

Fairies, Fathers and Fantasies of Childhood  
in London, 1915–1930

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Declaration of Authorship: I, Alice Sage, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis takes the childhood of one girl, Eileen Brock, as a starting point for a detailed analysis of children's public and private performance during and after the First World War. It demonstrates how fantasy images of childhood incorporated new experiences of mass war, loss, death, and the ideas of psychoanalysis, bringing Joan W. Scott's concept of the fantasy echo to bear on generational history and ideas of repetition and alteration.

Eileen was born to lower-middle-class parents in London in 1915, and soon after, her father was conscripted. Typically for separated families, the Brocks used letters and photographs to maintain contact and make sense of their experiences. My focus on fantasy reveals how cultural narratives of fairytales helped communicate emotional truths – consolation and nostalgia, mixed with hope for the future. I use postcards sent and received by the Brocks to connect their experience to wider practices, and to argue that adult fantasies combined with changing conceptions of children's inner lives.

From 1925–1926, Eileen belonged to a children's variety troupe, Madame Behenna's Juvenile Jollities. Compared to their Victorian counterparts, interwar performing children are overlooked by historians, despite their active participation in the entertainment industry. My analysis of the Jollities' participants, audiences and venues shows how the First World War had consequences for performing children, including: an emphasis on philanthropy and fundraising concerts; a definition of children as school pupils; and the far-reaching effects of new legislation. I uncover widespread, passionate desires to watch children perform, and show how producers and performers responded with choreography and costume that shaped fantasies: of littleness, perfection, cleverness and happiness.

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## **Contents**

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments	2
Content Warning	4
Abbreviations	4
Introduction	5
Chapter outline	6
Archives and sources	11
Theoretical approach and literature review	13
ACT 1	29
Chapter 1: Letters and Little Red Riding Hood	32
Chapter 2: Dreaming of daddy	67
Chapter 3: Fairies and mourning	97
Intermezzo	122
ACT 2	141
Chapter 4: Madame Grace Behenna’s Juvenile Jollities	145
Chapter 5: Jollity and littleness	173
Chapter 6: Making it big	210
Conclusion	240
Epilogue	254
Bibliography	262
Appendix 1: Members of the Jollities (1923–1927)	284
Appendix 2: Jollities concerts (1923–1928)	287
Appendix 3: Songs performed by the Jollities (1925–1926)	289

## **Content Warning**

It its discussion of representations of race in children’s performance, chapter five includes images of racist stereotypes and, in demonstrating the use of racist roles in children’s dance education, contains racist language.

## **Abbreviations**

AOD Association of Teachers of Operatic Dancing

IWM Imperial War Museum

LCC London County Council

MOC Museum of Childhood

V&A Victoria and Albert Museum

In references, place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.



## Introduction

This project began with an encounter with a photograph in the archive of the Imperial War Museum, London (IWM). Sepia tinted and extremely well-preserved, it shows a young girl dressed as a fairy (Figure 1). She is about five or six. Her curly hair is side-parted and her feet are bare, crossed at the ankle. She is half-smiling, and looking up, past the camera. On the back, a child's handwriting inscribes the photo 'Dear Daddy'.<sup>1</sup>



Figure 1 Portrait of Eileen Brock, 1921.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Private Papers of W C Brock, Documents.4646 Imperial War Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Brock Papers, IWM.

I knew this picture already, and that the child was Eileen Brock, born in London, 1915. I was familiar with the copy in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum of Childhood (V&A), which also held hundreds more items from Eileen's childhood – clothes, toys, photographs, letters and cards, school work and ephemera. The collection at the IWM was another side of this story: bundles of letters sent to and from Eileen's father, Will Brock, while he was serving in the army from 1916 until his death in 1921.

What caused me to pause was the shock of a new context, and the spontaneous production of new meanings. At the V&A, this photograph was a sweet image of a lovely dress, with the added pathos that the girl was a 'war orphan'. At the IWM, this photo suddenly became a materialisation of a father's gaze: when Will Brock saw his daughter, this is what he saw. The photograph – reproduced to be in two places at once – formed a bridge between two very different archive collections, between the child's life at home and the man away at war. It disturbed and intrigued me that this image was not of a *real* girl. It was a polished, costumed, fantasy child, too perfect in her pose. The fairy costume suggested an escapist, consolatory or at least sentimental type of child. Why was this image the one that was sent to a long-absent father? Why did a fairy costume seem so fitting? What other roles were little girls called on to play after the First World War?

The following thesis addresses these questions through close study of this and other photographs, a dance troupe called 'Madame Grace Behenna's Juvenile Jollities', to which Eileen belonged for two years from 1925, and the wider picture of children's performance in the decade after the First World War. What has emerged is a scene of girls' performance – both onstage and to camera – where children became the focus of shared hopes, fears and desires. I demonstrate the persistence of romantic themes of innocence and perfection, and how these fantasies incorporated new experiences of mass war, loss, death, and the ideas of psychoanalysis. Fantasies of littleness and timelessness mingled with those of enjoyment and hope. Along the way, I demonstrate the popularity of children's performance, and show how the fantasy of childhood shaped cultural production. This is an untold story, and one which gives nuance to understandings of interwar society in Britain.

## **Chapter outline**

Eileen was the only child of William Brock, a travelling salesman, and Amy Brock, née Piercy, the youngest of six sisters and an accomplished dressmaker. Amy and Will both grew up in Stoke Newington, and spent their long engagement, before their marriage in 1910, going to variety shows and pantomimes in the West End. From Will's conscription in 1916 until his temporary return in 1920, the Brock family faced the widely-shared challenges of wartime separation, which became

permanent when Will died suddenly in 1921. In the mid-1920s, Eileen joined the Juvenile Jollities, a children's variety troupe run by a Madame Grace Behenna. As a member of this troupe, Eileen performed at venues across London, and participated in a widespread trend for children's performance. The thesis is organised into two parts, or acts, of Eileen's childhood, separated by an intermezzo examining the legal context of children's performance.

### **Act one**

The first act is a wartime family drama of the years 1916–1921, and considers how, after Eileen's father was conscripted, the Brocks used letters and photographs to share their emotions, news, and fantasies. Amy worked hard to maintain a relationship between her young daughter and absent husband.

The first chapter considers how Amy and Will's wartime communication drew on a common pool of images and ideas, from 'daddy in khaki' to characters from fairytales and pantomimes. Using these familiar tropes, the Brocks were able to communicate their experiences and feelings, and set their uncertainties and concerns within stories that ended 'happily ever after'. The family were also adept at using costume in their photographs. The chapter spotlights a photograph of Eileen dressed as Little Red Riding Hood, to demonstrate how the Brocks' intensely personal and specific experiences found expression in culturally-available scripts. The image of Eileen as Red Riding Hood resembles countless iterations of the story and has a complex temporality: both traditionally timeless and specifically relevant to the circumstances of a child in wartime London. The chapter introduces a number of themes: the idealisation of childhood, a nostalgic temporality associated with loss and death, the texture and fabric of fantasy, and the persistence of Victorian practices into the apparently modern age.

The second chapter arises from a postcard Eileen sent to her father in about 1919. Titled 'Dreaming of Daddy', it shows a young girl sleeping, with an image of a marching soldier floating above her head. This opens an exploration of mass-produced postcard images of dreaming children to highlight how – both in popular and academic discourses – children's inner lives became the concern of adults in the early twentieth century. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the nascent discourses of British psychoanalysis – as pioneered with shell-shocked soldiers – embraced dreams as a way to understand loss, mourning and trauma. I look at the work of one proponent in particular, Charles Kimmins, whose book *Children's Dreams* (1920) combined the quantitative methods of the Child Study movement with tools from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). Kimmins, as Inspector of Schools for London County Council, organised London-wide surveys of children's dreams in 1918.

Kimmins's survey showed that children were affected at an unconscious level by the dangers and tribulations of war. They dreamed of bombs, of the Kaiser, and very often, of the return of their fathers and brothers from the front.<sup>3</sup> I consider what it meant for children to dream of their fathers, and how this was interpreted at the time.

The third chapter returns to the studio photograph of Eileen dressed in a fairy costume, which opened this thesis. Taken in 1921, it was arranged by Eileen's mother and sent to her father in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq), where he was on active service. I trace the aetiology of theatrical fairy-children since the nineteenth century, and consider the implications of the Cottingley fairy photographs – infamous pictures of fairies taken by two girls during the war. Eileen's 1921 portrait was taken mere months after Arthur Conan Doyle published his hugely popular article 'Fairies Photographed: An Epoch-Making Event' (December 1920), which exposed the Cottingley Fairies to the world for the first time.<sup>4</sup> This extraordinary episode highlighted the fantasies around girls' innocence and a persistent *desire to believe*. I show how the escapist and timeless figures of fairy and child merged to produce a non-threatening image of consolation and hope.

Much less fantastical was the death of Will Brock from heat stroke in July 1921, while he was working in an administrative role in the British-controlled city of Basra, in present-day Iraq. Documents in the IWM archive tell the story of his family's discovery of the death, the administrative mistakes which confused the message, and how Eileen and her mother Amy were comforted by their relatives in handwritten notes. By the time Will died in 1921, the family had already suffered a number of war deaths, and I demonstrate how black-edged notepaper and black silk remained symbolically charged and could offer some comfort to the bereaved.

## Intermezzo

*n. (a) A short dramatic, musical or other performance, of a light and pleasing character, introduced between the acts of a drama or opera ... (b) A short movement serving as a connecting link between the main divisions of a large musical work.*<sup>5</sup>

The second half of the thesis positions Eileen not only as a member of a family, but as part of a performing troupe called 'Madame Grace Behenna's Juvenile Jollities'. The shift in focus from the family photograph to the public theatre requires some reframing, and I use the dramatic structural

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<sup>3</sup> Charles W Kimmins, *Children's Dreams* (Longmans, Green and Co, 1920), 54.

<sup>4</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, 'Fairies Photographed: An Epoch-Making Event', *The Strand*, December 1920. Later extended as Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1922).

<sup>5</sup> 'Intermezzo, n.' OED online. December 2019. Oxford University Press (accessed 14 August 2020).

convention of an intermezzo to recount the relevant context of stage children and the law regarding children's performance. This section provides a connecting link between the two acts of Eileen Brock's childhood.

My analysis of the debates on the 1918 Education Bill, and the enactment of the Education (consolidation) Act 1921, will establish how fantasies of childhood persisted in the language of law- and policy-makers, and directly affected the ongoing balancing act between education, protection and freedom. These arguments took place during a period when childhood was lengthening in both legal terms and popular opinion. To demonstrate how the small adjustments in legislation had real effects on individuals, I use the case studies of teacher-manager Madame Victor and her pupil Evelyn Behenna who was building a stage career during and after the First World War (and was the younger sister of Grace Behenna, who would later establish the Juvenile Jollities troupe).

I identify an important but previously overlooked loophole in the 1921 Act, which I term the 'charity clause', which significantly reduced restrictions on children's performance, as long as they performed for charity. I argue that the charity clause was a catalyst for the explosion of children's performance in the 1920s. It reflected the wide public demand to watch children, and fuelled that demand by making it possible to see ever-younger children on the stage. Accounts of local disputes and letters in magazines demonstrate how this slip in the law created problems for regulators and performers.

## **Act two**

Madame Behenna's Juvenile Jollities was a dance troupe of mostly girls, aged four to fourteen, based in north-east London, which ran from 1921 to at least 1966. Eileen Brock was a member of this troupe for two years (1925–1926), and a number of programmes, costumes and photographs relating to this time are preserved in the V&A collection. Act two reconstructs the activities of the Juvenile Jollities troupe to illuminate the forgotten world of children's performance in the interwar years, connecting the individual fantasies of the first half to a collective, social experience.

Chapter four establishes who the Jollities were and where they came from, building a collective biography of the performers, patrons and audiences. The troupe included at least twenty members at any time, mainly girls from the 'shop-keeping classes' of Stoke Newington, plus some from families with higher status as politicians or philanthropists. Their figurehead, Madame Grace Behenna, worked with other adults to manage and choreograph the troupe, and recruited parents to assist making costumes and props. Most of the troupe came from Jewish families; I consider their intersectional position as young, second- or third-generation immigrant Jewish girls of East London,

and how they confirm or challenge historiographies of Jewish interwar life. The Jollities' concerts were concentrated around the heart of the East End, in youth clubs, Jewish institutes, and even Mile End workhouse. Occasionally they appeared in a fundraising event in the West End, and a smaller group of Jollities girls travelled out to the suburbs to perform in mental hospitals in Horton and Epsom: the Jollities encountered a wide range of audiences, and negotiated a variety of different spaces and environments.

Chapter five uses programmes, photographs and costumes to recapture how the Jollities produced *fascination* in their audiences. Accounts of children's concerts described adults enraptured by very young performers, whose littleness was reinforced and exaggerated by canny marketing and staging. Child performers were given diminutive nicknames, dressed in miniature versions of adult clothing, and arranged in height order to emphasise their smallness. The Jollities' concerts also disseminated rampant racist tropes, including the 'pickaninny' and the passionate Arabian sheikh. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the Jollities, despite being a group of children, were active in bringing West End trends to the East End, and were active participants in cosmopolitan popular culture.

Chapter six returns the focus to the girls onstage: what were their fantasies, expectations and hopes? The children of the Jollities and other dance troupes leave very little account of themselves. What role did the children have, then, in their own representation? What were their motivations? By observing the Jollities' costumes, and hearing other accounts of dancing and performance, we can surmise and infer the experiences of Eileen and the other Jollities.<sup>6</sup>

Eileen's solo performance 'Dream Daddy' brings together the themes of the entire thesis: fantasy family relations, the use of cultural tropes – dream texts and fairytales – to communicate emotion, and the paradoxes inherent in the idea of childhood. 'Dream Daddy', a 1923 song which describes the aural apparition of a far-away dream-father, contains the idea of children's dreams as wish fulfilment, but Eileen's particular performances of it suggest an additional, more personal reading, based on its resonance with her status as a fatherless child and her experience of mourning.

My work brings attention to the under-studied role of performance in shaping ideas and experiences of interwar childhood, while demonstrating how fantasy as a tool of historical enquiry can illuminate wider social concerns, unspoken fears and desires. This thesis also illuminates the everyday practices of children across the country during a specific and distinctive time, using a wealth of sources and a

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<sup>6</sup> This approach is suggested by Alexandra Carter, 'Blonde, Bewigged and Winged with Gold: Ballet Girls in the Music Halls of Late Victorian and Edwardian England', *Dance Research*, 13, no. 2 (1995).

wide disciplinary frame, and its conclusions illuminate shared experiences of Eileen's generation, who performed childhood in the aftermath of the Great War.

The central character in this thesis is Eileen Brock, but the cast is much larger, including her friends, family and audiences. One child's performances are a starting point for an interdisciplinary exploration of children's performance after the First World War. The tightly-defined timescale allows a deeper view of the ideas that were circulating at the time, and their relation to the context of the war and the hopes for the new generation. Museum archives are supplemented by contemporary sources and scholarship from fields including the history of childhood, theatre, dance, costume, photography and psychoanalysis. The next section introduces my archives and sources. Following this, I outline my theoretical use of 'fantasy' and acknowledge the scholars who have consistently informed my work. Then, I review the literature and outline my contribution to the field of the history of childhood. For many sub-themes of my project, the existing literature will be reviewed in the relevant thesis chapter.

## **Archives and sources**

The sources at the heart of this thesis, the two unpublished archives at the V&A and IWM, together record the personal and unique story of Eileen Brock's childhood during and after the First World War. The collection at the V&A contains over 450 items donated by Eileen in several batches during the 1980s. She gave at least twenty dance and fancy dress costumes, plus many more items of everyday clothing. Toys, souvenirs and books give a sense of her material surroundings, and Eileen and her mother Amy saved hundreds of greetings cards, postcards and party invitations, which sketch out their circle of friends and social life. The activities of the Juvenile Jollities troupe are preserved in a series of performance programmes, music and lyric sheets and a handful of photographs.

Eileen donated her father's letters to the IWM around 1981. This collection is less varied than that of the V&A, but just as fascinating, and includes more than 300 letters between Brock family members written from 1916 to 1921, a diary from 1918, and paperwork and photographs relating to Will Brock's death, burial and commemoration.

These two official collections were supplemented by a providential discovery. In late 2016, I was contacted by an ephemera dealer who had acquired boxes of letters, photos and postcards in a house clearance sale. Researching the names on the envelopes, she had found my Ancestry.com Brock family tree, and offered to send me the boxes. This wonderful gift filled in other areas of the family's history, including Will and Amy's courtship, and Eileen's later life.

It is rare for so much material from an otherwise unremarkable family to survive in large, prestigious museums. This fact in itself might raise questions about how typical Eileen was, and how far we can extrapolate from her life to draw conclusions about a generation of children, and the culture they grew up in. But Eileen had no children, nephews or nieces to pass this family archive down to, and it is not unusual to save family relics, especially when they relate to the early death of a father and national events like war. As a long-term employee of the Wills Office of the Inland Revenue, and holder of a history degree, perhaps she had higher-than-average interest in old documents, and the confidence to approach large institutions.

Whatever Eileen's personal motivations were (no correspondence survives in either museum's archive which might tell us), they fortunately coincided with the 1980s collecting policies of these two national museums. The IWM, from its foundation during the First World War, set out 'to acquire items which would have been regarded as ephemeral, and indeed, unworthy of preservation in a museum'.<sup>7</sup> It has been described as 'less a museum for the study of war than an ethnographic collection for the display of the British nation', and its collecting policies welcomed small collections from ordinary families.<sup>8</sup> The V&A Museum of Childhood (previously known as Bethnal Green Museum) also collected social history material in the 1980s. The curator of children's costume, Noreen Marshall, sought out examples of children's dress from middle- and working-class families.<sup>9</sup> Miss Brock's first donation was her childhood mourning dress, after which the rest of the clothes and ephemera followed in batches, as a relationship developed between the donor and the curator.

The lucky survival of the boxes of letters found in the house clearance is a bittersweet reminder of all the material which the museums did not accept, and may have been dispersed or destroyed over the intervening decades. My fortuitous windfall would not have been possible without the social-networking elements of the Ancestry website; these same facilities allowed me to discover the family backgrounds of many of the Jollities members and track down relatives to check information. The chapters on dreams and fairies include many images from other archives, including the Museum of Childhood in Edinburgh, and I have embraced the potential of online repositories like Flickr and eBay, which both provide extraordinarily rich, well-catalogued and completely digitised sources of postcards and ephemera.

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<sup>7</sup> Graeme Were and Jonathan King, *Extreme Collecting: Challenging Practices for 21st Century Museums* (Berghahn Books, 2012), 158.

<sup>8</sup> Sue Malvern, 'War, Memory and Museums: Art and Artefact in the Imperial War Museum', *History Workshop Journal* (2000): 188.

<sup>9</sup> As shown in her publications including: Noreen Marshall, *Dictionary of Children's Clothes: 1700s to Present* (V&A Publishing, 2008).



More conventionally, I have incorporated the writings of contemporary commentators including poet and author Robert Graves and essayist Constance Spender, and memoirists who grew up in Edwardian and interwar London. I have also used local newspapers extensively; when investigating the itinerary and audiences of the Juvenile Jollities, the social engagements sections of the *Jewish Chronicle* and *East London Observer* proved bountiful. These are complemented by accounts of other 1920s troupes in towns across the length of Britain. As well as establishing the presence of an informal children's performance industry, these accounts also provide the attentive historian with illuminating descriptions and reactions, in language which offers potent material for the analysis of fantasy. Specialist performance publications, including *The Stage* and *The Era* newspapers and *Dancing Times* magazine, were sites of extensive commentary and debate on the changing landscape for juvenile performance in the 1920s. I have found them invaluable for establishing attitudes to dance education and providing a behind-the-scenes view of stage children.

### **Theoretical approach and literature review**

Some representations of childhood recur so often as to become timeless or ahistorical. In the first chapter of this thesis, I find this continuity in the costume of Little Red Riding Hood, whose cloak has true iconic status in western culture: it is immediately recognisable even in black and white.<sup>10</sup> As another example, the image of a girl dressed in fairy wings has remained superficially unchanged for a century and a half (Figure 2).

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<sup>10</sup> Fairytales have long provided grist to the hermeneutic mill, from the debates over psychoanalytic and feminist symbolism in Bettelheim and Oliver, to twenty-first century queer theory. Alan Dundes, 'Bruno Bettelheim's Uses of Enchantment and Abuses of Scholarship', *The Journal of American Folklore*, 104, no. 411 (1991); Maria Tatar, 'Why Fairy Tales Matter: The Performative and the Transformative', *Western Folklore* (2010); Rose Oliver, 'Whatever Became of Goldilocks?', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* (1977).



Figure 2 Left: Cabinet card photograph of unknown girl, 1880s.  
Right: 'Fairy Photo Experience', 2017.<sup>11</sup>

The consistency of certain images of childhood can easily obscure the historical specificity and contingency that gave rise to them in the first place, and which invigorate each new eruption. The girls wearing mass-produced fairy costumes in twenty-first century 'photo experiences' inhabit a different world from those who stood stock-still in Victorian portrait studios; the intervening century has transformed conceptions of childhood, the circumstances of production and consumption of costume, ways of seeing and forms of parenting. How could the fairy have remained unchanged?

For something to remain popular and relevant for so long, in fact it needs to adapt. Constant change is the other side of the coin of continuity. Cultural historian Michael Pickering has suggested that these resilient phenomena show 'where a need is strongly felt'.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the images recur because they fulfil a persistent – and often hidden or disavowed – need for certain groups in society.

To interrogate these images and tropes, and identify the underlying need, I use *fantasy* as a conceptual tool. The lens of fantasy reveals the widespread desire to watch children perform, and focuses our attention on how this desire took a particular form at a particular time. In a culture traumatised by the First World War, bearing heavily the burden of loss, the fear of uncertainty and the crumbling of strongly held beliefs, our intuition tells us that social fantasy is a potent field for

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<sup>11</sup> Cabinet card by Henderlite Studio, Missouri USA. 'Fairy Photo Experience' by Paul Johnson Photography <https://pjpportraits.co.uk/fairy-elves-photoshoot-experience> (accessed 14 August 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain* (Routledge, 2008), xi.

historical enquiry. Fantasy is, according to psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, 'the stuff of socialisation and civilisation itself'.<sup>13</sup>

In psychoanalysis, fantasies (in the form of imagined stories, phrases or images) signal the presence of the unconscious in human relations and behaviour. Fantasy acts through mechanisms including desire, identification and anxiety, which may be irrational and contradictory. Analyst Maria Torok characterised fantasies as intrusive, fleeting, incongruous 'misfits', which disrupt the rational ego.<sup>14</sup> Because they seem to intrude from outside or below, fantasmic images are associated with a feeling of voyeurism or loss of control: we are spectators of our own fantasy, rather than authors.<sup>15</sup> In the first half of this thesis, we will see how the fantasy figures from fairytales appear like this, offering themselves readily, fully formed, to Amy Brock in her writing and image-making.

However, as Jacqueline Rose states, fantasy 'is never only inward-turning'.<sup>16</sup> Through the production of narratives, fantasy provides a way for people to make sense of their experiences, but also to form relations with others and to shape culture. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud put fantasy at the centre of all social life, working to shape the structures of institutions and society.<sup>17</sup> The imagined identifications and shared ideals between individuals are collective fantasies, which enable the formation of groups, and sharing of common aims. Rose describes fantasy as the glue of social reality, which shapes political identities, and through the actions of fantasy, history can appear as destiny: predetermined. This is because fantasy 'always concerns a historic reference in so far as it involves, alongside the attempt to arrest the present, a journey through the past'.<sup>18</sup>

These rather nebulous but evocative descriptions of fantasy are given more solid form and historical application in the work of Joan Scott, Sally Alexander and Carolyn Steedman.<sup>19</sup> These historians recognise, like Rose, that the relationship between past and present is never straightforwardly linear. Memory, social reproduction, generational exchange and cultural traditions root individual lives, thoughts and actions in the past, repeat them in the present and project them into the future.

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Sally Alexander, "'Do Grandmas Have Husbands?'" *Generational Memory and Twentieth-Century Women's Lives*, *The Oral History Review*, 36, no. 2 (2009): 172.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 30-36.

<sup>15</sup> Abraham and Torok, *Shell and the Kernel*, 35.

<sup>16</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization, Society and Religion: Group Psychology, Civilization and its Discontents and Other Works* (Penguin, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Rose, *States of Fantasy*, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Joan Wallach Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Sally Alexander, 'Memory-Talk: London Childhoods', in *Memory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (Virago, 1993 [1986]).

Joan Scott has introduced the phrase ‘fantasy echo’ to describe the articulation through time ‘of scenarios that are at once historically specific in their representation and detail and transcendent of historical specificity’.<sup>20</sup> The ‘echo’ is a repetition through time, which resembles but does not precisely replicate the original occurrence. In Scott’s words: ‘repetition constitutes alteration’.<sup>21</sup>

Fantasy echoes have all the qualities I have discussed so far: temporal ‘inexactness’, ahistorical resonance, retrospective identification. In this thesis, we will detect fantasy echoes in the costumes of fairies and Red Riding Hood, the refrains of music hall songs and the names of child performers, as well as in the language of law and regulation. Along with the hand-me-down clothes and costumes that Eileen wore, ideas of childhood in the 1920s were inherited from the 1890s or 1860s and worn again. It will become clear that a study of childhood imagery and fantasy is an act of inter-generational history which involves rebounding back and forth between the child, the parent, and the childhood of the parent.

Scott’s elaboration of the fantasy echo concept also provides a critique of history itself; she argues that the historian’s practice of drawing disparate events into a cohesive narrative is an act of fantasy. Like somebody waking from a dream, the historian seeks to make sense of fleeting images and inexpressible impressions, drawing them into a rational order and suturing them with an argument and an identity, borne from her own identifications.<sup>22</sup> To use fantasy productively, then, it is important not to elide historical difference, and not to assume or create continuity, even when surface appearances may encourage us to do so.

Questions of childhood are especially susceptible to historical fantasy; what that word meant at a given time in the past, who it designated, and who it excluded, cannot be determined from a present point of view. It is better to leave the term as an empty category than fill it with a recognisable definition in terms of age, class, race or any other identity. Throughout this thesis I draw attention to the shifts in childhood, and its multiple definitions. The contexts for these shifts are closely defined – the dance competition, the parliamentary debate – and are not intended to stand for anything wider or more general.

The concept of fantasy allows us to overcome the adult/child dialectic. In Sally Alexander’s writings on ‘generational memory’, she describes how children’s desires are imprinted by their ancestors.<sup>23</sup> Her histories of girls and young women in interwar London demonstrate the importance of very

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<sup>20</sup> Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 49.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-1.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander, ‘Memory-Talk’, 244.

early life experiences in the formation of the unconscious, and take seriously the effect of events, sights and sounds of infancy on 'the resultant life choices of the children as they became adults'.<sup>24</sup> This concept suggests the effects of war on very young children, and illuminates my discussions of Eileen's performances as a child. Although her father died when she was six, we can detect his influence and presence for years afterwards.

Across her body of work, Carolyn Steedman has approached children as 'both real children, living in time and space and material circumstances, but also figures, tropes, images, symbols' put to use by adults.<sup>25</sup> I share Steedman's desire to find real children in the glimmers of fantasy. If we are concerned that paying attention to fantasy might overshadow reality, Steedman demonstrates time and again the correspondence between 'the stuff of everyday life, and the stuff of dreams', and how we have to be attentive to both to understand the past.<sup>26</sup> The children of the Juvenile Jollities troupe were real children, but like the literary child acrobat known as Mignon who somersaults through two centuries of cultural history in Steedman's *Strange Dislocations*, their performances also articulated sentiments to do with 'childhood, and to do with the self, and the relationship between the two'.<sup>27</sup>

As a study of interwar childhood, this thesis overlaps with Steedman's biography of education reformer Margaret McMillan (1860–1931), which argues that fantasies of childhood could co-exist with a rigorous scientific approach to the bodies of real children.<sup>28</sup> In this *tour de force*, Steedman uses a thematic approach to life-writing which balances analysis with narrative, in a history of ideas and people, while simultaneously offering a feminist critique of the biographical form itself.<sup>29</sup> The chapters of the McMillan biography – with titles like 'Gardens', 'Cities', 'Minds', 'Voices' – make no claim to tell 'the whole story', but instead build uneven layers of detail onto a balanced and expansive structure. Similarly, my thesis is not the whole story of Eileen's childhood (the reader will find little here about her schooldays, for example); and although I write about a girl and her family, it is not a biography in any conventional sense.

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<sup>24</sup> Sally Alexander, *Becoming a Woman: And Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History* (Virago, 1994); Alexander, 'Do Grandmas Have Husbands'; Sally Alexander and Barbara April Taylor, *History and Psyche: Culture, Psychoanalysis, and the Past* (Palgrave, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan, 1860-1931* (Virago, 1990), 13.

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Steedman, 'Englishness, Clothes and Little Things,' in *The Englishness of English Dress* (Bloomsbury, 2002), 33.

<sup>27</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Steedman, *Margaret McMillan*.

<sup>29</sup> These experiments began with Carolyn Steedman, *The Tidy House: Little Girls Writing* (Virago, 1982) and *Landscape for a Good Woman*.

In *Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Jacqueline Rose controversially argued that children's literature tells us more about adults than children.<sup>30</sup> Rose pointed out that children's literature excludes children from its process, but intends to seduce children as readers.<sup>31</sup> Rose's description of J. M. Barrie's *Little White Bird* (1902) and *Peter Pan* (1904) highlighted their 'strange and overinsistent focus on the child' as a spectacle and possession: her far-reaching analysis went beyond discussions of fiction, and dissected the adult-child relationship as it manifests in theatre, photography, education and charity, and concluded that 'to this day ... the child serves above all as fantasy'.<sup>32</sup> The depiction of childhood in *Peter Pan* is so complex and ambivalent that it has dominated the scholarship concerning early twentieth-century children's drama, literature and performance. The shape-shifting ambiguity of its text is as seductive as its protagonist, and its detached shadow seems to float through this thesis too.

### **The Tinkerbell illusion**

When *Peter Pan* was produced in Edwardian theatres for the first time in 1904, the fairy Tinkerbell was represented by a shimmering light, 'not much larger than a human finger', which flashed about the stage, 'zig-zagging hither and thither in air'.<sup>33</sup> The captivating fairy was a reflection, produced by a technician standing in the wings with a pocket mirror. Tinkerbell was obviously an illusion, and yet she was real; she produced real effects of enjoyment, shock, empathy from the audience. Her near-death provided one of the emotional climaxes of the play.

The practical mechanism of the Tinkerbell illusion gives us a concrete example of how fantasy can be produced. There are two stages of transformation – reflection by the mirror and misrecognition in the gaze of the audience.<sup>34</sup> This is a knowing misrecognition borne of context; the audience sees what it wants to see, what the staging and narrative and other actors pretend is there, and tells it

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<sup>30</sup> Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>33</sup> Stage directions describing Tinkerbell's first appearance on stage are reproduced in Bruce Hanson, *Peter Pan on Stage and Screen, 1904-2010* (McFarland & Co, 2011), 39. The use of a mirror is described in Roger Lancelyn Green, *Fifty Years of Peter Pan* (P Davies, 1954), 79.

<sup>34</sup> As suggested by the terms 'mirror' and 'gaze', my interpretation of this effect is indebted to Lacan's concept of the Mirror Stage, which describes the production of subjectivity through identification with one's specular image. Initially described as a developmental stage in young children, in later years the Mirror Stage became a structural demonstration of the subject's relation with the body image. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Tavistock Publications, 1980), 5.

what is there.<sup>35</sup> That is to say, the audience meets the *mise-en-scene* with its own imaginative fantasy.

This structure of illusion and transformation is at work in all stagecraft. In the concerts of the Juvenile Jollities, the audience saw children on stage who were transformed versions of how they really were (complex, human, fallible, desiring). Instead of a mirror, the tools of transformation were costumes, language and choreography.

To extrapolate further, genre, narrative or even law might perform the transformational work of the mirror, turning something real into a reflection, which is then misrecognised. In the intermezzo section of this thesis, I discuss a loophole in the Education Act 1921, which had a strikingly similar structure to the Tinkerbell illusion. The real underlying desire to put children on the stage was reflected and transformed by a piece of legislation which turned ticketed events into acts of ‘occasional charity’.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, those who were watching could misrecognise the *purpose* of children’s performances as philanthropy, and the children as fundraisers.

## **Histories of childhood**

Since its first steps in the 1960s, the history of childhood has grown into a defined field of study, with productive overlaps with social and cultural history, the social sciences, education and art history.<sup>37</sup> One of the most rewarding aspects of studying childhood in the past is the inclusiveness of the research; to explore the diverse themes of fairies, dreams, mourning, popular song and dance, and childhood itself, I have sought insights from performance studies, psychology, music, folklore and many more areas of scholarship, and determinedly skipped across the boundaries of historical fields. In the following section, I will outline my intervention into the field of the history of childhood, reserving more detailed engagement with existing literature for the relevant parts of each chapter.

The history of childhood properly came of age in the 1990s. A self-proclaimed ‘new paradigm’ in the neighbouring sociological field of Childhood Studies asserted that ‘the child is a status of person which is comprised through a series of often heterogeneous images, representations, codes and

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<sup>35</sup> The term ‘Tinkerbell effect’ has been used by psychologist Frank Durgin to describe how strong belief in something can make it real; this refers to a moment in *Peter Pan* when the fairy Tinkerbell is revived through the audience’s clapping to show they believe in fairies. Frank Durgin and H., ‘The Tinkerbell Effect: Motion Perception and Illusion,’ *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 9, no. 5 (2002).

<sup>36</sup> Education Act, 1921, 62.

<sup>37</sup> Key early texts include Aries’ art-historical analysis and De Mause’s ‘long and mournful’ study of institutional childhood. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (Oxford: Vintage Books, 1965). *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (Souvenir Press, 1976).

constructs'.<sup>38</sup> For historians, this constructivist view of childhood necessarily entailed a temporal dimension and connected with social-historical work on gender and class. As Anna Davin explained,

What is seen as appropriate, at what age, for which children, varies between societies and also within them and over time. Conventions based on gender difference intersect with assumptions about age, and both operate within social and economic structures, so that much also depends on the specific situation of child and adult.<sup>39</sup>

Davin's reference to *what is seen as appropriate* underlines the importance of mentalities, attitudes and emotions to the history of childhood. Ideas about what children (however defined at the time) should or shouldn't do are produced through discourse and actions which both confirm and confront pre-existing assumptions. As Davin rightly indicates, this depends on adults at least as much as children.

The multi-faceted relationship between adult and child can be crystallised in the form of clothing. In 2011, the fashion historian Daniel Thomas Cook pointed out the gulf between the new paradigms of childhood studies and histories of children's costume, and argued that the latter would be 'enlivened' by including the voices and experiences of children.<sup>40</sup> My approach to Eileen's handmade and hand-me-down clothes uses close artefact-based study of Eileen's clothes to underpin interpretations of meaning, informed by cultural histories of dress.<sup>41</sup>

Twenty-first-century histories of childhood narrate major shifts in thought and practice: the 'triumph of school over work', the move to smaller families with fewer (to some authors, more precious) children, and the decline of infant mortality, mapped through legislation (for example Factory Acts and compulsory schooling) and demographic analysis.<sup>42</sup> Colin Heywood describes changes in attitude to children using a series of dichotomous pairings, e.g. 'depravity/innocence', 'independence/dependence', which effectively communicates ambivalence around childhood, and

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<sup>38</sup> Key texts include Chris Jenks, *Childhood* (Routledge, 1996), 32; Allison James and Alan Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood* (Routledge, 1990).

<sup>39</sup> Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (Rivers Oram Press, 1996), 2.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Thomas Cook, 'Embracing Ambiguity in the Historiography of Children's Dress,' *Textile History*, 42, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Breward, 'Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress,' *Fashion Theory*, 2, no. 4 (1998); Susanne Küchler and Daniel Miller, *Clothing as Material Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2005); Vivienne Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 5. The close artefact-based study method of analysing costume is outlined in Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 3-63.

<sup>42</sup> Peter N Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (Routledge, 2016); Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (Routledge, 2014).



makes space to include Suffolk kitchen workers, Southern cotton pickers and Victorian debutantes.<sup>43</sup> There is a whisper of a fantasy echo in Heywood's labels, which seek to draw diverse times and places into an analytical schema, albeit one which sustains contradiction. In this thesis, these long-term trends form a backdrop to individual lives. The families I study – the Brocks and the other Jollities families – experienced conceptual changes in material terms. My close attention to the fantasies performed in the Jollities' concerts shows how depravity and innocence might co-exist in the quotidian context of a Wednesday night concert in Whitechapel.

My project may be described as a microhistory of childhood. Works of microhistory start with a particular object or event, and 'proceed to identify its meaning in the light of its own specific context'.<sup>44</sup> The close focus of studies like mine can enter productive dialogue with histories such as Viviana Zelizer's *Pricing the Priceless Child*, a grand narrative of the changing economic and emotional role of children in western society.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, one recent definition of microhistory insists on the 'condition that reduction of the scale of observation reveals social structures that are relevant on a larger scale'.<sup>46</sup> The examples of individual children like Eileen Brock or Evelyn Behenna do not disprove Zelizer's thesis, but give nuance to the large-scale shifts in society. While researching the chapters which proceed from a single photograph or postcard, I found that my research necessarily oriented outwards, and was both grounded and expansive. My approach has much in common with the trend of life-writing 'sideways', which blossomed from the cross-pollination of microhistory and biography. According to Simone Lässig, this mode of writing uses montage and embraces discontinuity as an 'invigorating force'.<sup>47</sup>

In oral history, childhood is typically contextualised as a stage in the life course, rather than a separate field of study. Waves of oral history projects from the 1970s onwards provided accounts of diverse childhoods, with an emphasis on working class, immigrant and otherwise marginalised voices. I use published interviews from this movement, and my own interviews, in my accounts of children's performance.<sup>48</sup> Memoirs of First World War and interwar childhood also recount

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<sup>43</sup> Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory,' in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Oxford: Polity Press, 2001), 110. See also Peter Burke, *Varieties of Cultural History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>46</sup> Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 114.

<sup>47</sup> Volker Rolf Berghahn and Simone Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2008), 10.

<sup>48</sup> Just a few examples: Jean McCrindle and Sheila Rowbotham, *Dutiful Daughters: Women Talk About Their Lives* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977); Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels?: An Oral History of*

performance, and women of that generation often describe dance, theatre and entertainment with a vivid passion.<sup>49</sup> Novelist Noel Streatfeild's series of autobiographies recount her experience of dance education and performance, which informed her sensitive portrayal of girls' conflicted desires in her novel *Ballet Shoes* and its predecessor *The Whicharts*.<sup>50</sup> The value of memoirs for our understanding of fantasy, as Vivienne Richmond argues, is 'the very fact that they *are* mediated, by the passage of time, the limitations of memory and the necessity of selection'.<sup>51</sup> The persistent emotional resonance, the investment of hope and desire, makes these stories last the years.

### Children in the First World War and its aftermath

The 'total war' of the years 1914 to 1918 forced the conflict into all aspects of children's lives.<sup>52</sup> In *The Children's War*, Rosie Kennedy demonstrated its material effects across education, welfare, motherhood and play.<sup>53</sup> Her analysis used children's letters and adults' recollections to unpick assumptions about violence and patriotism, and argue that 'children were not simply passive receptors' for wartime propaganda, but contributed actively through defence activities, fundraising and caregiving.<sup>54</sup> Kennedy also showed how parents' letters might convey or disguise the truth of war to suit young readers.<sup>55</sup> But the scholarship on letter-writing predominantly focuses on the men

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*Working-Class Childhood and Youth 1889-1939* (B. Blackwell, 1983); Jeanette Copperman et al., *Generations of Memories: Voices of Jewish Women* (The Women's Press, 1989).

<sup>49</sup> Elizabeth Flint, *Hot Bread and Chips* (Museum Press, 1963); Margaret Morris, *My Life in Movement* (Owen, 1971); Anne Tibble, *Greenhorn: A Twentieth Century Childhood* (Routledge & Kegan Paul Books, 1973); Doris M Bailey, *Children of the Green: A True Story of Childhood in Bethnal Green 1922-1937* (Stepney Books, 1981); Hermione Baddeley, *The Unsinkable Hermione Baddeley* (HarperCollins, 1984); Gwendolen Freeman, *A Zeppelin in My Childhood* (Tallis Press, 1987); Hermione Gingold and Anne Clements Eyre, *How to Grow Old Disgracefully* (Gollancz, 1989); Barbara Windsor and Joan Flory, *Barbara: The Laughter and Tears of a Cockney Sparrow* (Century, 1990); Charles Poulsen and Min Tabor, *Scenes from a Stepney Youth* (Thap Books, 1988); Bryan Magee, *Clouds of Glory: a Hoxton Childhood* (Jonathan Cape, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> Noel Streatfeild, *The Whicharts* (W. Heinemann, 1931); *Ballet Shoes* (Random House Children's Books, 1937).

<sup>51</sup> Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England*, 16.

<sup>52</sup> Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Macmillan, 1991); Jay Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (Pan MacMillan, 1989); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, Annette Becker, and Catherine Temerson, *1914-1918: Understanding the Great War* (Profile, 2002); Susan Fisher, *Boys and Girls in No Man's Land: English-Canadian Children and the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Richard van Emden, *The Quick and the Dead: Fallen Soldiers and Their Families in the Great War* (Bloomsbury, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Rosie Kennedy, *The Children's War: Britain, 1914-1918* (Palgrave, 2014). A key predecessor was Dwork's study of the positive effects of the Boer War and First World War for childhood through policy: Deborah Dwork, *War is Good for Babies and Other Young Children: A History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England, 1898-1918* (Taylor & Francis, 1987). Recently further demonstrated in Maggie Andrews, Neil Fleming, and Marcus Morris, *Histories, Memories and Representations of being Young in the First World War* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

<sup>54</sup> Rosie Kennedy, 'The Children's War: British Children's Experience of the Great War' (PhD Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2006), 225.

<sup>55</sup> Recent work on First World War letter writing includes Martha Hanna, 'A Republic of Letters: the Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I,' *The American Historical Review*, 108, no. 5 (2003); Martha Hanna, 'War Letters: Communication between Front and Home Front,' in *1914-1918-online International Encyclopedia*

in the trenches, leaving space for new narratives of those who, like Will Brock, never made it to France, and spent the war years in camps a train ride away from home.

The most direct way that children experienced the war was through the absence and loss of their fathers. Jay Winter's demographic analysis concludes that across Europe six million children lost their fathers, a number which increased following the war.<sup>56</sup> As Kennedy states, whether children 'understood it fully at the time or not they shared in the nation's experience of mourning'.<sup>57</sup> The war's mass fatalities made young lives even more precious; a fact recognised by First World War historians. Winter has documented fundraising efforts for wartime welfare centres, and initiatives like the National Baby Week to promote child health, in what *The Times* called the growing 'cult of the child'.<sup>58</sup> Seth Koven has shown how disabled children at Chailey Heritage Craft School in Sussex assumed symbolic and practical obligations as caregivers, when their institution took in injured servicemen.<sup>59</sup>

Across his body of work on the emotional history of the war, Michael Roper demonstrates the continuity and connectedness between the men at the front and the families at home; his psychoanalytically-informed readings of family relationships show how emotions were 'unconsciously enacted' as well as consciously expressed, and how sentimental postcards could have real emotional value.<sup>60</sup> My thesis touches upon many of the same themes, although my sustained attention to one family creates space for idiosyncrasies (for example the Brocks' use of pantomime imagery in their letters). Roper's most recent work uses oral histories to investigate how children's lives were affected by fathers returning wounded after the war, and how the discourses of psychoanalysis shifted from shell-shocked soldiers to that generation of 'nervous' children.<sup>61</sup> As histories of the interwar period emphasise time and again, the war cast a long shadow, although

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*of the First World War*, ed. Daniel Ute et al. (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014); Richard Grayson, *At War with the 16th Irish Division 1914-1918: The Letters of JHM Staniforth* (Pen and Sword, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 48.

<sup>57</sup> Kennedy, 'The Children's War: British Children's Experience of the Great War,' 95.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Jay Winter, 'The Impact of the First World War on Civilian Health in Britain,' *The Economic History Review*, 30, no. 3 (1977): 498.

<sup>59</sup> Seth Koven, 'Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Great Britain,' *The American Historical Review*, 99, no. 4 (1994).

<sup>60</sup> Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> Michael Roper, 'From the Shell-Shocked Soldier to the Nervous Child: Psychoanalysis in the Aftermath of the First World War,' *Psychoanalysis and History*, 18, no. 1 (2016); Michael Roper, 'Subjectivities in the Aftermath: Children of Disabled Soldiers in Britain after the Great War,' in *Psychological Trauma and the Legacies of the First World War* (Springer, 2017).

historians differ as to whether Britons chose to turn away and embrace sunshine and fresh air, or fixated on the darkness.<sup>62</sup>

The First World War was a turning point for ideas of children's inner lives. Hendrick described the new figure of the post-war 'psychological child', as 'one of mind in terms of emotions, fantasies, dreams, instincts and habits'.<sup>63</sup> Nikolas Rose has shown how concern for children's 'nervous states' and 'complexes' after the trauma of war and the break-up of so many families, drove a desire across medicine, policy and education to mould and shape children's minds.<sup>64</sup> The problems of pathologised 'juvenile delinquents' often dominate these histories of psychology, but I am more concerned with children's everyday experiences of dreaming and desiring. My attention to the popular understandings of dreams, as represented in mass-produced postcards, contributes to the history of popular psychology.<sup>65</sup> As Nikolas Rose has outlined, the academic discipline of psychology took form between 1875 and 1925, finding legitimacy in universities, journals and professions but, 'it was outside the academy that the claims to truth which psychology made were first recognised'.<sup>66</sup> The work of Charles Kimmins has been mostly overlooked in histories of dreaming, and deserves more than a footnote for his communication of psychoanalytical ideas, brought to bear on real children's experiences, for a popular audience.<sup>67</sup> I will address this lack of serious consideration, to show how his methods sought access to the repressed and hidden interiors of London's children.

The second half of my thesis examines the national discourse of children's performance, to address how exactly children were symbolised and idealised. My thesis joins a growing body of works on the immediate post-war years which find children taking an important symbolic role in the narratives of convalescence and compensation, including Roper's study of 'Little Ruby,' the mascot of St Dunstan's charity for blind veterans and Friederike Kind-Kovács' analysis of the imagery of the Red

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<sup>62</sup> A spectrum of views can be found in: Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (Penguin, 2008); Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (Bodley Head, 2008); Roy Hattersley, *Borrowed Time: The Story of Britain Between the Wars* (Abacus, 2009); Richard James Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (Penguin, 2009).

<sup>63</sup> James and Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 43.

<sup>64</sup> Nikolas Rose, *Psychology, Politics and Society in England 1869-1939* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); Nikolas Rose, *The Psychological Complex* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

<sup>65</sup> There is a small but fascinating body of work which uses dreams as historical sources, including Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper, *Dreams and History: The Interpretation of Dreams from Ancient Greece to Modern Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 2004); Helen Groth and Natalya Lusty, *Dreams and Modernity: A Cultural History* (Routledge, 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> Kimmins, *Children's Dreams*. A detailed analysis of children's dreams in psychoanalysis can be found in Claudio Colace, *Children's Dreams: From Freud's Observations to Modern Dream Research* (Karnac, 2010). An account of psychoanalysis in the UK is well told by Graham Richards, 'Britain on the Couch: The Popularization of Psychoanalysis in Britain 1918-1940,' *Science in Context*, 13, no. 2 (2000).

Cross.<sup>68</sup> Roper uses the term 'aftermath' to describe the immediate post-war years, a term aptly suggesting devastation, survival, and trauma.<sup>69</sup> But 'aftermath' is also an agricultural term which refers to the new grass that grows after a field is mown.<sup>70</sup> Eileen and her contemporaries were this new grass.

## Social history

Social histories of childhood endeavour to include the voices of real children, which are often silenced or overlooked in adult-centred historical narratives. As Mary Jo Maynes has argued, girls are doubly overlooked in conventional histories as they are young and female.<sup>71</sup> The sub-field of historical girlhood studies has demonstrated the specificity of girls' experiences, and complicated the usual definitions of childhood by extending it to include females in their early twenties.<sup>72</sup> My arguments about the lengthening of childhood (specifically in dance displays and competitions) contributes to this gendered approach to the life course.

The intersectional historiography of childhood attends to questions of race and (more rarely) sexuality as well as gender, though more frequently in an American context.<sup>73</sup> Robin Bernstein's seminal book *Racial Innocence* presented the argument that the construction of white American childhood as 'innocent' excluded black children from childhood itself.<sup>74</sup> Bernstein's use of performance studies, combined with visual and material analysis, embraced a varied archive of play scripts and literature, as well as toys, clothing and advertisements – methods which resonate with my own. In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Saidiya Hartman released historical writing from

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<sup>68</sup> Friederike Kind-Kovács, 'The Great War, the Child's Body and the American Red Cross,' *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'Histoire*, 23, no. 1-2 (2016).

<sup>69</sup> Roper, 'Subjectivities.'

<sup>70</sup> 'aftermath, n.'. OED Online. March 2018. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/catalogue/libraries.london.ac.uk/view/Entry/3696?redirectedFrom=aftermath> (accessed May 01, 2018).

<sup>71</sup> Mary Jo Maynes, 'Age as a Category of Historical Analysis: History, Agency, and Narratives of Childhood,' *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 1, no. 1 (2008); Mary Jo Maynes, Birgitte Sjøland, and Christina Benninghaus, *Secret Gardens, Satanic Mills: Placing Girls in European History, 1750-1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

<sup>72</sup> Though earlier works included 'little girls' and 'young girls', for example, Valerie Walkerdine, *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Cathryn Halverson, 'Reading Little Girls' Texts in the 1920s: Searching for the Spirit of Childhood,' *Children's Literature in Education*, 30, no. 4 (1999); Steedman, *The Tidy House: Little Girls Writing*. For more recent work in the field of 'girlhood', see Hilary Marland, *Health and Girlhood in Britain, 1874-1920* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Edel Lamb, 'Shall we Playe the Good Girls': Playing Girls, Performing Girlhood on Early Modern Stages,' *Renaissance Drama*, 44, no. 1 (2016); Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Routledge, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> A notable exception is Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

the archives. Her vital telling of young black women's lives in *fin-de-siecle* dance halls and back streets, argued that the archive was formed by the same sociological imagination which saw black girls as a 'problem', and to tell their stories new forms of imagination had to be forged.<sup>75</sup>

Hartman's innovative approach is an act of resistance against the injunction to 'find' young people's voices in the past. Instead, we might seek the absences of children, or where they are silent, drowned out by more powerful voices. The invisibility of children in historical sources highlights the disadvantages of power (of various forms) inherent in being a child. In this thesis Eileen is a historical actor, she is central to the story, but her life was shaped to a great extent by her mother, and other adults, and we rarely read her voice in the archive. This confronts an ongoing question of agency in histories of childhood. Subaltern studies and histories of slavery have shown that the emphasis on agency, independence, and choice (enacted through disruptive transgressions or exceptional achievement) may in fact perpetuate the marginalisation of less powerful groups.<sup>76</sup> Widening our definitions of what constitutes historically significant activity opens our eyes to what Gyanendra Pandey evokes in *Unarchived Histories*:

an immense and critical arena of human being and interaction, described under duress as trivial, scarcely worth mentioning ... It is at this point that one may begin to sense the uncharted domain of the trifling.<sup>77</sup>

The everyday creative lives of women and children too often escape mention because they reside in this domain. For example, it is common for histories of performance to overlook the involvement of children. A recent book about blackface minstrelsy dismissed a show which included numerous children under ten years old (including child star Jackie Coogan) as 'a kids talent show', rather than recognising the role and presence of children in public performance spaces.<sup>78</sup>

Women's history often finds common ground with children's history, since both, especially when united as 'women-and-children', have been historically 'subjected to treatment as vulnerable victims, or valorised as angelic innocents of home and hearth'.<sup>79</sup> Without conflating their experience, this study recognises that women and girls shared many spaces in the aftermath of the First World War; both within widowed families and in groups like the Juvenile Jollities, men were in the minority.

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<sup>75</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

<sup>76</sup> Walter Johnson, 'On Agency,' *Journal of Social History*, 37, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>77</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *Unarchived Histories: The 'Mad' and the 'Trifling' in the Colonial and Postcolonial World* (Routledge, 2013), 7.

<sup>78</sup> Tim Brooks, *The Blackface Minstrel Show in Mass Media: 20th Century Performances on Radio, Records, Film and Television* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2020), 120.

<sup>79</sup> *Feminism and the Politics of Childhood*, ed. Rachel Rosen and Katherine Twamley (UCL Press, 2018).

My decision to focus on hitherto unknown women like Madame Behenna (and her predecessor Madame Victor) was driven by my interest in how creative, fulfilling lives might be lived out of sight. The work of these women might appear trivial to some historical observers, but they both carved distinctive careers as theatrical managers at a time when few women were able to do so. In the trifling domain of children's performance, they were able to chart their own courses.

Histories of interwar dance have embraced analysis of gender, race and sexuality, building on earlier feminist studies, yet children are largely absent from this work.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, interwar theatre and popular music are also centred on adults' activities and overlook the involvement of children.<sup>81</sup> Most historiography of stage children is concerned with the Victorian phenomenon, and the campaigns to 'rescue' them in the 1880s, involving the famous figures of Charles Dodgson, Millicent Fawcett, and W T Stead, and played out in the popular press.<sup>82</sup> One exception is Dyan Colclough's invaluable account of interwar troupes in northern England, based on oral histories recorded in the 1990s. Colclough considers the effectiveness of the 1918 Education Act and how performing children were exceptional in the eyes of the law.<sup>83</sup> However, her focus on wage-earning overlooks the boom in amateur and charity performance which defined children's performance after 1921.

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<sup>80</sup> The dearth of research was the subject of a provocative conference paper, Karen Bond, 'Is there a History of Children's Dance? Who is Writing it in the Twenty-First Century?' (Dance and the Child International, Copenhagen, 2015). Pioneering works in the social history of dance, which nevertheless overlook children, include Alexandra Carter and Janet O'Shea, *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2010); Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (Da Capo Press, 1998); Tracy Davis and Peter Holland, *The Performing Century: Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History* (Springer, 2007); Tracy C Davis, 'Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History,' in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: New Directions in the Historiography of Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989).

<sup>81</sup> Martha Vicinus, "'Happy Times... If You Can Stand It': Women Entertainers during the Interwar Years in England,' *Theatre Journal*, 31, no. 3 (1979); John Baxendale, "'... into Another Kind of Life in Which Anything Might Happen..." Popular Music and Late Modernity, 1910-1930,' *Popular Music*, 14, no. 2 (1995); Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England 1840-1914: A Social History*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); James Ross Moore, 'Girl Crazy: Revue and Variety in Interwar Theatre,' in *British Theatre Between the Wars*, ed. M Gale and C Barker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); James Nott, *Music for the People: Popular Music and Dance in Interwar Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Amy Koritz, *Culture Makers: Urban Performance and Literature in the 1920s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009); *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin, 1890-1939*, ed. Len Platt, Tobias Becker, and David Linton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Brian Crozier, 'Notions of Childhood in London Theatre, 1880-1905' (PhD University of Cambridge, 1981); Tracy C Davis, 'The Employment of Children in the Victorian Theatre,' *New Theatre Quarterly*, 2, no. 6 (1986); Pamela Horn, 'English Theatre Children, 1880-1914: A Study in Ambivalence,' *History of Education*, 25, no. 1 (1996); Anne Varty, *Children and Theatre in Victorian Britain* (Springer, 2007); Martin Danahay, 'Sexuality and the Working-Class Child's Body in Music Hall,' *Victorians Institute Journal*, 29 (2001); Dyan Colclough, *Child Labor in the British Victorian Entertainment Industry* (Springer, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> Dyan Colclough, 'British Child Performers 1920-40: New Issues, Old Legacies,' in *Entertaining Children: The Participation of Youth in the Entertainment Industry*, ed. Gillian Arrighi and Victor Emeljanow (Springer, 2014).

My account of the Juvenile Jollities brings children into the social history of dance, a field which avoids the foregrounding of the famous individual, 'and the resultant marginalisation of the mass of other performers'.<sup>84</sup> Tracy Davis, a social historian of performance, has described the work of feminist history as not only to document 'hitherto "lost" women, texts or performances, but to address the censoring impulses' which have led to their loss, to 'validate the experience, and to connect the woman with the work and the work with the world at large'.<sup>85</sup> For the Jollities, the world at large was the Jewish East End of London, but extended far beyond that to include the national picture of children's performance during the period of mourning and reconstruction after the First World War. As I outline in chapter four, Madame Behenna worked in an industry which included hundreds of dance teachers and thousands of pupils, all negotiating shifting legislation while seeking profitable performance opportunities.

As a micro-history of childhood which takes a previously unpublished archive as its starting point, this thesis enters into productive dialogue with all the above-mentioned scholars. The specificity of the Brock family, the Juvenile Jollities troupe and the interwar industry for juvenile performance, leads to many new findings and insights into questions of childhood in the past. By avoiding typecasting children as schoolkids or delinquents, my thesis brings children front and centre onto the stage of public life and gives them a bigger role in social history.

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<sup>84</sup> Carter, 'Blonde, Bewigged.'

<sup>85</sup> Davis, 'Feminist Methodology,' 69.



## ACT 1

Eileen Amy Brock was born on 20 February 1915. She was one of nearly a thousand babies born in the district of Stoke Newington that year, a number which concerned the Borough Medical Officer. The birth rate of 18.4 per 1000 people in Stoke Newington was lower, even, than the London average of 22.6. The Medical Officer blamed the war conditions, and the 'unprecedented' movements of the male population.<sup>1</sup> Even more worryingly, the infant mortality rate had shot up to 99.8 per 1000, from 78.7 the year before.<sup>2</sup> Deaths of babies under a year old made up one eighth of all deaths in Stoke Newington in 1915.<sup>3</sup>

The borough nurse, Miss Aldridge, reported that

A great many mothers, babies and young children were found to be suffering as a result of the war. There is a general anxiety for relatives at the front, and there were several premature births, cases of shock, and of premature hand-feeding which appeared to be due to the first Air Raid and the fear of subsequent ones.<sup>4</sup>

Instances of scarlet fever and measles among children were much higher than in previous years.<sup>5</sup> It was common for children to be brought to be weighed 'clothed very scantily in cotton', and many babies died of 'bronchitis and pneumonia from exposure'.<sup>6</sup>

It was not an auspicious time to be born in Stoke Newington, but baby Eileen thrived in that dangerous first year of life. As she grew, her mother Amy noted her weight on small cards issued at the chemists: 12lb 7oz; 14lb; 16lb; 17lb 8oz...<sup>7</sup> These numbers trace Eileen's 'healthy pattern of growth', but they do not record the emotional journey which may have accompanied it – her parents' anxiety, relief, or investment in their first (and only) child.<sup>8</sup> Amid rising infant mortality rates and the increasing casualties of war, a healthy baby was a precious thing.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Kenwood, *Report of the Medical Officer for the Year 1915*, The Metropolitan Borough of Stoke Newington (1916), 97-99. The rate is especially low compared to the birth rate of 27.1 recorded in London ten years earlier. J Warry, *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Hackney District for the Year 1905* (1906), 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>7</sup> Two weight cards, V&A Misc.143:1-1986.

<sup>8</sup> Eileen's growth tracked the 50th centile of the chart produced by the World Health Organisation in 2013, suggesting she may have been above average for 1915. 'Girls WHO-UK Growth Chart 0-4 Years,' January 2013, accessed 25 October 2019, <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/uk-who-growth-charts-0-4-years>.

Eileen was the youngest member of a large extended family on her mother's side. Amy (née Piercy) had five older sisters, most of whom lived nearby with their husbands and a total of eleven children between them. Her unmarried sister Ada lived round the corner with their father William Piercy until his death in July 1915. Amy and her sisters had a solidly middle-class Victorian upbringing, tutored at home with a live-in nurse and servants; William worked as a clerk in a Berlin Wool firm, eventually becoming an accountant.<sup>9</sup> During Amy's childhood, the Piercy family lived at 12 Kings Road, Brownswood Park, an area 'regarded as a particularly good part of a select suburb', which 'attracted men from the metropolitan parishes who worked in the City'.<sup>10</sup>

Will Brock's family were of slightly lower social status. His father Claudius had been a telegraphist (a skilled trade) and his mother Amy Jane Groves was a dressmaker (at least until her marriage) and the daughter of an Irish Master Tailor.<sup>11</sup> There were signs that Will felt the discrepancy between his and Amy's families. During their engagement, while he was working as a travelling salesman, he refused to attend events with the Piercy family as he was lacking the 'wardrobe': a reflection of his anxiety about his financial unworthiness to marry Amy. He used his relative poverty as a reason to break off their engagement in 1903, as he felt 'humiliated' by his low income and lack of prospects.<sup>12</sup> But they soon made up again. They married in 1910, and by 1915 were renting a small nondescript terraced house in Forburg Road, Stoke Newington, London.<sup>13</sup>

Will was the oldest of five children, but by the time of Eileen's birth, he had no close family nearby. His mother had died in 1907, followed by his sister Edith and his father in 1909; another sister, Violet, moved to Australia in 1913 and youngest brother Cecil moved to the USA. Will was close to his middle brother Charlie, who was a successful variety performer, but he also died quite suddenly in 1914 during a run at the Alhambra in Paris.<sup>14</sup> The loss of his close relatives brought Will nearer to Amy's side of the family, in particular his brothers-in-law Hugh Tedbury and George Brown and nephews Piercy and Raymond Spooner.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Census Returns of England, 1891', digital images, Ancestry.com (accessed 23 July 2020), William Piercy, RG12/1065/44/11; The National Archives.

<sup>10</sup> A P Baggs et al., 'Hornsey: Growth from the Mid Nineteenth Century,' in *A History of the County of Middlesex* (Victoria County History, 1980), 120.

<sup>11</sup> 'Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921', digital images, Ancestry.com (accessed 23 July 2020), Barnsbury St Andrew, 27 November 1877; London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Will Brock to Amy Piercy, n.d. (1903), author's archive.

<sup>13</sup> The terrace was one of many built by the speculative builder William Osment throughout Hackney in 1888. 'Hackney: Building after c.1800,' in *A History of the County of Middlesex*, ed. T F T Baker (Victoria County History, 1995), 38-44.

<sup>14</sup> Stanley Collins England, 'Jugglers I Have Known,' *Juggler's Bulletin*, no. 35 (August 1947).

To contextualise what follows, and in order to draw relevant wider conclusions from their specific story, we must consider Amy, Will and Eileen Brock in the tricky terms of social class. Edwardian commentator C. F. G. Masterman divided the British into three main groups: the rich and well-established 'conquerors', the skilled and unskilled 'multitude', and the 'suburbans' in the middle – which is where we might find Will and Amy Brock.<sup>15</sup> The 'suburbans' were the product of late-Victorian commerce, easily satirised as politically conservative, unimaginative and full of aspirational 'busy activity'.<sup>16</sup> According to historian Arthur Marwick, this 'debatable group' included 2.4 million men and women between working-class and middle-class which included 'small shopkeepers, hawkers, dressmakers' and elementary schoolteachers, who all had the distinction of earning a salary, but at levels far below the income tax threshold of £160 per year which marked the 'middle class proper'.<sup>17</sup> Will Brock's pre-war salary as a travelling salesman for a fancy goods manufacturer averaged £140 per year (including commission), putting him in the category which Marwick called 'lower-middle-class'.<sup>18</sup>

The Brocks made a life among the 'miles and miles of little red houses in little silent streets' that made up London's inner suburbs.<sup>19</sup> In 1915, Will went to work and Amy stayed at home, as they both adjusted to life with a baby during wartime. But in May 1916, The Military Service Act extended conscription to married men, and brought the war to their door.

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<sup>15</sup> C F G Masterman, *The Condition of England* (Methuen & Co, 1909), 68-70.

<sup>16</sup> Masterman, *Condition of England*, 68, 76.

<sup>17</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Form of Application for Special Assistance, author's archive. Carolyn Steedman's father was a traveller for a firm of mill-part manufacturers in York, which located him in 'the unambiguous position of the upper working class'. But Steedman exposed the inadequacy of defining a family's class status by a man's job or earnings, asserting, 'it was my mother who defined our class position'. Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, 56.

<sup>19</sup> Masterman, *Condition of England*, 70.

## Chapter 1: Letters and Little Red Riding Hood

### Daddy in khaki

Eileen Brock was twenty months old when her father William Claude Brock reported to Hackney Town Hall as an army conscript, on 7 November 1916.<sup>20</sup> Her mother Amy was left to look after the baby, the house, and the dog. Two days after leaving home, Will wrote his first letter from the Wimbledon training camp, describing the huts, the beds, clothing and their five meals a day.<sup>21</sup> His second letter gave more details of his routine:

I am in the dining hall dealing out the grub of course with 9 or 10 others, we have to scrub all the tables and forms twice a day ... There was a very good concert here last night quite professional and tonight it is pictures.<sup>22</sup>

This was the first week of a separation which continued, with occasional reunions during periods of leave, until April 1920.<sup>23</sup> Will was one of three million married men across Europe who left their homes to fight in the First World War.<sup>24</sup> But the type of war experience that Will had is often overlooked in narratives of the conflict. He was not sent to the trenches of the Western Front, but spent years on British shore-defence before going overseas to Russia and Finland after 1918. So the Brocks' correspondence brings new understandings of the war years, not defined by trench warfare, but still shaped by conflict and separation.

As Michael Roper, Martha Hanna, Angela Smith and Rosie Kennedy have established, separated families shared their day-to-day experiences of war through letter-writing, and surviving correspondence can give insight into the experience and expression of emotion in the period, even if collections of letters are fragmentary.<sup>25</sup> The first half of this thesis uses the letters sent between Will and Amy to investigate how a separated couple maintained family life as new parents, and how their daughter was included in their correspondence. Amy and Will Brock were not well-educated and their writing was not particularly fluent or expressive, but they persevered and shared their hopes and dreams for the family all through their years of separation. They found a language of shared

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<sup>20</sup> 'Certificate of Discharge', Brock Papers, IWM.

<sup>21</sup> Will was training with the 29th (City of London) Battalion, The London Regiment (212th Brigade in 71st Division)

<sup>22</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 28 November 1916.

<sup>23</sup> 'Certificate of Discharge'.

<sup>24</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 46.

<sup>25</sup> Grayson, *At War with the 16th Irish Division 1914-1918: The Letters of JHM Staniforth*; Hanna, 'A Republic of Letters: the Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I'; Hanna, 'War Letters: Communication between Front and Home Front'; Kennedy, *Children's War*; Roper, *Secret Battle*; Angela Clare Smith, 'A Personal Account of the Home Front' in *The Home Front in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 22.

references from theatre and pantomime which had personal meaning to them while also drawing on broader big themes of heroism, love and hope.

Amy and Will also exchanged photographs alongside their writing. Will sent pictures of himself in uniform, his army camp, or places he visited. Amy sent portraits of herself, and of their daughter carefully posed and beautifully dressed. Some were studio portraits, others were family snapshots taken in the garden, and they chart Eileen's growth from an infant to a young girl (see Figure 3). I consider these photographs as expressions of fantasy, *viz.* the expression of desires and identifications which are otherwise censored or unconscious. For example, I discuss how Will's commentary upon his portrait in 'summer attire' reveals his insecurities and a desire for reassurance which otherwise went unexpressed. I look at a studio portrait of Eileen dressed as Little Red Riding Hood, a character redolent with cultural meanings and fantasies. I also play with the crossovers between the character and the historical child, to enrich our reading of the single family photograph and connect it to the wider culture.



Figure 3 Left to Right: studio photograph c.1916; family snapshot c.1918 (From top: Will, Eileen, Amy, Uncle Cecil); studio photograph with taxidermy rabbits c.1921.<sup>26</sup>

### Family letters

Before going any further, I must introduce one more character in the Brocks' story: Rex the dog. The first recorded mention of Rex was in 1910, when Will's brother Charlie wrote, 'on the quiet, I would like to steal that Collie dog of yours ... he is *superbe* [*sic*]'.<sup>27</sup> Rex, whose majestic name indicated his

<sup>26</sup> IWM and V&A archives.

<sup>27</sup> Charlie Brock to Will Brock, 6 July 1910, author's archive.

status, attended Will and Amy's wedding and took pride of place in the photographs, sitting between the groom's knees. That picture was framed in a locket that Will carried while on service (Figure 4). If further evidence were needed of Rex's importance, Will's 1916 application for the army's separation allowance included the dog licence on its own separate line, but there was no equivalent mention of Eileen.<sup>28</sup> In the first weeks away from home, Will expressed a lot of regret at parting with his dog: 'Poor old Rex he must miss his master and I miss him'.<sup>29</sup> Rex was a loved and valued member of the family and he had been around longer than Eileen.



Figure 4 Locket (or photo-frame pendant), showing portrait of Rex the dog, 1910<sup>30</sup>

The war was not the first time Will and Amy had an epistolary relationship. A pile of letters, telegrams and postcards preserve the couple's courtship, which lasted from 1901 until their marriage in 1910 – a truly Edwardian engagement. Throughout these years, Will was a travelling salesman for Tom Smith & Co, a large fancy goods manufacturer based at Finsbury Circus in central

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<sup>28</sup> Author's archive. The reason for this, I expect, is that Will paid for the licence himself, whereas Eileen's needs were managed by Amy, whose budget of 'housekeeping' was a fixed sum allocated to her by Will. This in itself demonstrates how Rex's maintenance was part of the masculine pre-household budget and 'belonged' to Will.

<sup>29</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 14 November 1916.

<sup>30</sup> Brock papers, IWM

London. During the week, Will's job was to travel around Essex selling Christmas crackers, Easter eggs, and other seasonal novelties. Through short notes and long letters, Amy and Will made dates, shared news, and even broke up and got back together again.<sup>31</sup> They developed a personal shorthand and idiomatic language. An example of this is the use of 'squeezies' – spirals which represent loving hugs – at the end of letters (see Figure 5). They first appeared in 1902, but returned and proliferated in the war years, and were even used by others, including Eileen, her cousin Enid, and her uncle Cecil.<sup>32</sup>

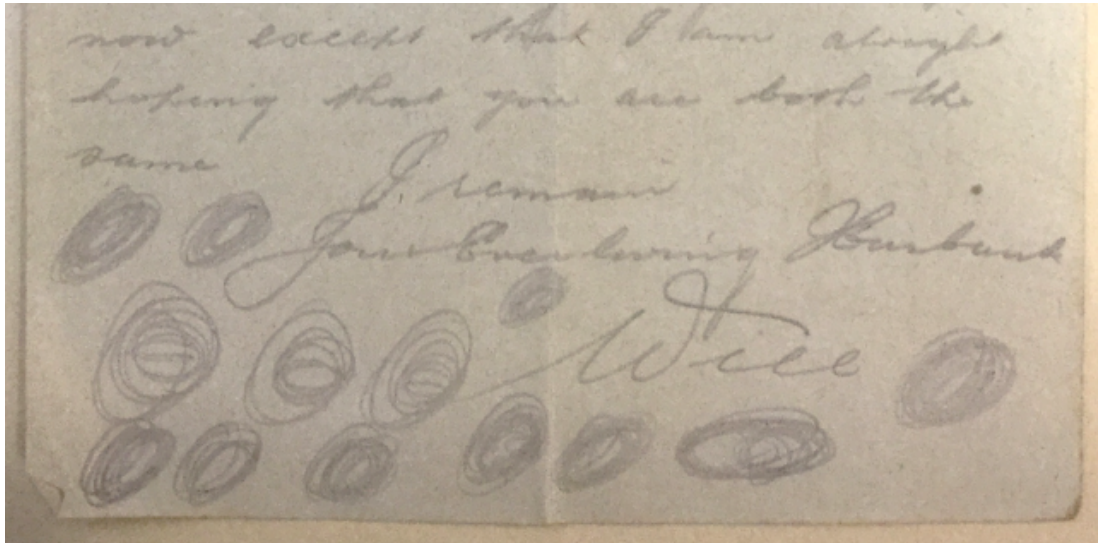


Figure 5 Letter from Will showing a surfeit of squeezies, 1 May 1918<sup>33</sup>

From June 1917 to June 1918, Will found himself in familiar territory at the Essex seaside, though rather than selling crackers in Clacton, he was now on coast-watching duties. Due to age and ongoing rheumatism, he had been given medical classification B1 when he enlisted.<sup>34</sup> B1 men were considered unfit for front-line service, but were able 'to march at least five miles, to see to shoot with glasses, and to hear well'.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, Will's wartime service does not fit the dominant narrative of the men in the trenches, far from home and out of reach. In fact, Amy and Eileen were able to visit him at the base in Clacton; Amy managed the journey (with dog and toddler) every few months, and the family spent New Year's Eve there together in 1917. This geographical proximity does not mean, however, that Amy did not feel the separation sharply. Will was allowed little leave,

<sup>31</sup> Will Brock to Amy Piercy, various letters August–September 1903, author's archive. Will attempted to break off their engagement, though within a month they were making theatre dates again.

<sup>32</sup> Will Brock to Amy Piercy, 27 August 1902, author's archive. Cecil Brock to Amy Brock, 2 January 1918, IWM.

<sup>33</sup> Brock papers, IWM

<sup>34</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 28 August 1917, author's archive.

<sup>35</sup> War Office, *Recruitment and Registration* (H.M.S.O., 1916). Quoted by Sir H Nield, 107 Parl. Deb., H.C. (5th ser.)(20 June 1918) 607-42.

and was rarely permitted to stay overnight away from base. Very few letters survive from Amy's side of the correspondence from 1916–1918, but Will's replies suggest his wife's distress:

I am very sorry you have been feeling so rotten it quite upset me to hear you had been crying and feel so lonely dear ... its rotten for me also to be away from you both.<sup>36</sup>

Amy had evidently described her loneliness and her tears. Such a letter from a wife, although Will says it upset him, could also reassure a husband that they were loved, remembered, and missed. Hanna's study of letters across the warring nations concluded that 'war wives ... frequently expressed their love by confessing their loneliness'.<sup>37</sup> Will's repeated use of the word 'rotten' is an empathetic response, which creates a parity between himself and his wife's experiences.

Separation and mothering alone were not the only hardships that Amy had to endure; conscription had very real financial consequences. As a private in the service corps, Will's salary was £21 per year, plus £50 14s separation allowance – a total of £71 14s (compared to £140 per year at Tom Smith & Co).<sup>38</sup> Conscription cut the Brock family's income in half, and reduced them to managing on only a shilling or two more than the Lambeth families described in *Round About a Pound a Week*, a study of the 'respectable poor' carried out in 1911 by Maud Pember Reeves.<sup>39</sup> Fortunately for Amy, her husband's food and shelter were paid for by the army, but she had the additional expenses of postage and travel to cover (because Will was not on overseas service, the couple had to pay for every stamp they used). The comparison with Reeves' survey shows how precarious the Brock family's position was (along with all the other families with conscripted fathers categorised B1), and how narrow were the boundaries between one social group and another: the financial insecurity brought on by war forced the nearly-middle-class Brocks to manage on a similar amount as families considered 'poor' five years earlier. Even after a pay rise in October 1917, when his salary increased to £39, Will's income as a soldier was hardly enough to maintain the family in 'the same degree of comfort' enjoyed before conscription, as had been promised by the War Office.<sup>40</sup>

About a third of Will's wages and the whole of the separation allowance was paid to Amy directly, so the job of managing this reduced income fell to her. Their rent was £40 per year, so it is no surprise that most of Amy and Will's letters discuss sub-letting the house, which could bring in about £28 12s.

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<sup>36</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 18 January 1917.

<sup>37</sup> Hanna, 'War Letters: Communication between Front and Home Front.'

<sup>38</sup> Calculated based on daily rates of pay as set out in *Recruitment and Registration*.

<sup>39</sup> This study by the Fabian Women's Group involved weekly visits to families in Lambeth, South London, on incomes of 18 to 26s per week. Maud Pember Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week* (Virago, 1979 [1913]). Sally Alexander, *Women's Fabian Tracts* (Routledge, 1988).

<sup>40</sup> *Recruitment and Registration*, 31-32.



This decision caused Amy endless trouble. Just like the women in Lambeth who sublet rooms in already overcrowded houses, Amy was 'turned into a landlord in her own person', forced to find, manage and keep tenants.<sup>41</sup>

Will supported his wife but offered little practical advice: 'of course it must puzzle you to know what to do but I must leave it to your own good judgement feeling sure that what you will do will be just the right thing'.<sup>42</sup> By November 1916, Amy had let part of the house to a couple called Mr and Mrs Lewis, and was advertising for more lodgers. Will added a postscript to one of his letters, 'hope you are comfortable in the little room'.<sup>43</sup> Amy was shrinking her own space in the house to make room for tenants.

Household budgeting and management had long been the work of women of all classes, so these were not new responsibilities, but Amy was now tackling them, alongside raising her first child, in one room, during a war.<sup>44</sup> She must have felt the contrast with her mother's methods of child-rearing, which typically for a middle-class Edwardian family involved live-in servants and a nurse.<sup>45</sup> Being 'lower-middle-class' and poor had some advantages over being 'working-class' and poor. Amy paid the rent quarterly rather than weekly, allowing her time to save money and budget effectively. Her middle-class neighbourhood of Stoke Newington made it easier to find tenants with higher incomes and thus lower risk. Her landlord was good at getting repairs organised. She had wealthy relatives (especially her eldest sister Maude) who could provide hand-me-down clothes and bits of paid work sewing shirts or coats. She may have had some savings; when her father William Piercy died in 1915, he left all his property divided equally between his children, so Amy received a sixth share of £495-3-0 (this was not a huge fortune, but would have provided a safety net of around £80). And Amy's financial survival through this period would have been greatly helped by the fact that she had only one child to look after. This would have had material benefits to Eileen throughout her early life. Selina Todd has emphasized the importance of family size in young people's life chances: in smaller families, children were less likely to work and more likely to stay at school if they won scholarships, as Eileen did.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Reeves, *Round About a Pound a Week*, 38

<sup>42</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock 30 September 1917.

<sup>43</sup> Will Brock, n.d. November 1916.

<sup>44</sup> For description of women's budgeting skills and responsibilities see Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England*, 60-61.

<sup>45</sup> Carol Dyhouse, 'Mothers and Daughter in the Middle-Class Home, 1870-1914,' in *Labour and Love, Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940*, ed. Jane Lewis (Basil Blackwood, 1986), 27-29.

<sup>46</sup> Selina Todd, 'Breadwinners and Dependants: Working-Class Young People in England, 1918-1955', *International Review of Social History*, 52 (2007): 70.

If we shift the perspective of history from the centre to the 'borderlands', Carolyn Steedman explained in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, 'the world is suddenly full of women waiting'. After 1916, the borderlands of inner suburbia were full of women waiting for letters, waiting for information, waiting for separation payments, dates of leave, returned items of kit ... And, as Steedman tells us, 'the other side of waiting is wanting'.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes, Amy's desires found their articulation through clothes: in July 1917, she wrote in a rush of syntax-breaking excitement: 'spur of the moment ... I went to Stephen's sale and I bought a saucy hat bargain and a little dress for Eileen to see Daddy in'.<sup>48</sup>

There were also desires that Amy shared with Will. Before the war, the couple had been enthusiastic patrons of Edwardian theatre and attended several pantomimes each season (which ran from Boxing day to early February).<sup>49</sup> At Christmas 1916, the first that Will spent away from home, his main priority was to send enough money so that his wife and daughter could go to a pantomime. Although Eileen was not yet two years old, Will was hopeful that 'she would enjoy it I'm sure'.<sup>50</sup> An outing to the theatre was Will and Amy's idea of extra money well spent.

In his younger days, Will was actively involved in performances, writing in 1903 that he was 'singing for a living' in addition to his day job.<sup>51</sup> And in 1906, Will was in charge of a 'big cracker' used in the Drury Lane pantomime and supplied by his employers, Tom Smith. He told Amy, 'should have liked you to have been with me, the show looks alright from behind'.<sup>52</sup> So once they had a daughter, Will was keen for her to develop the same interests.

Amy was of the same mind. Her late-Victorian childhood and adolescence had included many opportunities to dress up and perform. Singing, dancing and theatricals in the drawing room were common in middle-class families with daughters, and the Piercy family had six. Photographs from the mid-1890s (Figure 6) show teenage Amy wearing an accordion-pleated skirt-dancing dress and a Classical dancing dress. Both innovations of the 1880s, skirt and Classical dances became drawing-room crazes, as they could be performed effectively by anybody with enthusiastic grace and voluminous skirts.<sup>53</sup> There is no record of Amy performing publicly, but her dedication or proficiency

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<sup>47</sup> Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, 22.

<sup>48</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 9 July 1917, IWM.

<sup>49</sup> Will Brock to Amy Piercy, 6 January 1906, *Sinbad the Sailor* at the Grand, Islington. 19 January 1906, *Cinderella* at Drury Lane.

<sup>50</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 18 January 1917, IWM.

<sup>51</sup> Will Brock to Amy Piercy, n.d. postmark 1903, author's archive.

<sup>52</sup> Will Brock to Amy Piercy, 19 January 1906, author's archive.

<sup>53</sup> Fiona Macintosh, *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World: Responses to Greek and Roman Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Both skirt- and Classical-dancing had undercurrents of eroticism, fuelled by the

was sufficient to have studio portraits taken in her costumes. As well as the pantomime, Amy managed to take Eileen to free shows, including Pierrot performances in the park.<sup>54</sup> So despite their separation, between them Amy and Will managed to induct Eileen as a theatrical fan.



Figure 6 Amy Piercy wearing skirt dancing dress, 1895 and Classical dancing dress c.1897<sup>55</sup>

### Family photographs

Within weeks of his conscription, Will wrote to Amy in nostalgic mood, 'I should so like some old photos of us two if you care to send them in your different letters you know those loose ones of us'.<sup>56</sup> His reference to 'loose' photographs implies that the couple had pictures in frames and/or albums too, and that they had photographs from throughout their relationship. A few weeks later, Will's thoughts turned towards his daughter's changing appearance: 'the dear she must be getting

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expressive movements, free-floating sometimes translucent fabrics, and the bare feet of the dancers. This undercurrent was brought to the surface in adult performances where dancers would be naked under the dresses, and backlit for the avoidance of any doubt. In both photographs, young Amy Piercy displayed her respectability through her carefully visible shoes.

<sup>54</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, June 1917, IWM.

<sup>55</sup> Photograph, V&A Misc.118-1986

<sup>56</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 25 November 1916.

on now it seems an age since I saw you last I expect I shall notice a difference in her'.<sup>57</sup> As Kennedy demonstrates, this concern was commonplace; fathers often expressed how the long periods of separation made their children's growth more noticeable.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 7 Studio photograph of Will, Amy and Eileen, probably early 1917.<sup>59</sup>

It may have been this sense of time slipping by, and dissatisfaction with the 'old' photographs, which spurred the Brocks to visit a photographer's studio sometime during these first months, and sit for a group portrait (Figure 7). Photography's capacity to freeze time has halted Eileen's growth. It may have been prints from this session which Will received by post in February 1917, and acknowledged: 'Thanks for photos they are quite good to carry about in my pocket book'.<sup>60</sup> He was pleased enough with this image of his family to keep it on his person, physically close and protected by the enveloping pocket book. None of the photographs in the Brock collections are dated, but based on the size of Eileen and the fact that Will has his uniform, this was probably taken very early in 1917,

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<sup>57</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 29 December 1916.

<sup>58</sup> Kennedy, *Children's War*. Chapter 2 passim.

<sup>59</sup> Brock Papers, IWM.

<sup>60</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 4 February 1917.

when Eileen was nearly two. Suggestively, this was seen as the age of no return for *Peter Pan* author J. M. Barrie: 'You always know after you are two. Two is the beginning of the end'.<sup>61</sup>

Susan Sontag described photography as a form of image-making particularly suited to the domestic and familial.<sup>62</sup> Since photography's commercialisation in the 1850s, children of all ages had been 'escorted to professional studios' by parents keen to capture the likeness of their offspring.<sup>63</sup> Using photographs, 'each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness'.<sup>64</sup> Will's pocket book of photographs was this portable kit, and the images inside were literal representations of his small family's connectedness: in the portrait above, the trio sit extremely close, leaning in, their heads creating a small triangle. Eileen is sandwiched between her parents, held by both of them, bonding their bodies together.

Sontag continues, however, that 'photography came along to memorialize, to restate symbolically, the imperilled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life'.<sup>65</sup> Sontag's theories were forged in the Second World War, a period of even greater separation and loss than the years 1914–1918, so her analysis is particularly relevant for considering family photography against the background of international conflict. We can see this playing out in the production of portraits at a moment when the family is separated and 'imperilled', as in the case of the Brocks and the thousands of other families who sat for group portraits when the men were conscripted.<sup>66</sup> Like most men, Will chose to wear his uniform to the photo studio, memorialising his appearance in khaki.

Although the family photograph shows the trio together, Will's costume is a reminder that he is soon to leave. Will embraced his new soldier-father persona in his letters: 'give little Eileen a kiss from daddy in khaki', and now he was embodying this cultural role in a family portrait.<sup>67</sup> By assuming this role in language and costume, Will re-defined himself in uniform terms of duty to family and country. Carol Mavor proposes that all photographs are performative of a 'complex movement from presence to absence'; a transition made explicit in this kind of commemorative image which is taken

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<sup>61</sup> 'Peter and Wendy', quoted and discussed in Rose, *Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, 68.

<sup>62</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Penguin, 2002 [1977]), 8.

<sup>63</sup> Catherine Robson, *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentlemen* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 132.

<sup>64</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 8. For John Tagg (via Althusser, Machery and Freud) photography is a social practice through which ideology exerts its control, by creating false truths that overcome and suppress contradictions. Tagg shied away from direct analysis of fantasy, unwilling to 'dispel the strange force' the dream 'exerts over the day'. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 188-200.

<sup>65</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 8-9.

<sup>66</sup> Over two hundred examples, both identified and anonymous, can be seen in the collections of The Army Child Archive, <http://www.archhistory.co.uk/taca/1914-18.html>

<sup>67</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 9 November 1916.

in (probably unspoken) acknowledgment that the man's life would soon be at risk.<sup>68</sup> 1916 was the end of the Brocks' short time living together as a nuclear family, and the beginning of years of separation. It is not too much of a stretch to see the performance of this photograph as akin to a 'goodbye hug' – a last moment of squeezed-togetherness before separation.

## 1917

Unexpectedly, the first real encounters with danger appeared in Amy's letters. Living in the inner suburbs of London, she and Eileen faced genuine peril from the Germans' Gotha bombing raids in the summer of 1917. In June that year a school in Poplar, East London, was hit directly and eighteen children were killed.<sup>69</sup> A month later, Amy witnessed a daytime raid which involved twenty-two aircraft. She wrote to Will,

We are still alive but they are all round us again no doubt you have read in the papers about the raid. I have never seen such a sight in my life so many aeroplanes they looked like a swarm of bees all coming along all one could do was to look at them coming and then as they came near us we did a bunk, for what we thought the safest place, but really we all thought our last minutes had come.<sup>70</sup>

And again two days later, she expressed the genuine mortal fear she felt for their lives:

... we never know if we are going to wake up in the morning. I wish to goodness it was all over don't you? The one topic of conversation here is bombs you ought to see the damage ... The Germans have warned us that they are coming again with 100 aeroplanes and all sorts of dreadful bombs it is getting on my nerves ...

Eileen is having her afternoon sleep dear little thing and after she wakes up we are going to the City to see about my [sewing] machine it refuses to work any more, hope we don't get bombed or shot or anything I always think of that I think I'm potty but seeing such a lot of them coming Saturday you can't imagine what anxious moments we spent while they were overhead we thought every minute was going to be the last everyone did.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Carol Mavor, *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (I B Tauris, 1996), 4.

<sup>69</sup> Two years earlier, the first casualty of aerial attacks on London was a three-year-old girl in Stoke Newington on 31 May 1915, leading to Zeppelins being dubbed 'Baby killers'. 'Untold Lives', British Library, accessed 3 March 2021, <https://blogs.bl.uk/untoldlives/2015/10/theatreland-raid-by-the-baby-killers--1.html>. Christopher Cole and E F Cheesman, *The Air Defence of Britain 1914-1918* (Putnam, 1984), 260.

<sup>70</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 9 July 1917.

<sup>71</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 11 July 1917.

Although Eileen was too young to understand what was going on, this was ‘a time when feelings passed swiftly among people huddled together’, and she would have known that something was wrong.<sup>72</sup> In her memoir *Children of Bethnal Green*, Doris Bailey recalled sensing her mother’s fear during the Zeppelin and Gotha raids, and crying ‘bitterly’.<sup>73</sup>

To make matters worse, the lodgers Mr and Mrs Lewis ‘got the wind up’ and announced they were leaving London to get away from the raids.<sup>74</sup> Will’s first thought was for Amy and Eileen to clear out themselves, but ‘on the other hand where are we going to put our things and where will you live? I really do not know what to suggest’.<sup>75</sup> Within a fortnight, the Lewises had decided to stay and Amy had found another lodger, a woman with two boys whose husband was at the front in France.<sup>76</sup>

Trying to protect her daughter through bombing raids, act as landlady, pay the rent and maintain her marriage were not Amy’s only labours. She also corresponded with Will’s brother Cecil, who was in the trenches in Flanders. Cecil’s American fiancé had stopped writing, his mother was dead, and his surviving sister was in Australia, so Amy performed the woman’s work of sending parcels, encouragement and love.<sup>77</sup> When Cecil had leave, he stayed with Amy at Forburg Road, and it reflected on Amy and Cecil’s relationship that when he came to stay in September 1917, Eileen mistook him for her father. Will was philosophical: ‘fancy Eileen thinking Cecil was me it was the khaki no doubt’.<sup>78</sup> Will had been absent for so long that his daughter had forgotten what he looked like; the image of ‘daddy in khaki’ had eclipsed the individuality of her father.

At the same time, Amy’s sister Maude was grieving her son Raymond, who went down in his plane over France in June 1917. His older brother Piercy returned to the RAF with injuries in September 1917 and went missing within days. Amy needed to grieve her nephews. Being close in age to Ray and Piercy, she felt they were ‘more like brothers’ than nephews to her.<sup>79</sup> Amy and Maude wrote to each other while they waited for news of Ray, Piercy, and their younger brother Cliff. By November, Maude was despairing:

I get very nervy & at times so low spirited, this uncertainty about dear Piercy is unbearable almost, I wish I could learn something about him ... several enquiries from his friends have come ... all are getting anxious Oh! It is dreadful, my two

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<sup>72</sup> Alexander, ‘Memory-Talk,’ 242.

<sup>73</sup> Bailey, *Children of the Green*, 7-8.

<sup>74</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 15 August 1917.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 28 August 1917.

<sup>77</sup> Roper, *Secret Battle*.

<sup>78</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 30 September, 1917.

<sup>79</sup> Eileen Brock notes, Brock Papers, IWM.

brave boys gone & it will be a sad Xmas for me, I did know the three boys were alive & well last Xmas, & this, just you think what it means to me, not even the pleasure of packing & getting ready parcels or sending cards & letters to them all has been taken away from me & I seem to have lost all heart ... I have been busy cleaning up all his belongings and putting them away, but it's been a sad job & given me the heartache<sup>80</sup>

In these circumstances, Amy kept sewing. In her letter of 11 July 1917, Amy's sewing machine, which she gave a stubborn mind of its own, was important enough to drive her into the City, despite the dangers, her anxiety and her 'nerves' (both sisters use the word 'nerves' as synonymous with high emotional agitation and anxiety, rather than irritability). The sewing machine was Amy's way to earn money by making and altering clothes for others and to save money by making clothes for herself and Eileen. Dressing her daughter properly was important to Amy, and through the first five years of Eileen's life she crafted a wardrobe of fashionable garments.<sup>81</sup> As Barbara Burman's history of home-sewing makes clear, for women of all classes 'the maintenance of respectable appearances, making ends meet for a family and acts of charity were often interwoven' in their dressmaking.<sup>82</sup> But for Amy Brock, her sewing machine also gave her a way to escape from the noise of airplanes and the emotional burdens of war, and became a tool to manufacture fantasies through costumes.

### **Little Red Riding Hood**

Around January 1918, Amy took a home-made costume to a photographer's studio, along with Eileen, Rex the dog and a plan for an elaborate portrait. The resulting picture is immediately recognisable as Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf (Figure 8). Eileen holds a basket and wears a light-coloured dress and a hooded cloak, which we know is red even though the photograph is black-and-white. She has her hand on Rex's nose. He is a big, long-haired dog, and his position slightly in front of Eileen makes him appear much larger than the little girl. The whole image gives a sense of theatricality; the self-consciously performative use of a costume, added to the vignette effect which fades out at the edges of the print, combines with the painted backdrop to resemble a scene performed onstage under the spotlight.

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<sup>80</sup> Maude Spooner to Amy Brock, 26 November 1917.

<sup>81</sup> Examples from the V&A collection include 'Little girl's dress' B.707-1993; 'dress' Misc.91-1986; and 'girl's dress' Misc.151-1986.

<sup>82</sup> Barbara Burman, *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Bloomsbury Academic, 1999), 38.





Figure 8 Eileen and Rex as Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, n.d. (c.1918)<sup>83</sup>

The dress in this portrait was probably made by Amy on her stubborn sewing machine. It matched the length of the cloak very neatly, and its crenelated trim nodded to the medieval-ish ‘once upon a time’ of fairytales. The cloak, the key item which defines the character as Red Riding Hood, was made of red brushed cotton with red satin ribbons. The hood was generously gathered and the entire garment was lined with a different red fabric.

When she donated it to the museum, Eileen said the cloak had been worn as fashionable eveningwear by ‘her mother’s generation’ in about 1890 and it was later passed to her for ‘dressing up’.<sup>84</sup> Red Riding Hood’s metonymic red cloak was an established icon well before 1890 (Figure 10 shows a collectible *carte de visite* from the 1860s), and this fantasy costume resisted changes in fashion and its shape and style remained stable between generations.<sup>85</sup> In Eileen’s recollection, the cloak belonged to ‘her mother’s generation’. This is an interesting phrase to use – it belonged not ‘to her mother’ precisely, but rather to *a generation*, in Amy’s case a group of six sisters, born between

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<sup>83</sup> Photograph, V&A Misc.107-1986. This image only survives as a copy print in the V&A archive, i.e. the museum re-photographed the original print and presumably returned it to Eileen in the 1980s. This was normal practice in the museum at the time as the photos were only considered supporting material for the clothes. It is impossible, therefore, to know the size, colour, or condition of the original image, or if there were any annotations on the back.

<sup>84</sup> V&A catalogue Misc.107-1986.

<sup>85</sup> Even to this day, the design has not changed. The dresses underneath the cloak are strongly influenced by fashion but the red hood and cape are seemingly indestructible. The traditions are very different in France and Germany, where they use a capelet and cap respectively to designate their Red Riding Hood characters.

1868 and 1882. Across a spread of years it may have been picked up, put down and revived many times. And there is, behind the 'generation' of Eileen's mother, the figure of her grandmother, Eleanor Piercy, who died in 1900 but left a legacy of cloaks and costumes and daughters. In many early versions of the story, Red Riding Hood's cloak was a gift from her grandmother too; the pattern of grandmother-mother-daughter echoes through both stories, indicating the parallels between fantasy and life, and the intergenerational nature of fairytales and clothing.

The Brock archive contains a sewing pattern for a knee-length 'Red Riding Hood Cloak', with the same gathered hood and ribbons (Figure 9), which was very probably the model for the cloak Eileen wore.<sup>86</sup> Neither the torn-out fragment nor the cloak itself can be conclusively dated to the 1890s or late 1910s, either by materials or style – a sign of how fantasies persist almost unchanged across decades.



Figure 9 Sewing pattern for child's cloak.<sup>87</sup>

Figure 10 Hand-tinted *carte de visite*, Michael Burr, 1863<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> The origin of this pattern is obscure. The Commercial Pattern Archive (COPA), which is the main resource for these elusive ephemeral documents, contains at least twenty patterns for children's cloaks and capes, dating from 1896 to 1972, but not this one.

<sup>87</sup> MOC/BROC/1/4

<sup>88</sup> National Gallery of Australia, NGA 86.2190. Many versions of this image as photographs and stereoscopic cards survive in historic collections, suggesting it had a wide distribution.

Eileen's use of the phrase 'dressing up' indicates that she wore the cloak in a particular way: in play or make-believe, rather than everyday wear.<sup>89</sup> In dressing-up games, children assume different roles, wear clothes from different times, and practice and play with the 'performance that is fashion'.<sup>90</sup> Dressing up is closely related to *fancy dress*; etymologically derived from 'fantasy', fancy dress is a more public form of dressing up, with participants often adopting the costume of a specified role – as Eileen did in her studio portrait as Red Riding Hood.<sup>91</sup>

The historiography of children's fancy dress is limited, and generally focuses on the well documented Christmas traditions of upper-class children under Queen Victoria's influence.<sup>92</sup> In the narrative established in the 1950s by costume historian Doris Langley Moore, the Royals inspired the Lord Mayor of London to host an annual Juvenile Fancy Dress Party for children of the aristocracy and the mayors of other major cities soon followed suit; by the 1880s costume parties had become widely popular among the middle classes.<sup>93</sup>

The reality is probably more complicated. Clare Rose has concluded that playfulness was a key feature of middle-class nineteenth-century boys' everyday wear (especially the costume-like sailor suits and Highlander outfits), and Małgorzata Moźdzysłska-Nawotka describes the 'elegant but casual' contexts of upper class childhood which encouraged playful, fancy daytime dressing a century earlier.<sup>94</sup> The costumes cited throughout this thesis support those recent scholarly observations that children's clothes blur the lines between fancy dress, dressing up, formal and informal wear. Amy Brock's middle-class approach to clothing allowed for functional adaptation to different contexts and time periods; there was the pure fantasy of a fairy costume, the flexibility of a red cloak (eveningwear which became dressing up and fancy dress), Edwardian day dress (once informal wear, turned stage costume) and stage costumes that doubled as party dresses.

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<sup>89</sup> S.v. 'dressing up, n.', in *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Virago, 1985), 246.

<sup>91</sup> S.v. 'fancy, n. and adj.' OED Online.'

<sup>92</sup> Anthea Jarvis and Patricia Raine, *Fancy Dress* (Shire, 1984), 26.

<sup>93</sup> Doris Langley Moore, *The Child in Fashion* (Batsford, 1953), 80. There are many unanswered questions around children's fancy dress and dressing up, which could productively consider how uniform and fancy dress developed as polarised or complementary versions of children's costume in the late-nineteenth century, as compulsory education and groups like the Scouts and Girl Guides sought to standardise children's appearance. Leeds's mayor Alf Cooke threw a ball and produced a commemorative album in 1891. 'The Children's Fancy Dress Ball,' 19 December 2016, accessed 1 July 2020, <https://museumsandgalleries.leeds.gov.uk/leeds-museums/abbey-house-museum/the-childrens-fancy-dress-ball/>.

<sup>94</sup> Małgorzata Moźdzysłska-Nawotka, 'Dressed 'as if for a Carnival': Solving the Mystery of the Origins of Children's Fashion,' *Textile History* 50 (2020): 12; Clare Rose, *Making, Selling and Wearing Boys' Clothes in Late-Victorian England* (Routledge, 2016).

*Red Riding Hood* was a longstanding favourite for fancy dress. Ardern Holt, the pre-eminent authority on Victorian fancy dress, suggested costumes for girls drawn from traditional dress, history or mythology (e.g. 'Newhaven Fish Wife', 'Marie Antoinette' or 'Music'), but explained that 'the best [fancy] dresses worn by young people are suggested by the illustrated books, fairytales and other works of fiction, specially written for them', including *Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella* and the 'excellent' illustrations of Kate Greenaway.<sup>95</sup>

These characters remained popular through the Edwardian era and beyond, although commentators on the 1915 Lord Mayor's Fancy Dress Ball noted how the costumes had been influenced by the war:

The frivolous columbines and harlequins, the troops of elves and fairies, so popular in peacetime, had been ousted by fleets of juvenile sailors, contingents of small red-caped nurses, battalions of miniature soldiers shouldering toy rifles – even a six-year old Admiral, wearing a small cocked hat and sporting a little sword.<sup>96</sup>

However, Amy and Eileen's choice of Red Riding Hood in 1918 demonstrates that the patriotic turn in fancy dress did not last long, or affect everybody.

Anthea Jarvis and Patricia Raine, whose work makes up the bulk of the historiography of children's fancy dress, have identified a shift from 'uncomfortable but charming' Edwardian shepherdesses and courtiers towards more 'nursery rhyme and fairytale characters' in the 1920s, and attribute this to children choosing their own, more comfortable costumes.<sup>97</sup> However, I disagree. Firstly, as we have seen, fairytale characters were often used for fancy dress in the nineteenth century. If there was a move away from historical dress, it was not for reasons of comfort.<sup>98</sup> The Lord Mayor's ball of 1936 featured plenty of girls wearing corsets and crinolines, and boys wearing hose and top hats.<sup>99</sup> A better explanation might be found in the changing cultures and fantasies of childhood literature (which was the most common source of inspiration for fancy dress, as Ardern Holt stated). Adventurous epics and biographies of historical heroes by authors including R. M. Ballantyne dominated children's books in the late 1800s, whereas the following generations had the illustrations of Arthur Rackham (a prolific illustrator of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan* and many

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<sup>95</sup> Ardern Holt, *Fancy Dresses Described: or, What to Wear at Fancy Balls* (Debenham & Freebody, 1880), 237. Also suggested in Marie Bayard, *Weldon's Practical Fancy Dress, Or Suggestions for Fancy and Calico Balls, also Fancy Bazaars* (London: Weldon and Co, 1888).

<sup>96</sup> Lyn Macdonald, *1915: The Death of Innocence* (Penguin, 1997), 6.

<sup>97</sup> Jarvis and Raine, *Fancy Dress*.

<sup>98</sup> Another recent analysis has challenged the dominant narrative of comfort driving children's fashion, compellingly arguing instead that *playfulness* was key to (male) children's clothes taking on carnivalesque characteristics in the late eighteenth century. Możdżyńska-Nawotka, 'Dressed "as if for Carnival".'

<sup>99</sup> 'Lord Mayor's Children's Ball 1936', V&A B.222-1996

more, 1896 onwards) and Cicely Mary Barker (The Flower Fairies series, 1923 onwards) for fancy dress inspiration.<sup>100</sup> The influence of pantomime must also not be underestimated. As the fancy dress season and the pantomime season coincided around Christmas and the New Year, the exchange of characters between the two performative realms was fluid and frequent.<sup>101</sup>

The influence between fancy dress and children's publishing was not one-way; Eileen's Fairyland Doll Dressing toy from a few years later (c.1921–23) included Red Riding Hood, along with Cinderella, Aladdin and Dick Whittington (Figure 11). But rather than realistic portrayals of fairytale characters, the four paper dolls are white, chubby, pink-cheeked children not unlike Eileen herself, wearing 1920s underwear, which clearly marks them as children in fancy dress.



Figure 11 Fairyland Doll Dressing toy, about 1921–23.<sup>102</sup>

Red Riding Hood was a very popular costume for girls. The children's fancy dress ball in Leeds in 1891 included no fewer than seven versions of the costume, all with the essential components of red

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<sup>100</sup> Sarah Dunnigan, *Growing Up With Books* (Edinburgh: SELCIE, University of Edinburgh, 2018), 27.

<sup>101</sup> As well as Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and the other pantomime heroines, costumes at the 1936 Lord Mayor's Ball included Alice in Wonderland, a pirate, a fairy and a toy soldier. There was also a cowboy and several Robin Hoods, suggesting the early influence of cinema on children's fancy dress. An animated Robin Hood had been released in 1935 (dir. Dennis Connolly).

<sup>102</sup> V&A B.580-1993

cloak and basket.<sup>103</sup> Some of the character's appeal stemmed from its relative simplicity – only one garment, the cloak, had to be made (which was a fairly simple garment for home production) and the rest could be repurposed everyday wear. And as the free pattern in Figure 9 attests, the red cloak was an appealing offer to home dressmakers. Using the pattern, a home-sewer could transform flat paper into real clothing, and her ordinary daughter into a mythical heroine. Sewing patterns guided home dressmakers towards a fantasy realm; one pattern manufacturer even used the slogan 'tissue of dreams' in its 1917 advertisements.<sup>104</sup>

Red Riding Hood is one of the most familiar characters in Western culture. Her tale has been taken up anew by generation after generation and inscribed with desire, reverberating as a perfect example of a fantasy echo. The story has been appropriated, adapted and retold so many times, it has been called a 'text without a text and without an author'.<sup>105</sup> In the traditional version of the story, a young girl sets off through the woods alone to visit her ailing grandmother. On the way she encounters a charming but deceitful wolf, who lures her off the path, before racing ahead of her, eating the grandmother, and then lying in wait for his young prey.

The ending of the story depended on the teller. In the earliest versions from Medieval Tyrol, Red Riding Hood escaped the wolf through her own ingenuity.<sup>106</sup> In Perrault's 1697 version, the child was helpless, and was devoured.<sup>107</sup> In the nineteenth century, the Grimms introduced the heroic woodsman (a figure of patriarchal authority), who cut Red Riding Hood free after she was swallowed whole.<sup>108</sup> The Grimms' version, with an intervening male figure saving the day and creating a happy ending, had by the end of that century become the canonical, standard text.<sup>109</sup> But in every version, before and since, the complexities of youth, innocence and femininity are set against bestial desire and treachery. The dark forest setting, and the insistent hunger (sexuality) of the wolf opposed with the 'literally unadulterated' child, makes for exciting storytelling.<sup>110</sup> In each new version, the

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<sup>103</sup> 'Children's Fancy Dress Ball'

<sup>104</sup> Joy Spanabel Emery, 'Dreams on Paper: A Story of the Commercial Pattern Industry,' in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 251.

<sup>105</sup> Sandra Beckett, *Recycling Red Riding Hood* (Routledge, 2002), xvi. Beckett examines the re-use and re-telling of this archetypal tale, as does Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (Routledge, 1993). In November 2016, I collaborated with a storyteller to present a Victorian Magic Lantern show of Red Riding Hood for pre-school children; they all knew the story already and were able to recite the climactic 'all the better to see you with ... all the better to eat you with!' with verve.

<sup>106</sup> Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 7.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>108</sup> Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (Vintage, 1995), 211.

<sup>109</sup> Jack Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*.

<sup>110</sup> Warner, *Beast to the Blonde*, 188.



narrative absorbs and re-presents prevailing desires and concerns about childhood, but the dominant fantasy of all the retellings, disguised as a moral, is of a girl who strays from the path and puts herself in peril.

The story is so familiar that a single picture or photograph of Red Riding Hood can compress the whole narrative and its themes into a single frame. In 1857, *Alice in Wonderland* author Charles Dodgson photographed Agnes Weld in the role, conjuring a darkly intense Red Riding Hood, half submerged in foliage (Figure 12). Some have found her seductive, to others she appears snarling and lupine, or afraid and defensive; but she is unquestionably captivating.<sup>111</sup> Her direct gaze pierces back through the camera lens, implicating us somehow. *Are we the wolf?*



Figure 12 Agnes Weld as Little Red Riding Hood, Charles Dodgson, 1857<sup>112</sup>

Agnes's look confronts us with the presence of the camera and the adult(s) behind it. The introduction of the camera reinforces the imbalance of power between the hidden adult viewer and the framed, viewed child: the bearer of the gaze must be considered in terms of age as well as

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<sup>111</sup> Zipes, *Trials and Tribulations*, 21.

<sup>112</sup> 'Agnes Weld', Lewis Carroll Album 1, Princeton University Library.

gender.<sup>113</sup> If the adult (male) gaze seeks power and pleasure, the photographed (female) child is potentially disempowered, humiliated and sexualised. Eileen and Agnes, in their Red Riding Hood costumes, were both framed and photographed for the immediate pleasure of adults.<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, we must not give all the image-making power to the photographer. As Katherine Carlson has explained, Dodgson was always ‘to a certain extent, at the mercy of the sitter’, who was usually a child with whom he had a prior relationship.<sup>115</sup> Agnes and Eileen were performers in their portraits: they wore costume and adopted a role in front of the camera. Though they were unequal partners with the photographer, the process was essentially collaborative.

Looking at Eileen as Red Riding Hood, we are more voyeur than wolf. Eileen’s attention is directed not at the camera, the photographer or the viewer, but at Rex beside her, while we look on unobserved. This scene – the moment of encounter between predator and prey – was one of the most frequently chosen for book illustrations; it is a dramatic moment, ‘the cusp of the story’, when the child encounters the dangerous wolf and in her naivety, reveals her intention to visit her grandmother, while the wolf conceals his intention to eat them both (Figures 13 to 16 show just a handful of this composition’s innumerable iterations).<sup>116</sup>

When they composed the Red Riding Hood portrait, Amy and Eileen produced another reverberation of the story’s fantasy echo; their personal circumstances, family romances and historical moment coincided to create a new Red Riding Hood text and propel the tale once more into cultural discourse. As Scott explained, an amplifier of fantasy is identification, a recognition of the self in these cultural motifs: ‘the particular details may be different, but the repetition of the basic narrative and the subject’s experience in it means that the actors are known to us – they are us’.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> This is not the kind of analysis that I want to go into here, suffice it to say that the reassuring beauty of Eileen’s portrayal, the lack of any threat and the passivity puddling from her, clearly indicates the fetishistic mode of viewing as defined in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Springer, 1989), 27, 33.

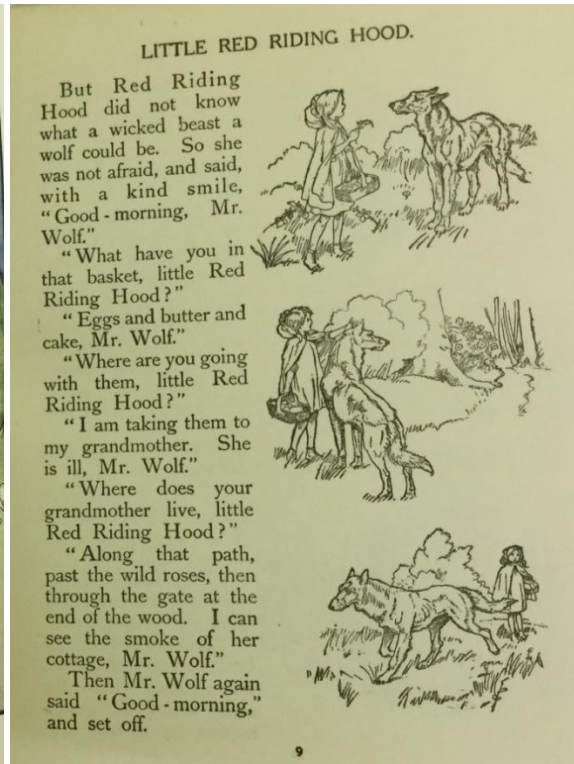
<sup>114</sup> The adult gaze is gendered: ‘the image of a girl child inevitably reaches beyond the family, beyond men as fathers, to address men in general with an appeal which is potentially sexual’. Patricia Holland, *Picturing Childhood: The Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (I B Tauris, 2004), 9, 188. Lindsay Smith, *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children, and Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 5.

<sup>115</sup> Katherine L Carlson, ‘Artful Artlessness: Authorship, Appropriation and the Creative Child, 1858-1920’ (PhD University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2011), 83.

<sup>116</sup> Aisha Anwar, ‘In the Shadow of the Wolf: Little Red Riding Hood in the Contemporary World,’ *Los Angeles Review of Books* (24 December 2014).

<sup>117</sup> Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 51.





Top Row: Figure 13 Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf, in *The Blue Fairy Book*, illustrated by George Percy Jacomb-Hood, 1892 edition.

Figure 14 Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf, illustrated by Jessie Wilcox Smith, 1911

Bottom Row: Figure 15 'Good Morning Little Red Riding Hood', from *Fairyland*, illustrated by Mabel Lucie Attwell, Nelson, 1918

Figure 16 Red Riding Hood's encounter with the wolf, in *My First Fairy Story Book*, Nelson, 1920

The usual interpretations of *Red Riding Hood* employ the tools of psychoanalysis, which ‘jump to hand, like the animated dish and spoon in the fairytale’.<sup>118</sup> This analysis points to the sexual danger faced by all girls and young women in a patriarchal society in which their innocence is something to be preserved while simultaneously making them vulnerable. However, in the case of Eileen in 1918, there is the more immediate and obvious danger of the wolf of war, which was snapping at the civilian population of London. Red Riding Hood is a rare fairytale example of a girl who, like Eileen, lives with her mother. Eileen, in fact, lived in a world of women. She was an only daughter with six aunts, and most of the men in the family had been taken away by the war: her father Will, her uncle Hugh and her cousins Piercy, Raymond and Clifford, had all gone. Amy Brock socialised with housewives in the same situation as herself, waiting for their husbands to return, or widowed, or never married.<sup>119</sup> Throughout the war, Eileen’s daily life was full of women, in her home, street and city. In the earliest versions of *Red Riding Hood* the only male presence was the wolf. The Grimms introduced the masculine figure of the woodsman who intervenes at the end, but only very rarely is this man described as her father (we could ponder whether he was mistaken for her father, as uncle Cecil was when he appeared at the front door dressed in khaki). At this particular moment of her childhood, Eileen was, just like Red Riding Hood, an innocent little girl in a predominantly female world negotiating a lethal masculine threat: the bombs falling on the city. Consciously or unconsciously, Amy identified and enacted through costume a parallel between Red Riding Hood and Eileen: both were *fatherless children at risk*.

This photograph was part of a conversation of desire between Amy and Will, using the image of their loved daughter and dog as performers in a fantasy scenario, which – unlike the everyday world around them – held no real danger. Psychoanalyst Maria Torok claimed that expressing fantasies was a ‘call for help’: a patient describing fantasy images is attempting to work through a problem, and is ready to be helped.<sup>120</sup> This fantasy image was a call for help from a mother, coping alone, under literal and emotional bombardment from the realities of war.

In the photograph Eileen is caught at the very moment when danger was encountered, deep in the wood, in the figure of the big bad wolf. But the darker intimations of the story are diffused by casting the family dog as the wolf. The photograph shows us the relationship between the girl and the animal; Rex was Eileen’s protector, her guide, even a big brother or father substitute. He was no

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<sup>118</sup> Hilary Mantel, ‘Wicked Parents in Fairytales,’ *The Guardian* 10 October 2009.

<sup>119</sup> The voices of housewives are scarce in First World War historiography, though ten million women might be included within this category. Karen Hunt, ‘A Heroine at Home: The Housewife on the First World War Home Front’, in *The Home Front in Britain*.

<sup>120</sup> Abraham and Torok, *Shell and the Kernel*, 36.

threat to the child. Despite its weighty unconscious optics, might this scene have been *funny* for Eileen and Amy?<sup>121</sup> It must have been fun to have Rex the dog there in the studio, playing the part of the big bad wolf, when he was really a loveable family pet.

The characterisation of Eileen as Red Riding Hood was picked up by her uncle Cecil, who sent his niece a postcard of a little girl in a red cloak, standing on the shore, waving out to sea (Figure 17). It was January 1919 and Cecil was over the channel at the time, so this picture reoriented Eileen's attention towards him and the men still on the Western Front, waiting desperately to be demobilised.



Figure 17 Postcard sent by Uncle Cecil, 31 January 1919<sup>122</sup>

Will and Amy Brock both used the language of fairytales to communicate their emotions and experiences. When Amy cried for help, Will responded with the chivalrous phrase: 'be brave dear and of good heart'. Was this attempt to embolden his wife a sign of optimism? After all, twentieth-century fairytales – even *Red Riding Hood* – had happy endings; protagonists lived happily ever after, despite encountering dangers and challenges. Jack Zipes has argued that fairytales provided Will and Amy's generation with utopian templates for transformation, which harnessed nostalgia as a tool for producing a better world. The stories depict 'a return home as a step forward to a home that must

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<sup>121</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'A Short History of Photography,' in *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael William Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002 [1931]).

<sup>122</sup> Author's archive.

be created, one that is implicitly critical of daily life'.<sup>123</sup> This concept – and its looping temporality of past and future – was expressed perfectly in Will's written promise to his wife that they 'shall have the old days back again and very much better too'.<sup>124</sup>

## 1918 – 1919

In June 1918, after a year at Clacton, Will found himself assigned to a top secret overseas expeditionary force, code-named Syren. Only after their ship had left port were the soldiers told that they were headed to Russia, in what would turn out to be an ill-fated intervention in the post-Revolutionary civil war: a burning conflict that 'bore characteristics of a coalition war, secessionist war, civil war, ethnic conflict and warlordism'.<sup>125</sup> No soldiers could be spared from the Western Front, so the Syren force was made up of what military historian Clifford Kinvig calls, 'doubtful medical material ... mainly category "B" soldiers ... fit for indoor duties or work at the Murmansk base. Most wore at least one wound stripe'.<sup>126</sup> This description fits Will, who was category B1 and had spent several weeks of 1917 in hospital suffering with rheumatism. On the voyage there was an outbreak of Spanish Influenza, in which 'practically everyone was attacked' and many died. Landing in Murmansk, one of the Force's officers Major Chambers found a town 'built on sand. There are no roads and there is no system of sanitation. Thousands of refugees, of all nationalities, were living in railway trucks. Their condition was pitiable'.<sup>127</sup>

Throughout the journey and campaign, Amy and Will continued to write. Letters took so long to arrive that the conversation became staggered, overlapping questions and answers. They numbered their letters and got used to the temporal displacement of replying to month-old news. The Armistice in November 1918 must have come as an anti-climax for Amy; her husband had embarked on a new offensive and was not expected home for a long time. In December, soldiers in the Syren Force were given Christmas cards to send home, which Will signed with his habitual squeeze-love. But Will had lost the stoicism of previous Christmases. He wrote (referring to his brother-in-law),

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<sup>123</sup> Knoepfmacher, quoted in Jack Zipes, *When Dreams Came True: Classical Fairy Tales and their Tradition* (Routledge, 1999), 122.

<sup>124</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 18 January 1917.

<sup>125</sup> By all accounts the Syren intervention was a disaster, spearheaded by independently-acting British Generals plagued by insurrection. Clifford Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade: the British Invasion of Russia, 1918-1920* (Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 25. Klaus Richter, 'Baltic States and Finland,' in *1914-1918-Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. Ute Daniel et al. (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014). Brock Millman, 'The Problem with Generals: Military Observers and the Origins of the Intervention in Russia and Persia, 1917-18,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 22, no. 2 (1998).

<sup>126</sup> Kinvig, *Churchill's Crusade*, 22.

<sup>127</sup> Frank Chambers, 'The Veterinary History of the North Russian Expeditionary Force,' *The Veterinary Journal*, 82, no. 2 (February 1926): 68.



‘Yes George and I had good times together in the old days but everything is different now, and besides we are getting older’.<sup>128</sup> More than ever, his writing expressed a longing for home: ‘oh what does it feel like to walk into a shop or on a pavement?’.<sup>129</sup> Until 1918, Will had avoided the death and violence of war, but it is likely that he came much closer to it during this period. His letters scrupulously avoid all mention of military activities, fighting, or casualties, but histories of the Syren operation paint a bloody picture of this disastrous campaign.

Men on the front line in Europe also took months to come home. In January 1919, Cecil wrote from Germany, freely venting his frustration at the authorities and being ‘so bound up with Red Tape’.<sup>130</sup> Many of Amy’s neighbours would have been waiting alongside her – waiting for husbands and sons to return, waiting for letters. Meanwhile, their children were growing up and life was going on. The 1918 voters register for Forburg Road recorded that of 110 houses on the road, sixty had men listed as voters, the other fifty either had no male household members, or the men were absent military voters.<sup>131</sup> This inexact but suggestive snapshot reinforces how high the proportion of women was on any given London street.

A birthday card from Auntie Hettie in February 1919 captured the sense of anticipation. It was illustrated with a girl in a white dress dancing with a dog, captioned, ‘Oh isn’t it lovely Toby they’ll soon be home again’.<sup>132</sup> It was a good choice of card for four-year-old Eileen, who was waiting at home with Rex for Will to come back. But Will was away for seven more months. Over the summer, he started to write letters directly to Eileen, asking questions, making promises, and including hints as to the state of Russia. ‘How are the kittens getting on? ... it will not be long now before daddy comes home for good then we can have lots and lots of Chocolates ... you are a lucky girl with all your dollies as the little girls here have none at all’.<sup>133</sup>

When he did return in September 1919, it was not for good. Conscription continued into 1920, and the army soon took him again. Will served as a clerk with the first British Legation in the newly independent Finland from January to April 1920. It was as cold and remote as his previous trip

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<sup>128</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 27 January 1919.

<sup>129</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 26 March 1919.

<sup>130</sup> Cecil Brock to Amy Brock, 4 January 1919.

<sup>131</sup> ‘London, England, Electoral Registers, 1847-1965’, digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), Forburg Road, 1918; London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>132</sup> Birthday card, V&A B.488-1993

<sup>133</sup> Will Brock to Eileen Brock, 16 July 1919.

North. His diary for 20 February records, 'my thoughts are with dear little Eileen': this was the fourth year in a row that he had missed his daughter's birthday celebrations.<sup>134</sup>

### **1920: At home**

When Will came home in April 1920, the Brock family could stop writing letters, and finally settle into life at 24 Forburg Road. Perhaps they took the family holiday that Amy had been dreaming of since 1917, though for many families in their position 1920 was a difficult year. The end of conscription meant the end of army wages and the separation allowance. Will did not return to his job for Tom Smith & Co – perhaps his rheumatism made traveling impossible, his job may have been taken by someone else, or maybe the market for party decorations and novelties had dried up in the post-war slump.

Histories of the immediate aftermath of the war are practically unanimous in their account of the emotional and material hardship faced by returning soldiers.<sup>135</sup> Social historian Keith Laybourn claims unemployment was the 'dominating issue' in the interwar period, and though economic historians debate the causes and extent, there is no disagreement that unemployment spiked quickly in 1920 and 1921.<sup>136</sup> The Brocks' situation was exacerbated in October 1920, when their rent was increased from £10 to £13 per quarter. Their landlord Mr Chambers used macroeconomic forces as justification, 'I am sorry for this, but your money has not got the same value now'.<sup>137</sup> In the post-war slump, with inflation raising prices, nobody's money had the same value.

Roper has turned the spotlight on the emotional upheaval that the reappearance of fathers could cause: 'the returned soldier's plight tended to take centre-stage while the children's subjectivities were shaped in the wings'.<sup>138</sup> His theatrical metaphor may have been particularly apt in the Brock household. Were Amy and Eileen upstaged by Will's reprisal of his role of father? Did the father–

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<sup>134</sup> Will Brock's Finland Diary, 20 February 1920.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (Abacus, 1995); Pugh, *Danced All Night*; Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War*; Hattersley, *Borrowed Time*; Overy, *Morbid Age*.

<sup>136</sup> Keith Laybourn, *Modern Britain Since 1906* (I B Tauris, 1999), 105. The exact figures for unemployment in 1920-1 are hard to find. Most economists still rely on data presented by Agatha Chapman in 1953, which included very rough estimates for 1920. Agatha Chapman and Rose Knight, *Wages and Salaries in the United Kingdom, 1920-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953). For explanation of this data and its shortcomings, see Edward Butchart, 'Unemployment and Non-Employment in Interwar Britain,' *Oxford Economic and Social History Working Papers* 16 (1997); P. A. Ormerod and G. D. N. Worswick, 'Unemployment in Interwar Britain,' *Journal of Political Economy*, 90, no. 2 (1982).

<sup>137</sup> Mr Chambers to Will Brock, 21 October 1920.

<sup>138</sup> Roper, 'Subjectivities,' 167.

daughter double act find its perfect audience in Amy, or its harshest critic?<sup>139</sup> However it played out, in the end this ensemble performance turned out to be merely an interval, before the final act of Will Brock's life.

### **1920 – 1921: 'Mespot'**

In the light of his family's worsening financial situation, in November 1920 Will re-joined the army and moved to barracks in Aldershot. He wrote to Amy, that of the men in his hut, 'nearly all are ex-soldiers like myself joined because they couldn't get a job, you would be surprised, some with 3 or 4 children'.<sup>140</sup> As Will was pointing out to his wife, the Brock family experience was far from unique; even men with several children had made the same difficult decision to join up again.

In fact, Will returned to his positive attitude of the early war years. His letters spoke of relief at steady employment, and the benefits of army life, and hinted at its familiarity after four years of military routine:

Ought to be at home didn't I but there we are must make the best of it ... and I am thankful I have the health to do it instead of walking about London. The army life is real good (if you do the right thing).<sup>141</sup>

Once the war was ostensibly finished, the army offered soldiers more leisure time. At Aldershot, Will started singing and performing more regularly, and was proud of his reception:

I sang at a concert here ... on Friday night 3 songs ... and they greatly appreciated my turn it is a proper concert hall here quite up to lick. And I was complimented on my singing (ahem).<sup>142</sup>

It seemed the army in peace time had perks that suited Will Brock very well. In December, he started the long journey to Mesopotamia, via India, arriving in Basra in February. The territory had been made a British Protectorate in the Treaty of Versailles and Will's unit, the 3rd Echelon, were there to support British administrative rule. Will reacted with rapt curiosity to his new surroundings. He described in his long letters how British men slept in bungalows and how the Arabs in the local town lived. His description of market day registered a mixture of fascination and repugnance – both expressions of an underlying racism typical of his time:

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<sup>139</sup> The arguments about conservative return to gender roles post-WW1 in Kent Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>140</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 12 November 1920.

<sup>141</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 15 November 1920.

<sup>142</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 12 December 1920.

... Sunday regular market day... you see all nations Arabs Syrians Persians Armenians, it is a mixture, typical [*sic*] Eastern men sitting outside their shops selling their wares, from highly coloured ribbons, carpets, cucumbers, to sort of black treacle looking stuff they spread on a leaf and they eat with great relish, and it leaves their mouth looking as if they had been eating blood and the noise with their drums and other instruments to say nothing of the beggars sitting by the side of the road, here you would see a man holding up his poor withered leg here a blind girl in fact all sorts there are several open air cafes too, you can buy cooling drinks lemonade etc all these places are in the open air. You must not believe all the nice Eastern Pictures you see, can assure you they are not so nice when you are amongst it, I often think of the alluring advertisements in the London papers about Eastern perfumes, with a pretty picture, but it's not a bit like it take it from me not quite so pretty I mean.<sup>143</sup>

Will also sent a bundle of photographs of 'Mesopotamia', including a number of views of camels, 'Arabs at the market', and the Garden of Eden.<sup>144</sup> They must have been incredible images to Amy and Eileen, so different from their domestic life in Stoke Newington. As was their wont, Will and Amy used their familiar language of pantomime and fairytale to describe and make sense of the changes in their lives. Referring to the dog's health, Amy wrote, 'Rex is alright but getting very old sometimes his legs give way like Ali Baba's donkey in the pantomime when the thieves were coming do you remember?'<sup>145</sup> Will replied,

Yes, I remember Ali Baba's donkey, and you see many Ali Babas about here riding on Asses, this is truly an Arabian Nights country, outside every house there is a large earthenware jar filled with water just like the 40 thieves jars.<sup>146</sup>

Stories from the *Arabian Nights*, including *Aladdin*, *Sinbad*, and *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, were part of the fairytale canon for children in the early twentieth century. Aladdin was one of the characters in Eileen's Fairyland paper doll set and Sinbad appeared on a reward card she received for good school attendance in July 1923.<sup>147</sup> The tales were frequently appropriated for pantomime, and like Red Riding Hood, their characters were part of the fantasy cast of the Brocks' imaginations. As we would expect from Will and Amy, the humour and stereotypes of pantomime offered a more useful set of shared images than the perfume advertisements which Will thought were 'not a bit like it'.

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<sup>143</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 8 May 1921.

<sup>144</sup> This was the nickname as spoken by the 'mouths of Little Englanders', Graves and Hodge, *Long Weekend*, 18.

<sup>145</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 19 April 1921.

<sup>146</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 16-17 May 1921.

<sup>147</sup> Attendance card, V&A B.698-1993



The theatricality of Will's new experiences extended to the costumes. 'Daddy in khaki' of the war years gave way to a new uniform:

My dress during the day time is either short drill knickers or drill trousers, white shirt with belt, 'spine pad' a cloth khaki coloured arrangement with tapes you put your arms in and they fit down your back to the waist and what with the curtain attached to our 'topees' we are well protected from the sun.<sup>148</sup>

Knowing that Amy would be keen to see his new outfit, he promised, 'I will have my photo taken in summer attire soon'.<sup>149</sup> Amy initially reacted with mirth, 'I read that part of your letter about how you have to dress up to Eileen and we did think you must look funny'.<sup>150</sup> And in the next, 'I think I shall squeal ... when I see your photo in summer attire'.<sup>151</sup>



Figure 18 Photo of Will Brock in 'summer attire' in Basra, 1921<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 28 April 1921. A 'topee' is a lightweight solid sun hat, otherwise known as a pith helmet, with a wide brim.

<sup>149</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 13 April 1921.

<sup>150</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 1 June 1921.

<sup>151</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 17 May 1921.

<sup>152</sup> Brock papers, IWM

For his portrait Will dressed and posed with dignity, standing tall with combed-back hair and his hands in his pockets (Figure 18). He looks more like a Rudolph Valentino-style romantic lead than a pantomime comedian, and his letter expressed his hope for a more serious and approving reaction from Amy: 'Enclosed photo proofs (don't laugh) taken under a date palm ... what do you think of it I borrowed the trousers but it doesn't matter'.<sup>153</sup> The details of the borrowed trousers and the date palm background are evidence that Will carefully orchestrated this image to send home. Perhaps it 'doesn't matter' that the trousers were borrowed because this was still an authentic self-representation, or one that Will was happy with. Amy replied earnestly, 'I liked the photos you look fine'.<sup>154</sup>

Eileen continued to appear in proxy in her parents' letters: 'Yes I expect Eileen would like a monkey she squealed when I read about you bringing one home'.<sup>155</sup> This is evidence that Amy read Will's letters aloud, and reminds us that letters were not just writing on paper, but were heard and spoken aloud, with a performative aspect of their own.<sup>156</sup> Eileen was also writing her own letters. During this second prolonged period of her father's absence, Eileen was much more active in the correspondence. She was older, of course, but her relationship with her father had also changed during his months at home in 1920. In April 1921, Will wrote, 'Eileen's letter I carry in my pocket with yours isn't she a little treat. I treasure it very much tell her and think her very clever'.<sup>157</sup> Father and daughter also found a point of identification, as they had both started 'school'; Eileen was going to St Thomas's Primary, and Will attended mathematics and grammar training courses. Eileen asked her father 'are you in the big boys at your school?' and included a row of the family's special squeezies (Figure 19).

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<sup>153</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 16–17 May 1921.

<sup>154</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 11 June 1921.

<sup>155</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 17 May 1921.

<sup>156</sup> This is consistent with Kennedy's descriptions of fathers' letters being shared among family members. Kennedy, *Children's War*, 49.

<sup>157</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 13 April 1921.

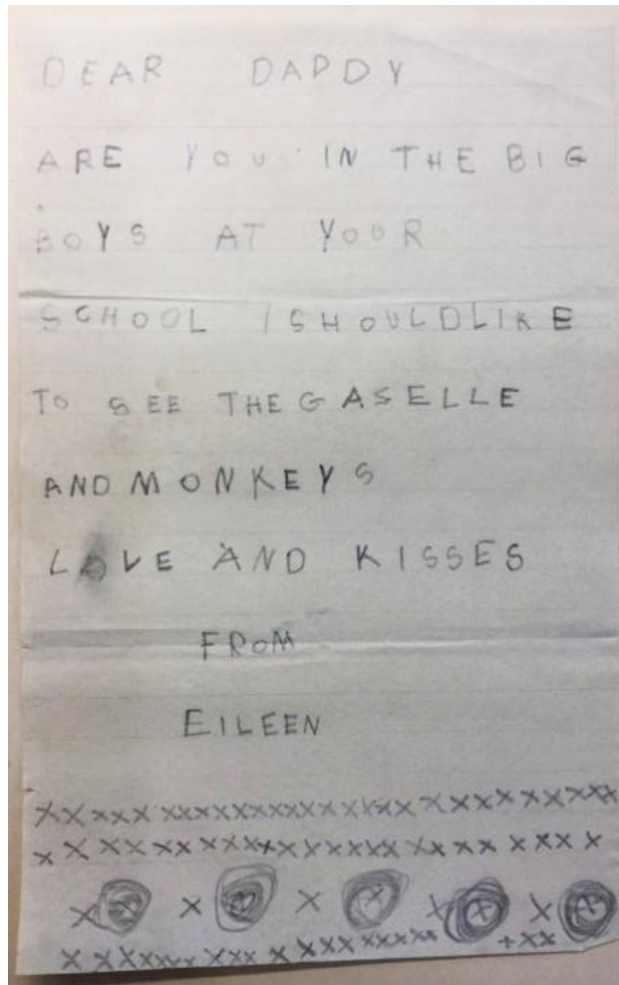


Figure 19 Letter from Eileen to Will, 9 June 1921<sup>158</sup>

In Basra, Will had found a niche as a performer and was developing a 'concert party' group, as well as singing weekly at the hospital. In a series of expansive letters from April 1921, Will described his performances and became more reflective about the separation of his family.

I went down on Wednesday last as usual took a part in a sketch, and sang 'Fishing' and 'Work'. Oh for some new stuff. Anyway they all seem to take alright, suppose it is because I sing so plain they can hear the words which is more than you can do of some of the comics out here.<sup>159</sup>

Will kept the letters from his wife and child physically close, and invested them with the qualities of a charm or talisman: 'my word I am pleased to get your letters and last night I went down better than ever at the hospital concert, simply because I had got your letters in my pocket'.<sup>160</sup> As objects

<sup>158</sup> Brock papers, IWM

<sup>159</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 3 April 1921.

<sup>160</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 11 April 1921.

from home, letters from his wife and daughter were literally a way for Will to keep *in touch* with his loved ones, when they were physically distant.<sup>161</sup>

Will acknowledged that Amy missed him, 'especially as I was at home so much before coming out here, you must feel it I know', but his dominant tone was determined cheeriness: 'I hope you are feeling much better dear and not so depressed (I don't like that word) now that you are receiving more news from me'.<sup>162</sup> Perhaps it was in response to Amy feeling 'depressed' that Will started to think about a new future together:

I should like to have you both here just now to hug and kiss, but not for keeps out here as in my opinion Mesopotamia is really no place for a white woman, India is alright but here NO... I might try for a job in India, but I may hear of something at home.<sup>163</sup>

Amy replied positively about India and the couple started to dream together about moving there.<sup>164</sup> The suggestion of 'trying for a job' in India reminds us that the empire offered at least imaginary possibilities to British citizens after the war. Before 1914, Will's siblings had emigrated to the USA, Canada and Australia, and his wartime travels had opened his eyes and accustomed him to different places: 'Yes, I am seeing the world, but you don't take much notice of things when you are amongst it every day'.<sup>165</sup> What did Amy really think about leaving her Stoke Newington home and family? The understanding of empire and imperialism in Londoners' everyday lives is a matter of historical debate, between those who argue Britain was saturated in imperialist discourse, and those who question the empire's domestic impact.<sup>166</sup> The Brock family letters demonstrate how Londoners' lives could be at once both saturated in and oblivious of the forces of empire. Will Brock was sent around the world to defend Britain's ideological positions (in Russia, Finland and eventually Iraq), and he dreamed of a new life in India with servants to bring him breakfast.<sup>167</sup> And yet in his letters to his wife, it was pantomime and piano tunes that he wrote about, the quandaries about sub-letting and gossip about family friends. Theirs was a domestic drama played out on a world stage. Will

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<sup>161</sup> This use of the phrase *in touch* was used by Roper, *Secret Battle*, 49.

<sup>162</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 7 April 1921.

<sup>163</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 3 April 1921.

<sup>164</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 13 April 1921.

<sup>165</sup> Will Brock, 7 April 1921.

<sup>166</sup> John MacKenzie argued that imperial imagery saturated everyday discourse; Bernard Porter disputed that, claiming that it played a quite insignificant role in working- and middle-class Britons' everyday lives. John M. Mackenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 8-10. Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: What the British Really Thought About Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4-8.

<sup>167</sup> Will Brock, 3 April 1921.

wistfully longed to be home, even though he knew the world had changed. As he wrote: 'but there's no place like home after all, how I wish things were normal in the old country'.<sup>168</sup>

## Conclusion

These well-read letters probably shaped Eileen's life-long relationship with, and idea of, her father. Across their pages, Will comes across as a loving, easy-going man who prided himself on his cheerfulness. After 1920, his singing and performing talents had won him a place in the army that he had not quite found as a B1 soldier in wartime. He was effusive in his praise for his daughter – 'a little treat ... very clever' – and he found pleasure in her progress as a performer: 'glad Eileen sings and recites so well I was hoping she would'.<sup>169</sup> These expressions of approbation and hopefulness may have taken on, to Eileen, much more significance than their brevity suggests. Those letters could have provided encouragement to her performances and contributed to her motivation in the coming years, or they may instead have been a burden to live up to.

Photography was an important tool of communication in the Brocks' relationship. Photographs could freeze time: holding their daughter at two years old, or recapturing the good times of their pre-war relationship. But they could also trace and mark changes, as with Will's portrait in his 'summer attire'. The Brocks' family included Rex the dog; his place was confirmed by his presence in photographs – in Will's locket and in photography studio theatricals.

Will's army life occurred at the periphery; first on the British coast, then in Russia and Helsinki. After the war, unemployment forced him to re-enlist and he left again for a non-fighting role in Basra. While Will was seeing the world, Amy and Eileen waited at home. But the surviving correspondence shows that Amy was active, working hard as a mother, sister, sister-in-law and wife. Under financial pressure and fearing for her life and the lives of loved ones, she managed to bring up her daughter, sub-let rooms in their house, and continued to sew for herself and others. Conscription caused emotional and material difficulties for nearly all British families. Long-term separation required new ways to express and communicate emotional and practical information. The Brocks developed a shared language built on their love of pantomime and their memories of many nights spent in the theatre. Underlying the Brock's cultural life was the transnational history of the Arabian Nights, the Eurasian character of ballet dancing and the expansionist legacies of the nineteenth century, and

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<sup>168</sup> Will Brock, 7 April 1921. As was typical for Will, the phrase 'there's no place like home' was taken from a popular song. 'Home Sweet Home', was a nineteenth-century song from the canon of British popular music. Russell, *Popular Music in England 1840-1914: A Social History*, 148. The song was later featured in the soundtrack of *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and the phrase became Dorothy's catchphrase.

<sup>169</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 27 January 1920.

yet, on the whole, they experienced and described their lives one day at a time within the possibilities available to them.

Mackenzie argued that 'ephemera and "free gifts" were important vehicles' for ideology.<sup>170</sup> He was referring to the biscuit tins, *Boy's Own* magazines and cigarette cards which promoted the heroism of colonialism, but we might expand and feminise this world of ephemera to include free sewing patterns, paper dolls and postcards, which all repeated the motif of vulnerable little girls in fairytale costumes.

Eileen's performance-for-camera of Red Riding Hood exemplified the concept of the fantasy echo which recurs throughout this thesis. The little girl in the red cloak, often pictured with the wolf, is a consistent image which resists change over time. As an un-dateable garment with connections to previous generations, Eileen's red cloak resisted the chronological drive of the chapter and introduced the circular temporality of generational memory and hand-me-down clothing. As Eileen's photograph demonstrated, personal circumstances collide with familiar cultural texts. As worn by Eileen, Red Riding Hood signified vulnerability, but leavened with good humour through the inclusion of the family dog.

The Brock family used the fantasies of fairytales to shape their experience into a narrative. Rather than being purely nostalgic, fairytales turned their minds towards the future, both as frustrated calls for help, and as utopian imaginings of better days, and the longed-for happy ending.

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<sup>170</sup> Mackenzie, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, 7.

## Chapter 2: Dreaming of daddy

A young girl lies in her single bed. Her dark hair, closed eyes and peaceful pose are mirrored by the doll in her arms. Above the girl, in a misty vignette signalling the content of her dreams, is a marching soldier in the khaki uniform of the First World War, holding a bayonet. This picture appeared on a postcard with the caption: 'Dreaming of Daddy'(Figure 20). This postcard raises several questions. Why send a picture of a child dreaming? Was it desirable for a child to dream of their father at war? *Did* children dream of their daddies during the war? If so, how would those dreams have been understood? Might ideas about dreams reveal fantasies about childhood?



Figure 20 *Dreaming of Daddy*, Underwood, printed 1914-18, sent c.1916-20<sup>171</sup>

An individual's dreams are the product of their personal and social contexts; images and motifs in the dreamworld reflect the waking world. Consequently, dreams have a history. Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper describe how dreams 'trace the changing social storehouse of images upon which personal views and even unconscious fantasies inevitably draw'.<sup>172</sup> In Carl Jung's terms,

A dream is a theatre in which the dreamer is himself [*sic*] the scene, the player, the prompter, the producer, the author, the public and the critic.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>171</sup> Author's archive.

<sup>172</sup> Pick and Roper, *Dreams and History*, 8.

<sup>173</sup> Carl Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 246.

But the themes of the play are drawn from pre-existing cultural scripts.

Dreams are unusual and tricky historical sources, to say the least. They invite questions of reliability (what sense or truth can be found in the nonsensical happenings of a sleeping mind?) and they are impossible to access directly. As Sigmund Freud established, all accounts of dreams are acts of 'secondary revision' which turn a nebulous phenomenon into a narratable experience.<sup>174</sup> Yet dreams contribute to history because they respond to dreamers' emotional and physical experience and establish a relationship between the inner and outer worlds. Including dreams in the archive of past experience enriches our understanding of life as a whole. In the psychoanalytic clinic, analysts are trained to ask, why am I being told this dream, why now?<sup>175</sup> This is also an appropriate question to ask of historical sources; why do they take their specific form in time, and how are they presented to the historian?

So how might we access dreams from the past? Not directly, but through the written or visual records that dreamers make. Writing or images that describe dreams are known as 'dream texts'. Isabel Richter, a cultural historian who studies dreams of death, places dream texts in the category of myths and fairytales: they are apparently timeless, direct, unstylised accounts, but as culturally produced texts, they bear the same marks of genre and style as other acts of writing, and can be productively analysed for form and content.<sup>176</sup> Dream images attempt external representation of inner vision, potentially providing artefacts, or in Whitney Davis's terms, 'objective manifestations', of subjectivity.<sup>177</sup>

Dreams and childhood have some things in common. Both are simultaneously biological phenomena and cultural experiences, grasped only fleetingly and reconstructed retrospectively through inadequate language and stories. The Romantic poets of the early 1800s were interested in both. Children and dreams were both manifestations of irrationality and creativity; from the poetic dream accounts of Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt and Wordsworth, through De Quincey, whose narcotic hallucinations verged on nightmares, to the more sober childhood recollections of Harriet Martineau and Mary Somerville.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A A Brill (Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 348.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Hanna Segal, in Pick and Roper, *Dreams and History*, 239.

<sup>176</sup> Isabel Richter, 'Dreams in Cultural History: Dream Narratives and the History of Subjectivity,' *Cultural History*, 3, no. 2 (2014).

<sup>177</sup> Whitney Davis, *Drawing the Dream of the Wolves: Homosexuality, Interpretation and Freud's 'Wolf Man'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>178</sup> Pauline Roose, 'Children's Dreams,' *The Argosy: A Magazine of Tales, Travels, Essays, and Poems* 52 (1891): 201.



The force of this association echoed through to the *fin-de-siècle*. In *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885), Robert Louis Stevenson explored the blurring of playing, dreaming and sleeping in young childhood, based on his own boyhood experiences.<sup>179</sup> Stevenson's evocation of a child's bed as a dreamscape, a site of hypnogogic fantasy, was given visual form by a series of illustrators who sustained his vision into the twentieth century, including Charles Robinson (1885), Ethel Mars and Maud Squire (1902), Jessie Wilcox Smith (1905), Millicent Sowerby (1908) and Myrtle Sheldon (1916, Figure 21). In each case, the artists reinforced the visual iconography of children asleep: the single bed with ruffled pillows and sheets, quilted bedspread, iron bedstead and scattered toys that signified a typical middle class nursery – exactly as appeared in the *Dreaming of Daddy* postcard.



Figure 21 Illustration for 'Land of Counterpane' by Myrtle Sheldon<sup>180</sup>

This chapter investigates the potential of children's dreams for historians of fantasy. The postcard that opened this chapter was an adult's attempt to understand and represent a child's inner world. It made claims about a daughter's emotional experience, based on normative assumptions of what wartime separation felt like to the children affected. I will show how children's dreams were increasingly conceptualised by psychologists, psychoanalysts, folklorists, poets and artists over the turn of the twentieth century. In formidable acts of fantasy, adults from all these fields imagined and interpreted what was happening in children's heads while they were sleeping.

I will also address what dream texts might teach us about children's wartime experience, through the published work of child psychologist C.W. Kimmins. In Kimmins's inspired analogy, a child's

<sup>179</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Child's Garden of Verses* (Puffin, 2008 [1885]). Stevenson was a dream enthusiast. He claimed that the idea for *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was brought to him by Brownies in his sleep in 1885, the same year that *Garden of Verses* was published. Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Chapter on Dreams,' in *Across the Plains* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1892).

<sup>180</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Child's Garden of Verses* (Chicago: M A Donohoe & Co, 1916).

dream came as a Fairy Godmother, a benign intervening adult from the world of pantomime, to provide what the child needed and desired.<sup>181</sup> Indeed, all the dream texts in this chapter were produced entirely by adults – sometimes for children, as stories or poems – or shaped by adults, as in the case of psychologists publishing children’s own dream texts.

## Dream interpretation

When Amy Brock was growing up in late Victorian Britain, dreams were popularly understood as augurs or tools of divination, and ‘dream books’ promising foresight by decoding the contents of dreams were the most popular form of chapbook’.<sup>182</sup> This premonitory function of dreams had long defined their role in culture, from the Old Testament story of Joseph, to the epic of Gilgamesh, or Plato’s *Republic*.<sup>183</sup> The oldest source for Western dream interpretation was Artemidorus, a first-century philosopher whose books used symbols to predict what would happen to the dreamer.<sup>184</sup>

One dream-book seller explained in 1899 that, ‘the greater number of my customers ... are workgirls and domestic servants, or young married women of the “small villa” class’.<sup>185</sup> Amy Brock, her sisters and friends were women of this ‘small villa class’, who might nevertheless have dreamed big, and hoped for much. However, the longevity and popularity of dream books did not equal respectability. Associated with superstitious ideas of destiny and premonition, and often concerned with matters of romance and luck, the study of dreams met with disapproval by those Victorians ‘who sought to bring education and improvement to the labouring classes’.<sup>186</sup> Even so, dreams remained fascinating, particularly to those who perhaps felt their lives were out of their own control.

Sigmund Freud’s book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) introduced hugely influential ideas of the unconscious, repression, symbolisation and sexuality at the outset of a new century.<sup>187</sup> Freud fought

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<sup>181</sup> Kimmins, *Children’s Dreams*, 20-21.

<sup>182</sup> Maureen Perkins, ‘The Meaning of Dream Books,’ *History Workshop Journal*, 48, no. 1 (Autumn 1999): 125.

<sup>183</sup> Steven Luria Ablon and John E Mack, ‘Children’s Dreams Reconsidered,’ *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 35, no. 1 (1980): 190.

<sup>184</sup> S. R. F. Price, ‘The Future of Dreams: From Freud to Artemidorus,’ *Past & Present*, 113, no. 1 (November 1986): 33.

<sup>185</sup> *Smithson’s Northallerton Almanac* (March 1899), quoted in Perkins, ‘The Meaning of Dream Books,’ 128.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>187</sup> My focus herein is the significance of children’s dreams, so I will not recount the general history of psychoanalysis in Britain, which can be found in: Sally Alexander, ‘Psychoanalysis in Britain in the Early Twentieth Century: An Introductory Note,’ *History Workshop Journal* 45 (Spring 1998); Philip Kuhn, *Psychoanalysis in Britain, 1893–1913: Histories and Historiography* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017); Richards, ‘Britain on the Couch’. Understandably, Freud has dominated the scholarship on twentieth-century dream interpretation. Along with Richter, Price, Pick and Roper, the following take Freud’s dream book as a starting or turning point: Colace, *Children’s Dreams* and Lynn Gamwell, *Dreams 1900-2000: Science, Art and the Unconscious Mind* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

the prevailing scientific view that dreams were purely physical phenomena, mere 'sea-froth'.<sup>188</sup> Instead, he took seriously the popular and folkloric notion that dreams had meaning, that they could act as a message. Children's dreams were fundamental to the book's initial conception, and its theoretical conclusions. Freud used numerous examples of his children and grandchildren dreaming of things they were forbidden in waking life: eating strawberries and cherries, sailing on the lake. He concluded, based on observing *real children*, that dreams provided compensation for disappointments, frustrations and sorrows:

The dreams of little children are often simple fulfilments of wishes, and for this reason ... they are invaluable as affording proof that the dream in its inmost essence, is the fulfilment of a wish.<sup>189</sup>

Quite radically, he forced readers to accept that children were desirous. They had longings, and though they were frustrated, their desires persisted. 'Children's dreams are not senseless', he said in his *Introductory Lectures*, 'they are intelligible, completely valid mental acts'.<sup>190</sup> Freud's dream theory extrapolated from these observations to propose a vocabulary of adult dreams and from that, the structure of consciousness itself.

Freud's theory of 'wish fulfilment' resonated with concepts circulating in Edwardian nursery stories and popular culture: that children's dreams gave them access to their heart's desire. The title story of children's annual *The Dream Garden* (1905) described the plight of Anne, a miserable girl who 'lived in a dreary little house, in a dreary road in London'.<sup>191</sup> One night, however, Anne is visited by the Dream Fairy, who takes her to the dream garden, where people go 'to find things they have lost. Some for things they never had'.<sup>192</sup> In the story, dreams provide compensation and fulfilled desires, years before the first English translation of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1913.

In 1912, the founder of sociology Emile Durkheim observed that, in modern Europe, for all its apparent sophistication, there were still,

many people for whom ... sleep is a sort of magico-religious state in which the mind, partially unburdened of the body, has an awareness of vision that it does not enjoy in wakefulness.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> As translated by Barbara Low; also sometimes given as 'foam'. Barbara Low, *Psycho-Analysis: A Brief Account of the Freudian Theory* (George Allen and Unwin, 1920).

<sup>189</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 38.

<sup>190</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, ed. James Strachey (Penguin, 1986 [1963]), 159.

<sup>191</sup> Netta Syrett, ed., *The Dream Garden: A Children's Annual* (John Baillie, 1905), 1.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>193</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1912]), 55.

Once the First World War contributed its burdens on everyday life, even those not usually prone to superstition may have sought foresight or 'awareness of vision' in their dreams of loved ones, and discovered reasons to hope or despair. New dream books continued to appear in wartime: in late 1914, Scottish newspapers included the advertisement, 'Do you believe in the Interpretation of Dreams? If so, you will find the Penny Dream Book a course of never-ending pleasure and interest'.<sup>194</sup>

Michael Roper discovered many examples of frontline soldiers finding pleasure in their dreams. Their letters described dreaming, day and night, of their families at home, sitting around the tea table or walking in the garden.<sup>195</sup> But wartime dreams were a source of terror as well as pleasure; the wartime folklorist Edward Lovett discovered sufferers of nightmares turning to the traditional remedy of hanging a red-fabric-covered horseshoe over the bed. One proponent claimed, 'practically all his friends did the same thing and it was regarded as the best cure for nightmare in the world'.<sup>196</sup>

Superstitions and supernatural beliefs around dreams were persistent and plentiful. In late 1914, two Anglican women claimed to have telepathically transported in their dreams and physically 'laid hands' on wounded soldiers on the battlefield while sleeping in their beds.<sup>197</sup> Convalescing soldiers reported improvement after being visited in dreams, or seeing visions at their bedside.<sup>198</sup> Some superstitions around dreams were idiosyncratic. Around 1914, the child Anne Tibble was taken to see the body of a drowned boy and was forced to touch his face, as her mother believed that 'touching a dead person stopped you dreaming about them'.<sup>199</sup>

## Wartime postcards

Like dreams, postcards appear unsummoned, imprinted by other people, other places, often bearing mysterious phrases and images to decode. Their combination of picture, printed text and handwritten message is a potent space for cultural fantasy, as postcards combine in one small,

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<sup>194</sup> Owen Davies, *A Supernatural War: Magic, Divination, and Faith in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). Whether or not the advert intentionally refers to Freud's book, the content of this particular handbook was unlikely to follow his theory.

<sup>195</sup> Roper, *Secret Battle*, 55. Roper provides extensive and sensitive analysis of frontline men's imaginings, concluding that, '[h]ome became, not a parallel existence, but another world, beyond the reach of the trenches. These dreams of home, however, were neither naïve nor dysfunctional, but essential to their survival', *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>196</sup> Edward Lovett, *Magic in Modern London* (Boscastle: Red Thread Books, 2014 [1925]), 15.

<sup>197</sup> Rosa Stuart, *Dreams and Visions of the War* (1917).

<sup>198</sup> Davies, *Supernatural War*, 92.

<sup>199</sup> Tibble, *Greenhorn*, 35-36; Julie-Marie Strange, "'She Cried a Very Little': Death, Grief and Mourning in Working-class Culture, c.1880-1914,' *Social History* 27, no. 2 (2002): 155.

cheap, widely accessible and universally understood format, the ideas of commercial popularity, contemporary relevance and personal resonance. During the First World War, picture postcards became extremely popular.<sup>200</sup> They were cheap to send, they were easily available, collectable, and the wealth of visual imagery could contribute meaning to the short written message on the other side. The women of the 'small villa class', separated from their husbands, brothers and sons, bought sentimental picture postcards in their millions, or collected them for free, to send to their men in the training camps, barracks and trenches.<sup>201</sup> The *Dreaming of Daddy* postcard (Figure 20) was given away with the popular weekly story magazines *Smart Fiction* and *Yes or No*. Both cost just one penny per copy in the war years, the same price as sending a postcard overseas.<sup>202</sup>

To twenty-first century eyes, the sentimental postcards of the First World War appear schmaltzy or clichéd, but they communicated 'deep and authentic feelings' between senders and receivers.<sup>203</sup> They also provided individuals, whose personal emotion might be otherwise incommunicable, with a language of expressive images and texts. A well-chosen card could be a 'symbolic interaction' that helped to validate emotion, situate the sender and recipient in relation to each other, and created a tangible connection between them, while still providing space to share information.<sup>204</sup>

*Dreaming of Daddy* offered the promise that fathers appeared in their daughters' dreams. This might be a reassuring fantasy to a man away from home for long stretches of time – he might be absent from her day-to-day life, but he was at least remembered and loved enough to have a place in her inner life. But the postcard goes further than that, by providing an 'objective manifestation' of their actual reunion: daughter and her 'daddy in khaki' are brought together pictorially within a single frame.<sup>205</sup> If a postcard could connect sender and recipient, the picture on this card repeated and reinforced that function.

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<sup>200</sup> Tonie Holt and Valmal Holt, *Til the Boys Come Home: The Picture Postcards of the First World War* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2014 [1977]).

<sup>201</sup> The Army Children Archive online provides a representative sample of the imagery which has survived. The Army Children Archive, accessed 3 March 2021, <http://www.archhistory.co.uk/taca/home.html>

<sup>202</sup> Both published by Harry Shurey. *Yes or No* featured thrilling tales of espionage and violence and offered 'cash prizes for soldiers' yarns', whereas *Smart Fiction* provided romantic stories including 'Sister's Honour' and 'The Loveable Sinner'. *Smart Fiction*, 11 April 1917.

<sup>203</sup> Roper, *Secret Battle*, 22.

<sup>204</sup> Working in the field of sociological consumer studies, Emily West places greeting cards in the realm of 'ritual communication' for working-class consumers, in which the effort and care involved in the act of communication (choosing an appropriate image, buying and affixing a stamp or envelope, delivering to the post box, etc) bears as much significance as the content. Emily West, 'Expressing the Self Through Greeting Card Sentiment,' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 5 (2010).

<sup>205</sup> This figure appeared in popular song as well as imagery, for example 'Our Khaki Daddy – a War Action Song for Infants' (1915). John Mullen, 'Propaganda and Dissent in British Popular Song during the Great War,' *Textes et Contextes* (2011).

Unlike the sleeping girl, who is a sharply focussed photograph, the man is a slightly fuzzy drawing, and appropriately for a figment of a child's imagination, his small size and stiff pose give him the appearance of a particularly detailed toy soldier. Although this indeterminacy serves the practical purpose of making the postcard relevant to a wide market of consumers, whose fathers may be serving in many theatres of war, it also offers a more significant commentary on the fact children around Eileen's age, who were born during the war years, likely knew their soldier fathers from photographs and descriptions rather than their own memories.

Will Brock never described this dreams in his letters, but one contemplation of his wife and daughter's activities had the quality of a daydream, rendered as a tableau of domestic comfort:

I wonder what you are doing now? Expect you are both in bed tickling each other with poor old Rex on the floor and Tim [the cat] somewhere about the room or on Eileen's chest.<sup>206</sup>

In contrast to Will's vivid evocation of home, the imagined man in the postcard's misty vignette is far from specific or richly imagined. He marches in a featureless void, with only his shadow to give a sense of three-dimensionality or solidity to the space he occupies. Whereas soldiers could recall and imagine their homes in detail, those left behind were unable to imagine life in the barracks or trenches.

The back of the Brocks' postcard reads, 'Dear Daddy, Thank you for those pretty cards Love from Eileen', with a row of kisses and the familiar squeezies (Figure 22). However, it is in Amy's handwriting: the message was not from Will's daughter, but his wife. Since Eileen was so young when Will left home, she was unable to read or write and their communication was mostly one way. As described in the previous chapter, Will's letters were read aloud to Eileen and heard, therefore, in Amy's voice. This postcard shows how Amy also acted as the channel for communication in the other direction, from Eileen to Will. The card may have been collaboratively written with Eileen (we can easily imagine Amy saying 'let's write a thank you card to Daddy') or without the child's input at all; either way, Amy is assuming the voice of her daughter, on the reverse of a card which explicitly makes a connection between a girl and her father.

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<sup>206</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 8 May 1921

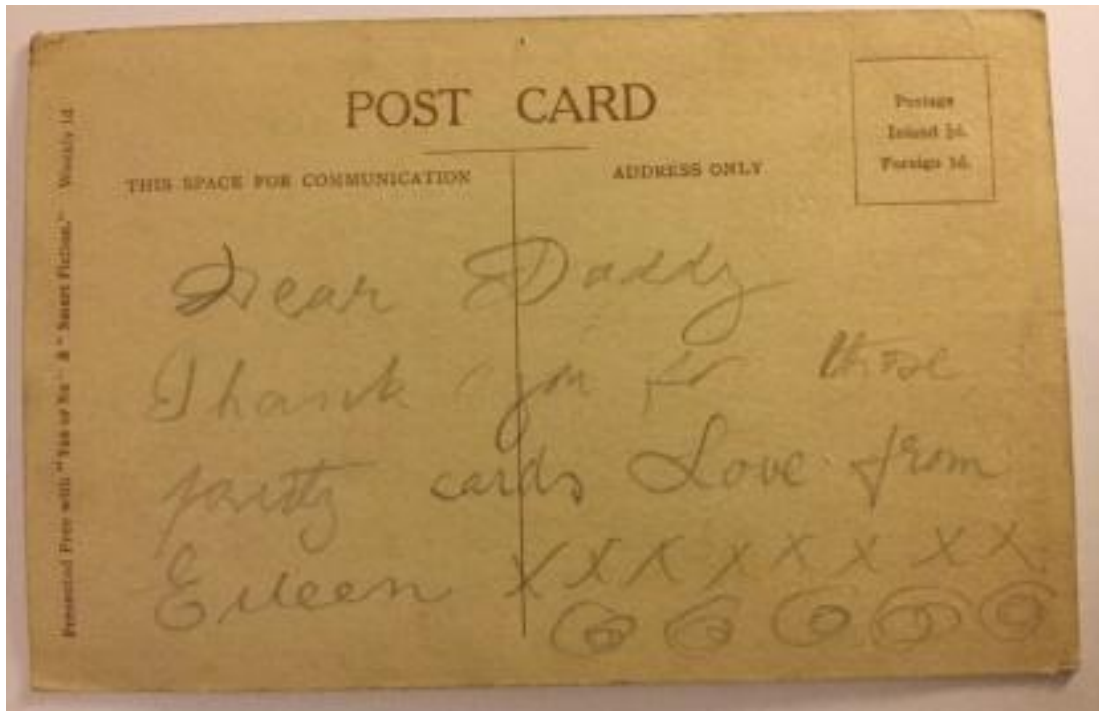


Figure 22 Reverse of *Dreaming of Daddy* postcard<sup>207</sup>



Figure 23 *Dreaming of Daddy*, sent to James McCarthy 1915.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>207</sup> Author's archive.

<sup>208</sup> 'Dreaming of Daddy 1915: The Sad Story Behind a Three-Year-Old's Postcard,' 21 February 2014, accessed 6 July 2020, <http://tacadrum.blogspot.com/2014/02/dreaming-of-daddy-1915-sad-story-behind.html>.

In 1915, a *Dreaming of Daddy* postcard was sent to another soldier who was married with children, Private James McCarthy (Figure 23). This much more battered and creased version carries the message:

Dear daday just to let you no I am longing to see you. Dear daday you have been a long time away from your own little Annie and John and Jimmy. To my darling dady Annie McCarthy. [sic]

Strikingly, this message is also written in an adult hand, this time the (unnamed) mother of John, Jimmy, and three-year-old Annie.<sup>209</sup> There is no possibility that James McCarthy thought this was written by Annie, yet Mrs McCarthy has sustained the pretence beyond just signing it from their daughter. The affectation of childish mis-spellings gives the message a performative tone; the repetition – ‘dear daday ... dear daday ... darling dady’ – reinforces the message ‘I am longing to see you’. This example is more emotionally expressive than the Brocks’ card, and we can sense Mrs McCarthy’s own longings make themselves felt ventriloquistically as she assumes her daughter’s voice. The plaintive tone recalls the waiting, wanting women of the working-class landscape painted by Carolyn Steedman.

On both cards, the mother assumed the place of her child and attempted to communicate their feelings, offering her husband (and perhaps herself too), reassurance that his daughter remembers him, and has a place for him in her fantasy life. By using this card, they connected the motif of dreaming with an experience of longing and overcoming separation. In Marina Warner’s terms, the two sides of a postcard form a third ‘unvoiced’ meaning, which we might hear in these cases as the voice of the mother.<sup>210</sup> These cards highlight the emotional labour of women who literally obscured their own voices by writing as their children, for the benefit of the family.

### **Children’s dreams**

The prevalence of dream postcards in this huge body of popular visual culture confirms that dreams formed part of the language of love, fantasy and separation, and that these associations – when represented on a postcard – were widely understood. *Ever Dreaming of Our Absent Ones!* is a luridly-coloured illustrated postcard with French and English captions, by A. A. Nash (Figure 24). Adrienne Nash (born 1889) was a British woman illustrator who produced a huge number of

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Quoted in Anabella Pollen, ‘Book Review: *Tales of Wonder*,’ *Visual Studies* 33, no. 4 (2018).



sentimental and patriotic wartime postcards, mostly of children.<sup>211</sup> In this card, the figure of the father looms ghostily over his daughter's tiny sleeping body. The blonde-haired, pink-lipped child reclines coquettishly in a large armchair. The vulnerability and availability of her tiny body is accentuated by our frontal view of her dishevelled nightie and cocked leg. In all, the scene is somewhat disturbing to twenty-first century eyes, but the card demonstrates the exaggerated sense of innocence and domesticity common among wartime images of sleeping girls.



Figure 24 *Ever Dreaming of Our Absent Ones!*, A. A. Nash, printed by Inter-Art Co, 1914-18.

Nash also produced *The Dream*, a symphony of patriotism in red, white and blue (Figure 25). A sleeping girl holds a sword, dreaming of a heroic cavalry battle complete with standard-bearers. The flags of the allies are also draped across her white bed, the red stripe of France's tricolour pooling almost like blood at her feet (suggestions of Joan of Arc, perhaps?). The bilingual captions for Nash's cards are a reminder that publishers marketed their cards across the allied nations, and that sentiment crossed borders. This particular example was signed on the back, 'With love / from Daddy'.

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<sup>211</sup> James Taylor, *Pack Up Your Troubles: How Humorous Postcards Helped to Win World War I* (Bloomsbury, 2016), 144.



Figure 25 *The Dream*, A. A. Nash, Inter-Art Co 1914-18. <sup>212</sup>



Figure 26 *Dreaming of Her Soldier Boy!*, Frederick Spurgin, Inter-Art Co, posted 6 June 1915<sup>213</sup>

<sup>212</sup> 'The Dream,' The Army Children Archive, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/armychildrenarchive/28638960141/in/photolist-2a6CEhY-23Mc6jk-ZEKqaE-KCJa5R-oNyX7t-nf2p27-okjvkP-rmS7rx-V2w2tN-xuGfKs-UBorkw-AF5K9c/>.

<sup>213</sup> 'Dreaming of Her Soldier Boy,' The Army Children Archive, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/armychildrenarchive/39892812515/in/photolist-2a6CEhY-23Mc6jk-ZEKqaE-KCJa5R-oNyX7t-nf2p27-okjvkP-rmS7rx-V2w2tN-xuGfKs-UBorkw-AF5K9c/>.

Postcard artist Frederick Spurgin created a simpler composition of a sleeping brunette, bob-haired girl holding her doll (Figure 26). *Dreaming of Her Soldier Boy* bears similarities to *Dreaming of Daddy*, though Spurgin replaced the baby doll with a miniature Tommy in khaki, and we are unable in this case to see the girl's internal imaginings, though by the look on his face, the toy soldier can. Once again, this card was sent 'With best love from Father'; this card introduces 'soldier boy' as another possible characterisation of a fighting father.

The postcards are astonishingly similar to each other in composition and content: the child's head is placed on the left, among white pillows and sheets. The repetition of facial expression and pose, setting and furniture, refer to an already well established iconography of dreams and sleep.<sup>214</sup> These similarities indicate the presence of fantasy, which repeats and reinforces the images of desire. What is the desire here? One can imagine how men used to sleeping on hard wet ground might have found sensual pleasure in these postcards' evocation of cloud-like comfort and cleanliness.

The idealised girls are extremely domestic, physically far removed from the war, fantasies of what has been left at home. The sleeping girls are silent, still, and yet they summon their daddies in khaki or soldier boys in visionary dreams. This is wish-fulfilment for adults through the fantasy image of the dreaming daughter.

Adults also used postcard images to model ideal or desired behaviour in children. In contrast to the sleeping girls, *I Never Forget You Daddy* (Figure 27) shows a boy awake and daydreaming, gazing in reverie at a framed photograph of his father in khaki. In the verse underneath, the child's voice is rendered phonetically, producing a similar faux-naivety as in Mrs McCarthy's card above:

I almost fink I saw, My own Daddy talking to me 'stead of fighting in the war ...  
Wish I wasn't just a-dreaming / And my Dad was here again.

The handwritten message on the back explicitly refers to the picture on the front: 'My darling Geo, What do you think of this card, is that what you do? Love and kisses from your affect Daddy xx'. With his hopeful question, 'is that what you do?', the man indicated his own desire to be missed and remembered, and projected it onto his son. The card provided the father with a fantasy version of his son which fulfilled those desires – a clean, sweet, lisping boy who dotes on his Daddy (and yet sensibly knows the difference between reality and fantasy). The card clearly expressed George's

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<sup>214</sup> For dreams in the 'high' or 'fine' arts of painting, art photography, theatre and drama, see Meike Werner and Barbara Hahn, *The Art of Dreams: Reflections and Representations* (De Gruyter, 2016).

father's expectations, and provided a demonstration of how to fulfil them: gazing, daydreaming. In short, this card modelled for George the correct way to miss his father.

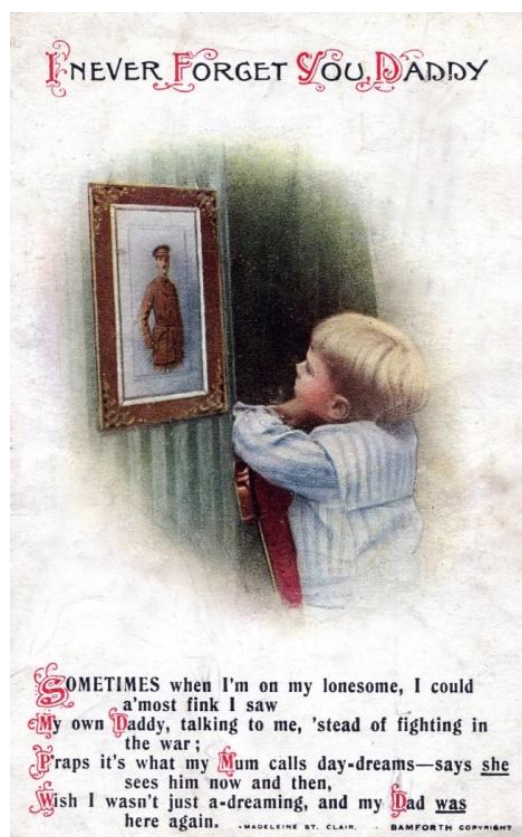


Figure 27 *I Never Forget you Daddy*, Bamforth 'Patriot Series', posted 19 March 1916.<sup>215</sup>

If adults used postcard images of children to share their hopes and expectations, images of men dreaming presumably provided more direct identification. Yet I have found only one postcard that depicts a man dreaming while asleep. *Dreams of Home* (Figure 28) shows a man lying out in the open, on a piece of tarpaulin with his kitbag under his head and a billy can by his feet – what a contrast to the fluffy ruffled pillows enjoyed by the children in this chapter. His dream, projected upon the trench wall behind him, shows a woman tending to a baby in a draped crib. The bright whiteness of her clothes and the bedclothes illuminate the scene; the 'sweet memories' she represents have let light into the soldier's dark situation.

<sup>215</sup> 'I Never Forget You Daddy,' The Army Children Archive, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/armychildrenarchive/37850833736/in/photolist-ZEKqaE>.





Figure 28 *Dreams of Home*, Midget Message card, no date (1914-18)<sup>216</sup>



Figure 29 *His Dream*, publisher unknown, 1914-18

Figure 30 *Only A Dream*, Underwood, 1914-18<sup>217</sup>

<sup>216</sup> 'Dreams of Home,' eBay, <https://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/Patriotic-WW1-Red-Letter-Midget-Message-Card-Brown-Gravure-8-Dreams-of-Home-/264761335445>.

<sup>217</sup> And above, eBay, no longer accessible.

Perhaps the vulnerability of a sleeping man, and the grim reality of his uncomfortable bed (or lack thereof), were not consistent with other ideals of the 'daddy in khaki'. Most picture postcards of dreaming soldiers show them lost in the waking reverie of daydreams, rather than actually asleep. The soldier in *His Dream* gestures towards an apparition of a young boy, whose fashionable sailor suit has been turned into a navy uniform with the addition of a rifle (Figure 29). *Only a Dream* shows a seated sailor in pensive mode (Figure 30). The woman and young girl in his visions are as playful and unaware as Eileen and Amy were in Will Brock's imagined scene of them tickling each other in bed.

These images share a similar composition of a dream image appearing in the top corner and a man placed in the bottom part of the card, with his unfocussed gaze (apart from the sleeping man) cast upwards, towards the vision. This is clear evidence that the iconography of dreaming and day-dreaming had been well established within visual culture, and was communicable through iconography (bed, pillows) and compositional devices such as vignettes and inset images. Combination printing layered multiple photographic negatives to reunite soldiers and their families within one image. Another favoured technique was collage, which involved cutting and pasting ephemeral items into a single composition (Underwood in particular used this technique, see Figure 20 and Figure 30). In their attempt to represent the dislocated and fantastical experience of dreams, wartime postcards used the same methods as artists considered experimental and avant-garde (Futurists and Dadaists in particular used collage), but brought these techniques to a wide popular audience in the service of emotional, ritual communication. Collage was a particularly apt method for images of reunion, as it brings separated items together; even the postcards themselves were paper items intended to connect families torn apart.

The most visually sophisticated publisher of dream postcards was Bamforth, whose cards combined hand-tinted photographs and multiple images with vignettes and light effects, all brought together with didactic and emotionally-wrought captions, written in verse. During the First World War, Bamforth produced at least two collectible series that told narratives of bereaved children and their dreams. If seeing a narrative on a postcard could validate it and situate it in practices of communication and exchange, might bereaved children on postcards provide senders with a way to recognise and visualise their experience? In a four-part story, a boy repeatedly asks 'Where has my Daddy gone to?', and 'why he ne'er came home' (Figure 32. It is the same blond sailor-suited model as in Figure 27).



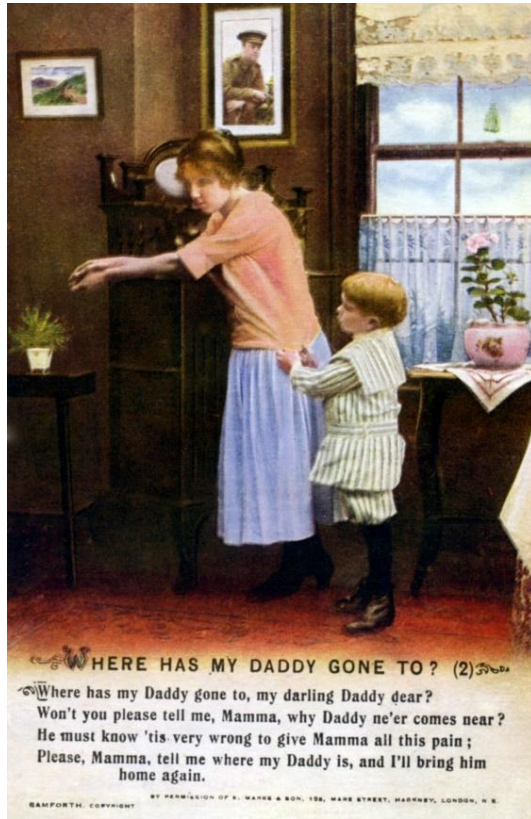


Figure 32 *Where Has My Daddy Gone To?* Series of four postcards, Bamforth, 1914-18

His mother refuses to answer, and in the third card he confronts her, 'Last night I saw dear Daddy, in my dreams I saw him here; I know that he would love me, please tell me, Mamma dear'. The complex combination printing of this scene layers the 'real' room of the house with a photographic portrait of the father which recurs throughout the series, and a glowing vision of the man holding his son, which represents the boy's dream remaining with him in the light of day. The final card in the sequence uses the same technique to reveal the content of the mother's thoughts, and the truth that she is keeping from her son: a man falling in battle, and a wooden cross marking his grave.

The boy's dreams, like the photograph on the wall (which seems to move preternaturally around the house), are a conduit for the father's presence, bypassing the oppressive silence and secrecy that burdens the boy's mother. How, and if, children were told about death depended on their parents' class, religion and attitudes. Some Edwardian children were 'spared' the truth for years, others were encouraged to become familiar with the physical and spiritual rituals of death and burial. It is unclear whether the contemporary viewer of this postcard series was meant to *agree* with the woman's commitment to silence, but the physical expression of her grief certainly demands sympathy. If we view the mother as a mourner, it is significantly her body language and facial expressions (reminiscent of silent film performance) which tell us she is suffering, not her assumption of external signs of mourning like closed drapes or black clothing – in fact her wardrobe is cheerfully bright.

For those who did acknowledge their loss, dreams could preserve the image of a dead loved one in the mind of the bereaved. The Bamforth series 'Daddy' departed from the usual wartime subjects in its depiction of a grieving father and daughter in an atmosphere of emotional and spiritual intensity (Figure 33. I have been unable to find the first two cards in the series which might shed light on the cause of the mother's death). In the cramped space, restricted by blood-red furniture, the mother hovers in a glowing aureole, a bright, blurred emanation that indicates her separation from the material sphere. In this family the child is aware of the loss and plays the role of comforter to her father, offering the promise of dream reunion as a consolation to the grief-stricken man: ' 'twill all be right / We shall always meet her in our dreams'. This postcard suggested that communication and care could continue beyond death.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Richards, 'Britain on the Couch,' 189.



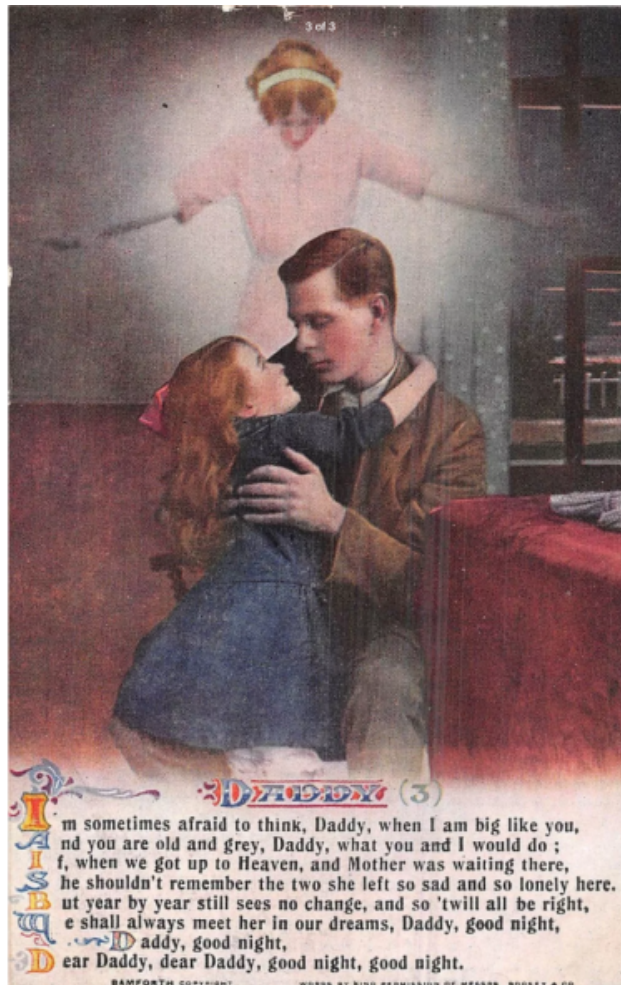


Figure 33 *Daddy (3)*, Bamforth, 1914-18 (Army Children Archive)

This sample of postcards has demonstrated a subtle range of approaches to the dream and its meaning during the First World War. Among them, dreams were depicted as a stage for fantasy (Figure 25), a response to absence (Figure 24), a defence against forgetting (Figure 27), a hallucination (Figure 29) and a channel for ‘sweet memories’ (Figure 28). Most of all, dreams were associated with desire and love: to dream of someone is to love them and to miss them. For those who believed in the premonitory power of dreams, all the postcards discussed in this chapter so far potentially suggested future safe return or reunion. Postcard senders and receivers would have held a wide range of views on the significance of dreams (or lack thereof), but the proliferation of this motif confirms that the iconography of dreams at least provided fantasies of connection or reunion.

In 1919, Freud added a footnote to a new edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, sharing a wartime anecdote which paints a picture straight from a sentimental postcard: The night that Freud’s adult son left for the Front, his one-and-a-half-year-old son (Freud’s grandson), cried in his sleep and called out from his dreams, ‘Daddy! Daddy! - baby!’. In Freud’s interpretation, ‘this can only have meant that daddy and baby were remaining together; whereas the tears recognised the approaching

farewell'.<sup>219</sup> We must wonder to what extent Freud, as a father witnessing his own 'baby' leaving for war, may have been projecting his own desire and anxiety onto his grandson's three words.

## Real dreams

By its third year, the war had taken a mental and emotional toll on the London populace; Amy Brock's letters in the previous chapter gave a glimpse of how the 1917 aerial attacks bombarded her nerves, and how her friends were leaving the city. On the other side of town, a psychologist named Charles W. Kimmins started a diary of his dreams, hoping to discover how they related to the events around him. Kimmins (1856 – 1948) was Chief Inspector of Schools for London County Council (LCC) and a member of the Child Study movement, having graduated from the psychological laboratory of University College'.<sup>220</sup> The 'witty and fun-loving' Kimmins represented the overlapping worlds of education policy, Child Study and psychoanalysis.<sup>221</sup> From his dream diary, Kimmins became convinced that material conditions – including noisy surroundings, ventilation, 'hard mental work' and food – had an influence on his dream habits.<sup>222</sup> Might he be able to use dreams to discover how war had affected London's youngest inhabitants?

Kimmins recognised, as psychologists do now, that children's dreams could provide information about their lives and access to their emotional states 'in a concise, trenchant way'.<sup>223</sup> In the last months of the war, he developed a large-scale survey to record the dreams of 'normal healthy children' across the entire city. This project, made possible by Kimmins's position in the LCC, was the first systematic study of the effects on children's minds of war and conflict.<sup>224</sup> To collect material, Kimmins deputised teachers in elementary and secondary schools, industrial reformatory schools, and special schools for blind children and deaf children. The instructions for children aged eight to sixteen were: 'Write a true and full account of the last dream you can remember. State your age, and also say how long ago you had the dream you have described'. In infant schools, children aged

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<sup>219</sup> Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 416.

<sup>220</sup> Rose, *The Psychological Complex*, 199.

<sup>221</sup> Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 201.

<sup>222</sup> Kimmins, *Children's Dreams*, 22-23.

<sup>223</sup> Kimmins, *Children's Dreams*, vii. Ablon and Mack, 'Children's Dreams Reconsidered,' 189.

<sup>224</sup> More recent studies of children's wartime dreams have found long-term effects among, for example, holocaust survivors and schoolchildren of the West Bank. Yoram Bilu, 'The Other as a Nightmare: The Israeli-Arab Encounter as Reflected in Children's Dreams in Israel and the West Bank,' *Political Psychology* 10, no. 3 (1989); Deidre Barrett, ed., *Trauma and Dreams* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Michael Schredl and Edgar Piel, 'War-Related Dream Themes in Germany from 1956 to 2000,' *Political Psychology* 27, no. 2 (2006).

five to seven told their dreams individually to teachers, who wrote them down.<sup>225</sup> In the end, Kimmins received accounts from over six thousand children.<sup>226</sup>

Kimmins's survey showed that children's dreams were explicitly affected by the dangers and tribulations of war:

During the years 1915–18 the air raid had an important effect on the frequency and terrifying nature of children's dreams in centres visited by hostile aircraft ... It is clear from the records that the blind child suffered from air raids far more than any other type of child.<sup>227</sup>

Children dreamed of bombs, of the Kaiser, and very often of the return of their fathers and brothers from the front:

I dreamt that we had a party because Daddy had come home, and we had a violin, and a gramophone played all the evening [five year-old boy].<sup>228</sup>

I went to my aunty's and she gave me some biscuits; we had a tea party and a soldier on crutches came in and he said to my aunty, 'Have a waltz' [child aged seven].<sup>229</sup>

I dreamt that we had a dog named Jack who loved his master very much, and after Daddy had been out in France for a little while the dog found its way to France and then found Daddy. He was ever so surprised at seeing the dog, and asked the general if he might take it home, and he was given permission to do so, and that was how we got Daddy home in my dream. Then soon after I woke up [girl aged thirteen].<sup>230</sup>

Kimmins calculated that the return of their fathers was the single most dominant dream theme among the youngest children, aged five to seven.

These dream records offer convincing evidence that the postcards discussed at the outset of this chapter did indeed respond to real experiences, objectively materialising the nebulous dream images of daddies in khaki shared by so many of London's schoolchildren, girls especially. And we must bear in mind that postcards disseminated idealised images of soldiers, which may have triggered and reinforced dreams of their fathers among girls, creating echoes of fantasy between

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<sup>225</sup> Kimmins, *Children's Dreams*, 16.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-6.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

waking and sleeping. Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott wrote that children 'depend very much on adults for getting to know their dreams'; for wartime children, this adult-led education came from postcards to and from parents, and school projects just as Kimmins's.<sup>231</sup>

Unsurprisingly, as the survey was done in the run up to Christmas, the second most frequent figure after fathers was Santa Claus, who appeared in fifteen per cent of all dreams in five-year-old children.<sup>232</sup> Kimmins also proclaimed 'the passing of the ghost and the coming of the fairy', pointing out that only one child in his whole sample of under-sevens dreamed of a ghost, whereas the 'pure enjoyment' of fairy dreams were common.<sup>233</sup> Figures in dreams, whether Father Christmas or a Daddy in Khaki, are fantasy constructions sourced from the surrounding culture.

Children's dreams of their own involvement in the war were often heroic (as in the postcard 'The Dream', Figure 25): 'I was an American soldier, and I had an army of soldiers, and we went into Germany and we captured the Kaiser and Little Willie'.<sup>234</sup> War adventures occurred among boys over eight years old particularly: 'The dreamers are often mentioned in despatches, win the Victoria Cross, are personally thanked by the King, and, on returning home from the war, are cheered by grateful crowds'.<sup>235</sup> Among girls over the age of thirteen, 'deeds of valour generally as Red Cross nurses on the battlefield are not infrequent'.<sup>236</sup>

Gender differences in dreaming were of great interest to Kimmins, and he wrote, 'the girl dreams far more about the return of the father and relatives from war; about presents of various kinds; about eating, and above all, about visits to the country, travelling and entertainments ... boys have six times as many dreams about bravery and adventure'.<sup>237</sup> Kimmins took pains to distinguish boys' and girls' dreams, especially in children over the age of eight, sometimes to a ludicrous extent: 'Girls who ride in aeroplanes generally land successfully, but the boys nearly always crash'.<sup>238</sup> It is a feature of his book, though, that Kimmins offered no commentary or reflection upon these statements.

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<sup>231</sup> Donald W Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis: Collected Papers* (Karnac Books, 1975 [1958]), 151.

<sup>232</sup> Kimmins, *Children's Dreams*, 37.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Kimmins did not analyse the children's dreams at an individual level, but he did sort and categorise them (which entailed some interpretation, of course). They were divided first into age groups, then into girls and boys, and then into an idiosyncratic taxonomy of his own devising:

The various types of wish fulfilment and fear dreams; kinaesthetic dreams; references to fairy stories; dreams of bravery and adventure; school activities; cinemas, exciting books and death incidents; dreams in which conversations are recorded; the presence of other witnesses than the dreamer; and dreams in which the dreamer was absent.<sup>239</sup>

Although Kimmins credited Freud and Jung as 'the most distinguished' theorists of dreams, it is clear from the list above that he did not fully subscribe to Freud's wish-fulfilment theory, as it is just one type of dream among many.<sup>240</sup> He also included references to dream researchers of recent decades: Sante de Sanctis;<sup>241</sup> Maria Manaseina;<sup>242</sup> Mary Whiton Calkins;<sup>243</sup> and Joseph Jastrow.<sup>244</sup> Kimmins even recognised the importance of the folk belief that dreams foretold the future: 'Naturally, during the war there were many presentiment dreams of coming evil, as in the death of relatives of the dreamer'.<sup>245</sup> And he did not quibble that many were 'said by the dreamer to have come true'.<sup>246</sup>

### Kimmins's conclusions

As was typical among the first generation of British psychoanalysts, Kimmins took parts of Freud he agreed with, and discarded others. Overall, Kimmins's version of psychoanalysis would fall into what Richards terms 'Freudish', a form of everyday psychological language that mingled parts of Freud with terms coined by Jung, Adler, Ferenczi, Klein and others.<sup>247</sup> This 'diversity' in the early psychoanalytic enterprise made it inclusive to medical, educational and welfare professionals who were the intended audience for Kimmins's book *Children's Dreams* when it was published in 1920.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>241</sup> An Italian dream researcher who studied the periodicity of sleep and dreaming, paving the way for REM studies.

<sup>242</sup> A Russian sleep researcher, author of *Sleep: Its Physiology, Pathology, Hygiene and Psychology* (1897), based on studies of sleep deprivation in puppies.

<sup>243</sup> Harvard-based philosopher and psychologist, who recorded her own dreams in a nightly diary.

<sup>244</sup> Polish-born American psychologist, whose lectures and articles reached a popular audience. *Fact and Fable in Psychology* (1900) debunked parapsychology, and investigated dreams among blind people.

<sup>245</sup> Kimmins, *Children's Dreams*, 22.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>247</sup> Richards, 'Britain on the Couch,' 185, 201.

<sup>248</sup> The diversity was curtailed by Ernest Jones' enforcement of orthodoxy after 1929. Harry Hendrick, *Narcissistic Parenting in an Insecure World: A History of Parenting Culture 1920s to Present* (Policy Press, 2016), 30.

*Children's Dreams* gave a lot of space to the words of children, *in their own words*, and then related these personal accounts very clearly to the surrounding material conditions, including poverty, education, and the effect of war on young civilians. Kimmins concluded that dreams were markers of desire and loss, and were related to children's lives and opportunities. The book's final chapter, 'Educational Value of the Dream', set out how dreams could be diagnostically useful, particularly those which 'indicate underfeeding and those which give evidence of undue stress and strain'.<sup>249</sup> He also noted how children's expressive writing about their dreams – a task they evidently enjoyed far more than their usual lessons – was of such an 'uncanny' high standard, that it proved that children may learn better if they had more freedom to choose enjoyable topics.<sup>250</sup> His original contribution to dream studies is worth quoting at length:

The dream comes in as the Fairy Godmother and supplies to [children] the pleasures which the normal conditions of their lives have failed to provide ... The homeless, uncared for child dreams of the happy home, supplied with every comfort, of rich relations from whom they receive costly presents, of continual change of scene, and above all, of abundant success and prosperity in after life. The very elements which are so conspicuously lacking in their lives are those which figure most prominently in their dreams.<sup>251</sup>

The 'fairy godmother' is an inspired analogy, which draws on pantomime and fairytale to convey the sense of fantasy in children's desires. This language made Kimmins's theories more immediately accessible to a wider public than Freud's concept of 'wish-fulfilment' or Jung's 'compensatory aim-taking function'.<sup>252</sup>

### **The reception of *Children's Dreams***

Kimmins's reticence to analyse dreams beyond categorising them disappointed more orthodox psychoanalytic readers. A review in the *Journal of Medical Science* was mixed: 'the merit of this little book is that it attempts no more than a descriptive analysis of the material', though this was all 'a

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<sup>249</sup> Kimmins, *Children's Dreams*, 120.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-1.

<sup>252</sup> In some senses, Kimmins aligns with Jung's 'anticipatory' dream. A compromise is reached between wish-fulfilment and premonitory dreams by arguing that by dreaming of getting what she wants, the dreamer is able to shape the future to achieve it. Kimmins's idea of the Fairy Godmother is more suitable to children's dreams and children's comparable lack of agency and resources to make changes in their own lives and fulfil their wish to, for example, visit the countryside. Carl Jung, *Dream Interpretation Ancient and Modern: Notes from the Seminar Given in 1936-1941*, ed. John Peck and Maria Meyer-Grass (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

little meaningless, when no indication can be given of the fantasy life of the individual child'.<sup>253</sup> Even this criticism, though, demonstrated how the ideas of psychoanalysis had taken root in the medical profession, and made the 'fantasy life of the individual child' a worthwhile subject of study.

Wider public perceptions and awareness of psychoanalysis were transformed by the war, thanks mainly to the use of psychoanalytic techniques in shell-shock hospitals, where doctors including W. H. R. Rivers and David Eder proved that the 'talking cure' and dream analysis were legitimate approaches.<sup>254</sup> Once associated with military service and performed under the aegis of the War Office, psychoanalysis gained respectability. Kimmins was one of many writers who made a link between the wartime successes and their own work in slightly different fields. He wrote on the very first page of *Children's Dreams*:

Among the human wreckage caused by the Great War, the interpreter of dreams in shell-shock hospitals has been of the greatest possible assistance in the investigation of war neuroses.<sup>255</sup>

Kimmins's dream research supports Richards's argument that the trauma of war and the ensuing social crisis produced a 'rapid and intense' inward turn among the 'traditionally non-introspective British'.<sup>256</sup> But, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, many British people had been picking away at their internal *dreaming* selves for some time. The dreams postcards show how the effects of war laid the groundwork and created the demand for this kind of thinking about children. Perhaps the post-war change really came in the elite patriarchal contexts of the universities and professions, which finally caught up with the street markets, children's nurseries and women's letters and postcards.

The society magazine *Tatler* recognised the significance and appeal of Kimmins's study:

The psychological study of the child would have been laughed at not so very many years ago. Children were then little human beings whom parents fed and washed, gave the Ten Commandments, and smacked them if they didn't live up to them... Mr. Kimmins's study ought to give many valuable hints to both

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<sup>253</sup> E M Creak, 'Review of Children's Dreams,' *Journal of Mental Science* 84, no. 352 (September 1938): 863. The reviewer Mildred Creak, later became head of child psychiatry at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

<sup>254</sup> John Forrester, 'W H R Rivers, the English Freud' in Alexander and Taylor, *History and Psyche: Culture, Psychoanalysis, and the Past*.

<sup>255</sup> Kimmins, *Children's Dreams*, vii. 11-12. Others included David Eder, *War-Shock: The Psycho-neuroses in War* (1917), Barbara Low, *Psychoanalysis: A Brief Account of Freudian Theory* (1920), and J A Hadfield, *Psychology and Morals: An Analysis* (1923).

<sup>256</sup> Richards, 'Britain on the Couch,' 202.

parents and teachers. And in addition to the more serious side of his subject, he has inserted several types of dreams some of which are very entertaining.<sup>257</sup>

To promote *Children's Dreams*, Kimmins travelled the country giving lectures at local literary and scientific societies, and presented a keynote at the General Meeting of the British Association in Cardiff in August 1920.<sup>258</sup> With his engaging mixture of anecdote, children's own words, and explicit links to the shared experience of war, Kimmins brought psychoanalytic language and ideas to a wide audience. One of his earliest lectures received several reviews: the *Yorkshire Evening Post* reprinted some of the more comical examples of children's dreams, and underscored the class-based differences.<sup>259</sup> The *Lancashire Evening Post* concluded, 'It was necessary ... in order fully to understand a child to get at its innermost mind, and only through dreams was it possible to do that', although unfortunately attributed this assertion to 'Mr Timmins'.<sup>260</sup> And the *Pall Mall Gazette* praised Kimmins's 'very interesting stories', but did not repeat any of them, and questioned whether they were 'so good as to suggest that ... artless children also have their methods of experiment' (i.e. the dreams were made up).<sup>261</sup> Just these three responses demonstrate how many messages could be taken from Kimmins's work, and how seriously (or not) he was taken – was he a man capable of reaching children's 'innermost minds', or a victim of children's 'artless' games?

By all accounts, Kimmins was a charismatic and interesting speaker. His talks were packed and he returned to venues regularly. One glowing review proclaimed Kimmins 'a modern day Joseph', and the *Hull Daily Mail* commented, 'if everyone made science as interesting as Dr C. W. Kimmins makes psychology, all science lectures would be well attended'.<sup>262</sup> The reviews make it clear that Kimmins's ideas were innovative enough to be of interest, but not too challenging: 'Dreams and their significance have always formed a subject of fruitful interest and speculation, especially to women. They also, however, possess a scientific value'.<sup>263</sup> Sometimes, the audience's unfamiliarity with psychoanalytic terms meant that words were mis-transcribed; one journalist referred to psychoanalyst Carl Jung (a slip that Freud would have appreciated).<sup>264</sup> The *Coventry Telegraph* titled

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<sup>257</sup> 'Dreams,' *The Tatler* 13 October 1920, 18.

<sup>258</sup> 'Dreams of Childhood,' *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 27 August 1920, 4.

<sup>259</sup> 'What Children Dream,' *Yorkshire Evening Post* 24 May 1919, 7.

<sup>260</sup> 'Children's Dreams,' *Lancashire Evening Post* 24 May 1919, 6.

<sup>261</sup> 'The Child Mind,' *Pall Mall Gazette* 24 May 1919, 4.

<sup>262</sup> 'Study Children!,' *Hull Daily Mail* 19 March 1924, 5.

<sup>263</sup> 'By The Way.'

<sup>264</sup> 'Dreams,' *Dundee Courier* 12 September 1922, 4.



its review 'The Garden of Sleep', turning Freud's statement that 'dreams are the guardian of sleep' into something more bucolic and English.<sup>265</sup>

Kimmins's book was at the vanguard of an interwar surge of English-language psychoanalytically-informed child psychology written for parents and teachers, which shaped the public concept of the 'psychological child'.<sup>266</sup> Many shared the optimism and ambition of Barbara Low, who declared that psychoanalysis could 'set the feet of the new generations on a more desirable path, leading to a destiny more splendid and satisfying than we can yet dream of'.<sup>267</sup> Other notable works included J. C. Flugel's *The Psycho-Analytic Study of the Family* (1921) and G. H. Green's *Psychoanalysis of the Classroom* (1921), which used children's dreams as justification for 'adjustment' of the whole education system.<sup>268</sup> Hugh Crichton-Miller's *New Psychology and the Parent* (1922) warned against repressing children's fears and causing bad dreams. And Susan Isaacs, one of the most influential psychoanalysts in interwar Britain, would use the example of a child's statement on dreams – 'I don't like dreams; they are horrid things ... and another thing – I don't have any' – to explain the mechanisms of denial and the whole topology of psychoanalysis.<sup>269</sup>

By 1926, Kimmins was renowned enough for the *Leeds Mercury* to ask its readers 'Do you remember the name of Mr. C. W. Kimmins? You have seen it often in print. Every newspaper reader is indebted to him for many quaint tales of children', and the article continued with a long compilation of anecdotes from Kimmins's next book.<sup>270</sup> The review gave the guarantee, 'if you dislike the muck-rake theories of Freudism, you may be reassured: you will find little of them here'.<sup>271</sup> Kimmins seems to have found a gently amusing form of popular psychology that found favour with a wide reading public. The cost of this popularity, it seems to me, was the diminution of the children of his study, who, defused of Freudian desires or Romantic visions, became 'quaint' figures of fun for an adult audience. The fantasy that Kimmins's audience embraced was one of cheekily humorous but harmless, slightly sickly children with devout but naïve spiritual commitment, whose desires stretched to a hot meal and a playful run around a meadow.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> 'Dream Time: The Garden of Sleep,' *Coventry Evening Telegraph* 4 March 1936, 7.

<sup>266</sup> James and Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 43.

<sup>267</sup> Low, *Psycho-Analysis*, 17.

<sup>268</sup> 'Psychoanalysis,' *Pall Mall Gazette* 1 January 1921, 2.

<sup>269</sup> Susan Isaacs, 'Criteria for Interpretation,' in *Childhood and After: Some Essays and Clinical Essays* (Routledge, 1948), 11.

<sup>270</sup> W L A, 'Quaint Tales of Little Children,' *Leeds Mercury* 15 March 1926, 4.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid. and 'Experiment and Research in Education,' *St Andrews Citizen* 31 July 1926, 7.

<sup>272</sup> This was precisely the image of children that his wife, Grace Kimmins, used to promote her projects 'The Guild of Play' and the 'Guild of the Poor Brave Things'.

Quaintness became increasingly evident in postcard depictions of dreaming children in the aftermath of war. Two remarkably similar cards, both featuring cartoonlike illustrations, depicted young blond children sleeping smilingly on white pillows under colourful patchwork quilts. *When Thou Art Sleeping* (Figure 34) shows a boy dreaming of limited means dreaming of romantic love from his slightly crumbling garret room, under a full moon. Note the exposed brick, bare floorboards and much-mended quilt. *Ever of Thee I'm Fondly Dreaming* (Figure 35), by the much-imitated Mabel Lucie Attwell, has visual echoes of *Dreaming of Daddy*, but its tone is much brighter.<sup>273</sup> As well as the similar appearance of the children (blonde, pink-cheeked and very young) and their quilts, these cards are united by their use of archaic words like 'thou' and 'thee'.<sup>274</sup> Combined with the smiling ageless faces, the effect is a *quaint* nostalgia, slipped out of time.



Figure 34 *When Thou Art Sleeping*, Ludgate, posted 1919<sup>275</sup>

<sup>273</sup> Attwell was a household name in interwar Britain, producing illustrated versions of *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Waterbabies*; she sold millions of postcards and put her name to applied arts and collectibles. Brian Alderson, 'Attwell [married name Earnshaw], Mabel Lucie (1879–1964), illustrator.' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>274</sup> 'Ever of Thee...' was an American song from the mid-nineteenth century (and appears as a caption to a number of wartime postcards too). George Linley and Foley Hall, 'Ever of Thee' (1858).

<sup>275</sup> *When Thou Art Sleeping*, accessed 14 July 2020, <https://www.ebay.ie/itm/R360360-When-Thou-Art-Sleeping-Dream-of-Me-Ludgate-No-1118/274379696077?hash=item3fe24de7cd:g:X24AAOSwD6Fez2hh>.



Figure 35 *Ever of Thee I'm Fondly Dreaming*, Mabel Lucie Attwell, posted 31 May 1924<sup>276</sup>

## Conclusion

The postcards discussed in this chapter directly engaged with the emotional experience of war, through a recognisable and clear image of the dream as a mechanism of longing and desire. Adults co-opted the images of children to express their own emotions, and to describe and explain expectations for children.

The conventions of dream representation developed from folk beliefs and superstitions, romantic art and literature, and anticipated or tentatively included new concepts from psychoanalysis. In particular, the idea of 'wish-fulfilment' highlighted children's desire in new ways. But even the new scientific discourses relied on existing folk dream theory, and new psychoanalytical ideas overlapped with traditional cultural representations and everyday experience. The promise of dream interpretation has always been that, given the right key, we might decipher the mysteries of our minds, whether to tell the future or understand our past.

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<sup>276</sup> *Ever of Thee I'm Fondly Dreaming*, accessed 26 July 2019, [https://www.picclickimg.com/d/l400/pict/382920826100\\_/MABEL-LUCIE-ATTWELL-1924-Old-Postcard-Love-Ever.jpg](https://www.picclickimg.com/d/l400/pict/382920826100_/MABEL-LUCIE-ATTWELL-1924-Old-Postcard-Love-Ever.jpg).

It has been said that 'no one made [children's dreams] the subject of sustained, high-quality research until cognitive psychologist J. Piaget wrote *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*' in 1951.<sup>277</sup> But as I have shown, children's dreams actually contributed significantly to the development of the field of psychology, and continued to throughout the interwar period. C. W. Kimmins's work, as he published it, presented it, and as it appeared in the popular press, introduced a sanitised version of Freudian theory to an eager general public. His aims were serious – to address children's needs and to reform education so it encouraged imagination and talent – but his methods were light-hearted. Kimmins's anecdotal style was easily digested as breakfast news in the morning paper. This drive to entertain meant that Kimmins occasionally characterised children as quaint or cute, and this chapter has introduced some hints of the excessive littleness which came to dominate images of childhood in the 1920s. The next chapter will develop this motif further, through the character of the fairy.

But Kimmins's book also gave us insight into the real experiences of children during the war. The published accounts of their dreams are distorted by secondary revision, and the mediation of their teachers first and Kimmins after, but they retain a grain of truthful fantasy. Children *did* dream of their fathers (as well as their mothers, friends and teachers and even Santa Claus). Often enough, their dreams were theatres in which their fathers were the leading men and heroic deeds led to triumphant ends; or the scenes of tragedies and the horror of air raids. Dreams, then, revealed how ideas of war found their way into the unconscious life of the country's youngest citizens.

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<sup>277</sup> Kelly Bulkeley, *Visions of the Night: Dreams, Religion and Psychology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 148. Even within that 1951 publication, Piaget included a lecture on children's dreams he had presented at the International Conference on Psychoanalysis in Berlin in 1922. Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (Psychology Press, 1999), 170.

### Chapter 3: Fairies and mourning

In 1921, Amy sent Will another photograph of Eileen. The posed studio picture shows Eileen sitting on a balustrade, against a cloudy, indistinct backdrop (Figure 36). Her feet are bare, crossed at the ankle, and she is wearing a frilled fairy costume, with small wings. Her hair is curled, and she has a ring of fabric flowers on her head, round her waist and on her skirt.



Figure 36. Left: Photograph of Eileen dressed as a fairy, 1921. Right: Fairy dress after conservation treatment in 2011.<sup>278</sup>

Consider the work and expense that went into creating this image. Amy and Eileen would have planned, prepared, travelled and paid to have it taken, carrying the homemade costume with them. The foundation of the dress was a relatively simple pattern: a square bodice with no shaping that closed at the back of the neck. Perhaps Will had managed to send home a pay cheque, because Amy rejoiced in the trimmings. She added an overlay of metal tinsel (made of silver and copper alloy) on the bodice, plus:

The gauze sleeves and gathered skirt are decorated with silk flowers on a metal cord and flower-shaped sequins. The wings are also of gauze, shaped with metal wire, and decorated similarly to the dress.<sup>279</sup>

The wings attached to the dress using snap fasteners. The overall colours of the dress are ivory, silver and pink, and it has a shimmering prettiness even a century later after oxidation has set in

<sup>278</sup> Fairy dress and photograph, V&A Misc.105-1986

<sup>279</sup> Katy Smith, 'Conservation of a Child's Fairy Costume,' *V&A Conservation Journal*, no. 60 (Spring 2012).

(see picture after conservation, Figure 36). The many sequins, silver bodice and tinsel-trimmed wings would have sparkled even more brightly in 1921. Eileen's pose suits the girliness of her costume, with crossed ankles, upward-gazing eyes and rested hands. This passive body language, combined with the pink tones and soft translucency of the materials create an image of idealised childhood, captured by the photographer for posterity. A child in fairy wings is a fantasy that knows itself as such; it is a defiant call to unreality.

The 1921 portrait of Eileen is an echo of the fairy-child motif which had persisted for a century before (and still endures a century hence). Like Red Riding Hood, the fairy-child was an apparently timeless archetype, comprised of simple iconographic ingredients: pretty girl, frilly dress, sparkly wings. It was a pre-formed fantasy image, available to Amy and Eileen in their search for a role that might fit their real circumstances and the message they wanted to communicate. Yet each repeat of this echo is also an alteration, shaped by social conditions and personal context.

This chapter will trace the association between fairies and little girls from Victorian pantomimes (which I have already established was a source of inspiration for the Brocks) to the publication of the notorious Cottingley Fairy Photographs in *The Strand* in 1920. Eileen's fairy photograph was the last photograph to be sent to Will, but he died before it arrived. This chapter concludes with a comparison between the lustrous glimmer of the fairy dress, and its dark, shadowy counterpart the mourning dress.

## Fairy children

In her influential studies of fairylore, Katharine Briggs outlined the rich taxonomy of fairies, including both kind and malevolent, which had prevailed in early-nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>280</sup> As well as

the tiny English fairies ... we have the child-sized fairies whose kingdom Elidor visited, the fairy bride of human size and more than human beauty, the wild hunt, the miraculous passage of time in Fairyland, the fairy who needs a human midwife and is invisible except by the help of a magic ointment, the changeling, the misleading night fairy, the bogey-beast and the Love-Talker or Incubus.<sup>281</sup>

Relations between fairies and mortals were traditionally fractious, and often tragic. In England around 1800, children considered 'changelings' faced trials of exposure, torture and even murder in

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<sup>280</sup> Katharine Mary Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (Psychology Press, 1967); Lewis Spence, *The Fairy Tradition in Britain* (Kessinger Publishing, 1995).

<sup>281</sup> Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, 3. *Elidor and the Golden Ball* is a twelfth-century Welsh tale about a boy who is led to a golden fairyland.

attempts to chase out the fairy.<sup>282</sup> But Carol Silver's history of Victorian fairies argued that in literature, a 'tradition of sentimentalisation and idealisation developed ... fairies were conflated with angels or further miniaturised into toys'.<sup>283</sup> Over fifty or so years, the Victorians colonised and domesticated the world of faerie; the diverse and ambivalent elfin races of folklore were rounded up and confined in the nursery. Although some painters explored the dark and deviant aspects of the fairy world (for example Charles and Richard Doyle, Richard Dadd), by the end of the century the common image of fairies had solidified to resemble an idealised child: 'pre-pubescent, attractive ... winged creatures full of vitality, sensuality and boldness'.<sup>284</sup> This combination of smallness and prettiness made fairies a popular costume for girls attending the newly fashionable fancy dress parties, and by the 1880s magazines gave instructions for 'conventional fairy's wings'.<sup>285</sup>

In Jacqueline Rose's view, late-nineteenth-century commercial publishing was responsible for a 'confusion between children and fairies'.<sup>286</sup> The illustrator E. Gertrude Thomson is exemplary; her 'fairy-fancies' were nude, androgynous and very small (they commune with plants and small animals), and they were identical to human children. Were they too similar? Her friend and collaborator, *Alice in Wonderland* author Charles Dodgson, suggested to Thomson: 'if you ever fancy any of the pictures look too like real *children*, then by all means give them wings'.<sup>287</sup> The simple addition of wings, Dodgson implied, could leave banal reality behind and transform children into magical creatures. To be sure, it is only the wings in Thomson's drawings which distinguish her naked fairies from pre-pubescent children (Figure 37) – just as the addition of wings might elevate eveningwear to fancy dress, or everyday life to fantasy.

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<sup>282</sup> Carole G Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19-30.

<sup>283</sup> Silver, *Strange and Secret*, 187.

<sup>284</sup> Susan P Casteras, 'Winged Fantasies: Constructions of Childhood, Innocence, Adolescence, and Sexuality in Victorian Fairy Painting,' in *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud*, ed. Marilyn R Brown (Ashgate, 2002), 127.

<sup>285</sup> 'The Countess of Buchan; or, A Story of What Children did for Children,' *Aunt Judy's Annual Volume 4* (1885): 104.

<sup>286</sup> Rose, *Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, 106.

<sup>287</sup> Charles Dodgson to E Gertrude Thomson, 27 February 1893, in Roger Lancelyn Green, *The Diaries of Lewis Carroll* (Greenwood Press, 1953), 947.





Figure 37 Fairies illustration, E. Gertrude Thomson, 1898.<sup>288</sup>

But it was also encouraged by the climactic ‘transformation’ set-pieces of Victorian and Edwardian pantomime, when children in fairy costumes filled the stage, and sophisticated lights, scrim, mirrors and moving scenery gradually revealed ‘an ideal otherworld inhabited by fairies, nymphs and angels, arranged in an appropriately glittering setting’.<sup>289</sup> The child performers, known as ‘pantomime babies’, stood or sat very still as projections played across their bodies.<sup>290</sup> Although reform of theatre employment practices eventually outlawed the participation of very young children in the transformation scenes, their sparkling theatricality was etched into cultural memory for at least another generation.

Into the twentieth century, the image of glittering fairies with children’s bodies and magical wings continued to dominate theatrical and literary imaginings from the plays of Edward Seymour Hicks (*Bluebell in Fairyland*, 1901) and W. Graham Robertson (*Pinky and the Fairies*, 1909) to Andrew Lang’s series of coloured Fairy Books (1889–1913). Book illustrators continuously reflected and

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<sup>288</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Three Sunsets and Other Poems* (Macmillan & Co, 1898), 65.

<sup>289</sup> Amy Koritz, ‘Moving Violations: Dance in the London Music Hall, 1890-1910,’ *Theatre Journal* 42, no. 4 (1990): 430.

<sup>290</sup> Michael R Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910* (Routledge, 1981). The fairy-children were silent, pretty objects of a fascinated gaze; it is no wonder that they drew heated attention from moral reformers in the 1890s, who pointed to the fairies’ dangerous sensuality as a cause for concern. Tracy C Davis, ‘Do You Believe in Fairies?: The Hiss of Dramatic License,’ *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 1 (2005).



reinforced the same motif in a hall of mirrors that included Henry Ford, Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac. Collectible picture postcards made the illustrations of Ellen Clapsaddle and Jessie Wilcox Smith easily affordable and set fairy-children free from bound pages to fly from person to person. One Clapsaddle postcard sent by a child in 1902 depicted a cherubic fairy, not unlike Eileen herself, posing for a portrait, while another operates the camera (Figure 38). The printed verse, ‘Though time and space from you divide me / I have your picture still beside me’, echoes the sentiment of Eileen’s portrait too, which used photography to overcome separation.



Figure 38 *Fairy Photographer*, Ellen Clapsaddle, Raphael Tuck, posted February 1902.

In the Edwardian imagination, Fairyland was an attractive and magical place, to be emulated by those with the taste for it. In 1911, Amy’s friend Gar Christie wrote to thank her for entertaining him on a lovely Saturday: ‘The garden was a veritable Fairyland with those lanterns shining in the trees, and you make an ideal hostess’.<sup>291</sup> His description calls to mind a photograph taken a few years earlier, of Amy in the garden with six children, all wearing matching costumes and arranged in careful pairs in height order (Figure 39). Amy fans her skirt and tilts her head as she smiles at the camera. The children are pointing at a large, glowing orb which has appeared in their midst – the result of some clever trick in the darkroom. The significance of this choreographed performance is opaque now, but, along with Christie’s letter, contributes to the picture of Amy as a woman with an appetite for fairy imagery and fantastic atmosphere.

<sup>291</sup> June 14th 1911, author’s archive.



Figure 39 Amy Piercy and children (probably nephews and nieces), with added glowing orb, 1900-1905<sup>292</sup>

These fairies of earlier times reverberate in Eileen's portrait. Although Eileen is not nude like the winged fairy-children of Thomson's generation, her legs and feet are bare, with magically, unearthly clean toes. Even her crossed ankles and relaxed pose echo the fairies in Figure 37, and of course she has been given wings. Making Eileen's costume, Amy Brock took the gauze, sequins and tinsel that made the pantomime transformations possible, and gathered them into a delicate garment.

### **Peter Pan**

The Edwardian fairy-child found its apotheosis in *Peter Pan*. First performed in 1904, J. M. Barrie's play was an immediate and long-lasting success. A Christmas fixture in West End theatres, it missed only nine seasons between 1904 and 1990.<sup>293</sup> *Peter Pan* tells the story of the Darling children (Wendy, John and Michael), who are visited by a flying boy called Peter, who refuses to grow up. Peter takes the Darlings to Neverland, a place of Lost Boys, pirates, and fairies including his companion Tinkerbell. *Peter Pan* exploited the confusion of children and fairies, combined with the transformation concept from earlier pantomime, and wrapped both together in a seductive parable about childhood and belief.

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<sup>292</sup> 'Photograph', V&A Misc.121-1986

<sup>293</sup> Zipes, *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales*, 381.

The play is a heady mixture of the most extreme sentiment – Barrie’s fairies are created by a baby’s laugh – with barely concealed themes of repressed sexuality and looming death. *Peter Pan* premiered in the year that a War Office report into the ‘Physical Deterioration’ of the population found that one in six children died before their first birthday, from a host of causes: infectious diseases, terrible housing, mothers’ ill health, lack of hygiene, bad milk and poor food.<sup>294</sup> Barrie’s play promised that children might not die like adults, but pass into a fairy-filled Neverland or limbo, from where they might occasionally visit the living. In *Peter Pan*, death is not final; Peter shouts that ‘to die would be an awfully big adventure’, and several times, characters in the play die and return to life, including Wendy and the fairy Tinkerbell.<sup>295</sup>

In *Peter Pan*’s most memorable moment, fairies, belief and death are brought together. As the poisoned Tinkerbell splutters to death onstage (her presence represented by a spot of light), Peter turns to the audience and directly entreats them to ‘clap if you believe in fairies’, to save the imaginary fairy’s life. With this extremely theatrical gesture, Barrie’s script demanded a commitment of impossible belief from a colluding audience. It was an effective call to action. In 1921 the literary critic Constance Spender asked,

do children of the 20th century still believe in fairies? To judge from the storm of clapping which bursts from them when they are asked this question in *Peter Pan* one would answer yes.<sup>296</sup>

But it was not just children who clapped when asked. *Peter Pan*’s genius was its appeal to adults, for whom fairies had always fulfilled ‘an implicit need to believe in magic’.<sup>297</sup> In a conflict between the literal light and the impending darkness, the audience were given the deciding role. The act of clapping was a disavowal of death: by *believing in something*, it implied, you could prevent its demise. Tinkerbell was Edwardian culture’s most famous fairy (and her Disney reincarnations have maintained her celebrity). Did her name get mentioned when Eileen sat patiently in the photography studio? It was an appropriate model; Eileen and Amy were in a Neverland limbo of their own, waiting for the happy-ever-after that Will repeatedly promised them.

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<sup>294</sup> HMSO A. W. Fitz Roy, *Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration* (H.M.S.O., 1904).

<sup>295</sup> J M Barrie, *Peter Pan and Other Plays*, ed. Peter Hollindale (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002 [1904]), 125.

<sup>296</sup> Constance Spender, ‘Poetry and the Child,’ *The Contemporary Review* (1921): 384.

<sup>297</sup> Casteras, ‘Winged Fantasies,’ 129. Silver confirms that fairies are always ‘linked to belief’. Silver, *Strange and Secret*, 7.

## Soldiers and fairies

In the war years, *Peter Pan*'s explicit evocation of belief overcoming death became more popular than ever; soldiers on leave packed the play's London performances, and seats were booked months in advance.<sup>298</sup> And the wartime appeal of fairies was wider than *Peter Pan*. In fact, Britain was taken by fairy fever during the first years of Eileen's life. The symptoms developed throughout the war years, with eruptions of fairy poetry, visual art, literature and theatre. Little girls and soldiers were particularly susceptible. *Where the Little Things of the Woodland Live Unseen*, a painting of fairies in a forest glade by Estella Canziani, sold 250,000 reproductions in 1916.<sup>299</sup> The Old Vic's Shakespeare productions of the fairy-filled *A Midsummer Night's Dream* drew large 'proletarian' crowds in the war years.<sup>300</sup>

The wartime love of fairies has been attributed to escapism and nostalgia fuelled by the horrors and hardships of conflict. Nicola Bown suggested that fairies could have a cathartic effect for soldiers 'marooned in the present', who 'took to dreaming of, and weeping for, the lost world of fairies'.<sup>301</sup> Maggie Atkinson claimed fairy pictures gave 'some respite from the day-to-day adversity of constant warfare'.<sup>302</sup> These statements are plausible, and we can understand how images of healthy British girls with curled hair and white dresses – as pictured among injured soldiers in *The Sphere* newspaper in January 1918 (Figure 40) – might have a morale-boosting effect for soldiers who commonly saw starving and malnourished children on the streets of Europe.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (Penguin, 2001), 280.

<sup>299</sup> Maggie Atkinson, 'Visions of "Blighty": Fairies, War and Fragile Spaces,' *Libri & Liberi* 6, no. 1 (2017): 42.

<sup>300</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*, 144.

<sup>301</sup> Nicola Bown, *Fairies in Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 187.

<sup>302</sup> Atkinson, 'Visions of Blighty,' 42.

<sup>303</sup> Winter, *The Experience of World War I*, 197.



Figure 40 'A Doll's House Made by Wounded Soldiers', *The Sphere*, January 1918

However, Bown and Atkinson gloss over the ambiguities of First World War fairy imagery. Some fairy texts did not escape or avoid the question of war, but confronted it directly: poet Robert Graves' *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1917) used fairies to meditate on the 'lost, forgotten, betrayed innocence' of young men at war.<sup>304</sup> In the novel *Britain's Defenders* and printed play *The War Fairies* (both also 1917), fairies joined the war, rising to the call of duty to defend the country from invasion.<sup>305</sup> It is more helpful to think in terms of fantasy, which might be dark and conflicted, than escapism. The fairy figure could play out all kinds of repressed desires and fears, mortality and immortality and humanity's place in the world.

In the face of the incomprehensible scale of the First World War, and the constant fear faced by both combatants and civilians, fairies offered a way to believe in the impossible. And as the war went on, 'supernatural thinking' became 'universal' among troops and very common on the home front.<sup>306</sup> A fictional story by Arthur Machen, which described angels appearing over the battlefield of Mons in 1914 to support the British troops, was repeated and re-printed widely as truth, and the

<sup>304</sup> Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 279.

<sup>305</sup> Eleanor Gray, *The War Fairies* (Letchworth: Letchworth Garden City Press, 1917). Rose J Patry, *Britain's Defenders, Or Peggy's Peep Into Fairyland, A Fairy Play* (Samuel French, 1918).

<sup>306</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, 'Ministry of Apparitions,' *London Review of Books* 41, no. 13 (2019): 21.

sightings were confirmed by soldiers who had been at the real battle.<sup>307</sup> Spirit photography flourished, as believers tried to come to terms with the loss of so many men and sought freedom from the 'tyranny of realism'.<sup>308</sup> In the aftermath of the war, as mourning began and separation from survivors continued, many looked for answers beyond the earthly plane, and beyond conventional religion to spiritualism, the occult and the supernatural.<sup>309</sup>

### The Cottingley episode

After the Armistice, the fantasies around fairies maintained their transformational magic. In a grieving society, ideas about death and reincarnation (as embodied in Tinkerbell), could be fused with fairytale optimism. In 1920, one theatre reviewer was captivated by how, 'in the merciful dim light of the enchanted wood, the tinsel and chiffon become cobweb and petal' – they could almost be describing Eileen's portrait, posed in her spangled dress against the painted backdrop of the photographer's studio.<sup>310</sup> Among sophisticated modern adults, belief and scepticism combined to produce fascination, as pithily expressed by a writer in the *Era*: 'now that we no longer believe in fairies, we are vastly interested in what they are like'.<sup>311</sup>

In the months before Eileen's portrait was taken, the enchanting trio of photography, children and fairies aligned to create an infamous episode of fairy history. In December 1920 photographs appeared in *The Strand*, and then other London papers, of two Yorkshire girls apparently communing with fairies (Figure 41).<sup>312</sup> The photographs were hailed by their champion, Arthur Conan Doyle (the internationally famous and bestselling creator of Sherlock Holmes) as an 'epoch-making event'.<sup>313</sup> The pictures had been taken in that peak fairy year of 1917, but their appearance in the aftermath of war, to an audience keen for fairy images, attracted a huge amount of attention and speculation in the popular press and public consciousness. The fairy image evidently responded to urgent fantasies in British culture at the end of 1920, and there were many who genuinely believed the photographs' veracity.

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<sup>307</sup> Gaskill, 'Ministry of Apparitions,' 19. Arthur Machen, 'The Bowmen,' *London Evening News* 29 September 1914.

<sup>308</sup> Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 228. Alex Owen, "'Borderland Forms": Arthur Conan Doyle, Albion's Daughters, and the Politics of the Cottingley Fairies,' *History Workshop Journal*, no. 38 (1994): 50.

<sup>309</sup> Pugh, *Danced All Night*, 9. Winter, *Sites of Memory*. David Cannadine, 'Death and Grief in Modern Britain,' in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death* (Europa, 1981).

<sup>310</sup> M.E., 'Fanciful Fairies at the Old Vic,' *Daily Herald* 10 February 1920, 5.

<sup>311</sup> 'Blue Fairies, A Midsummer Nights Dream,' *The Era* 14 November 1923, 5.

<sup>312</sup> Doyle, 'Fairies Photographed.'

<sup>313</sup> Helen Nicholson, 'Postmodern Fairies,' *History Workshop Journal*, no. 46 (1998): 211.





Figure 41 'Alice and the Fairies' (Frances Griffiths), *The Strand*, December 1920.

The Cottingley case produced so much writing both at the time and later that it has its own historiography, but I want to reflect on the resonances between Frances and Elsie's photographs, and that of Eileen.<sup>314</sup> Amy's choice of the fairy costume was no coincidence: she must have finished making Eileen's costume while the debate around the Cottingley pictures still raged and headed to the studio to photograph her own little fairy. There are also shared themes of fatherhood, hope and impossibility, in the aftermath of the worst war the world had ever seen.

Eileen Brock and Frances Griffiths were both only children whose fathers were away at war, and they both had rich fantasy lives. While Eileen performed fantasy roles assisted by her mother, Frances escaped to the bottom of her garden, where she saw fairies. One day her sixteen-year-old cousin Elsie Wright borrowed a camera and the two girls managed to photograph these fairies, in an attempt, Elsie later said, to prove that Frances was *telling the truth*.<sup>315</sup> In fact, the Cottingley cousins had made their own paper fairies, carefully copied from a storybook (where children and fairies were often confused) and performed with them for the camera. This simple trick photography was in

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<sup>314</sup> A detailed account of the events can be found in Alex Owen, 'Borderland Forms'; Douglas A Anderson, 'Fairy Elements in British Literary Writings in the Decade Following the Cottingley Fairy Photographs Episode,' *Mythlore* 32, no. 1 (2013); Nicola Bown, 'There are Fairies at the Bottom of our Garden: Fairies, Fantasy and Photography,' *Textual Practice* 10, no. 1 (1996).

<sup>315</sup> Joe Cooper, *The Case of the Cottingley Fairies* (Pocket Books, 1997).

the same spirit that the Piercy family created a glowing orb among a group of children in the garden (Figure 39). Although the supposed objectivity of photography gave it weight as ‘evidential knowledge’, the magical potential of the process was acknowledged in its early days, when photography was called ‘fairy work’: the images seemed to come from nowhere, created by unseen hands.<sup>316</sup>

Francis and Elsie made the photographs for their parents to see – they were not intended to be public documents. But Elsie’s mother, like Amy Brock, had a penchant for fantasy and showed the photographs at a local Theosophist group where they were seized upon by believers. Soon they were disseminated publicly, and swiftly became the focus for fierce debates about truth and belief. Notoriously, the Cottingley photographs’ conduit from private family photograph to national sensation was the December 1920 article in *The Strand Magazine* by Arthur Conan Doyle.<sup>317</sup> Doyle saw the photos as proof of life’s hidden ‘glamour and mystery’ and evidence for his own spiritualist beliefs. How well timed this publication was – to anticipate the coming pantomime season – when glamorous and mysterious fairies would be most visible in wider culture.

Doyle embraced the Cottingley photographs with the credulity of a man who deeply wanted to believe in life beyond death.<sup>318</sup> He had lost his son in the First World War and sought a way to contact him beyond death. Doyle visited spirit photographers and mediums who could receive the ‘frequencies’ of the dead (in the radio-informed language of the time), hoping to use spirit communication to bring ‘solace ... to a tortured world’.<sup>319</sup> Fairies were not spirits, but Doyle recognised them as ‘borderland forms’ which became ‘manifest upon the margin’ of normal perception, and might lead the way to the spirit realm.<sup>320</sup> The miniature magical fairies who danced and played in the Cottingley photographs offered hope: ‘they may have their shadows and trials as we have, but at least there is a great gladness manifest in this demonstration of their life’.<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Smith, *Politics of Focus*, 17; Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in Nineteenth Century Photography* (Lund Humphries Publishers, 2001), 57.

<sup>317</sup> Doyle, ‘Fairies Photographed.’

<sup>318</sup> Folklorist Paul Smith considered all the main characters in terms of belief. Though he literally draws a linear spectrum of credulity on the page, his analysis gives a three-dimensional picture including different forms of belief, from ‘blind faith’ to open-minded curiosity and childhood stubbornness, and he considers the various motivations which support belief, including fear of reprisals and hope for financial gain. Paul Smith, ‘The Cottingley Fairies: The End of a Legend,’ in *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (New York: Garland, 1991), 396-402.

<sup>319</sup> This is all detailed in Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography* (Hutchinson & Co, 1922).

<sup>320</sup> Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies*, 126.

<sup>321</sup> Doyle, ‘Fairies Photographed,’ 468.



Amy Brock was also mourning in 1920. Although Will had survived the war, Amy's nephews Ray and Piercy had both been killed as had other neighbours and friends. The death of the two young men, both RAF pilots, left the family distraught. By April 1921, Amy was still endlessly anxious, writing: 'We are all well as can be expected considering the worries etc'.<sup>322</sup> When she dressed their daughter in fairy wings, did Amy anticipate that her husband's reaction might echo Doyle's, and he would be heartened? Or was it Amy herself who experienced great gladness at the sight of her daughter playing at fairies?

Eileen was well cast as a ray of sunshine among shadows. In contrast to her anxious mother, Eileen emerges from her parents' letters as an optimistic, bright child. She was, wrote Will, 'always happy and easy to please', and he agreed with Amy that their daughter was often 'noticed' for her 'sunny' disposition.<sup>323</sup> This characterisation echoes descriptions of Will himself, and Eileen seemed to take after her father in her easy humour, expressed through 'sundry little laughs'.<sup>324</sup> Though these fragments hardly add up to a whole person, they do give us a glimpse of how the Brocks thought about their daughter, and perhaps what they told her about herself.

Another of Amy's letters provided a small insight into Eileen's own fantasies; she was apparently 'wishing ... to be in a little place of our own with a pretty garden'.<sup>325</sup> Might Eileen have had a copy of Rose Fyleman's 1918 children's book *Fairies and Chimneys*? The first poem – 'There are Fairies at the bottom of our garden!' – not only described Cottingley-style encounters in the long grass, but ended with the revelation that the poem's fairy queen is 'a little girl all day, but at night she steals away ... well – it's me!'<sup>326</sup> Fyleman described fairies in everyday domestic life, finding them in chimney smoke, in motor cars and on Oxford Street buses, and her bestselling book reached twenty-two editions by 1928 including annual editions for LCC elementary schools from 1920–1925. This vision of domestic, child-sized magic was commercially attractive in the immediate post-war years. Referring to Fyleman and similar poets, Constance Spender encouraged children to immerse themselves in fantasy: 'remember to *be* the fairy when you are saying the fairy poems'.<sup>327</sup> The 'confusion' between fairies and children had become a thorough amalgamation. It is possible that Eileen channelled Fyleman's suburban sprites, as well as Tinkerbell, as she perched on the ersatz balustrade for her portrait.

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<sup>322</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 19 April 1921.

<sup>323</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 24 June 1921.

<sup>324</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 7 April 1921.

<sup>325</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 19 April 1921.

<sup>326</sup> Rose Fyleman, *Fairies and Chimneys* (Methuen & Co, 1918).

<sup>327</sup> Spender, 'Poetry and the Child,' 384.

After 1920, Elsie and Francis could no longer see the fairies at the bottom of their garden, but nevertheless the Cottingley drama continued. In *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922), Doyle blamed the girls' advancing years, and lamented that 'the processes of puberty are often fatal to psychic power'.<sup>328</sup> His collaborator Edward Gardner blamed Francis's 'board-school education' for robbing her gift.<sup>329</sup> But it was no matter that Elsie and Frances had grown out of fairies, they had already inspired plenty of imitators and emulators. Rather than diminishing, the echoes of fairy fantasy built to a crescendo. Illustrators Margaret Tarrant and Mabel Lucie Attwell led the coming of the fairies in the 1920s, along with Cicely Mary Barker, whose *Flower Fairies* books featured charming, idealised children wearing botanically inspired costumes, with translucent wings like dragonflies.<sup>330</sup> The first book, *Flower Fairies of the Spring* (1923) opened with the poem 'Spring Magic':

The World is very old  
and sometimes sad;  
but when the daisies come  
the World is glad.  
The World is very old,  
But every spring  
it groweth young again,  
and fairies sing.<sup>331</sup>

Only after the First World War could a child's book evoke global sadness in its first couplet. This short verse valorises youth as a force of transformation, consolation and hope. In this sad postwar world, the daisies and other flowers were fairy-children, and they sprung up as the new growth of the aftermath. The old world, including Victorians like Arthur Conan Doyle, was made 'glad' by their small faces, cast towards the sun.

In a statement which reinforced the amalgamation of children and fairies, and the domestication of fantasy, Barker's publishers claimed that the artist copied her illustrations from 'reality': the fairies were portraits of real children from the local school, and she had made the costumes herself before drawing and painting them.<sup>332</sup> They suggest there was nothing unreal about Barker's illustrated children apart from their wings (and they were easy to make). There is an echo here of Amy's

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<sup>328</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922), 66.

<sup>329</sup> Doyle, *The Coming of the Fairies*, 74.

<sup>330</sup> In 1922 the Medici Society commissioned artist Margaret Tarrant to create a series of fairy paintings to become prints and postcards including *Do You Believe in Fairies?* Sara Gray, 'Margaret Tarrant,' in *Dictionary of British Women Artists* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 209), 260.

<sup>331</sup> Cicely Mary Barker, *The Complete Book of the Flower Fairies*, 14 ed. (Penguin, 2003), 8.

<sup>332</sup> Cicely Mary Barker, *Flower Fairies of the Winter, with a Biography of the Author* (Blackie, 1985). During the war Barker produced postcards sets of Kate Greenaway-style 'Children of the Allies' and 'Shakespeare's Children', and contributed much to the prevailing representation of children, alongside Tarrant and Attwell.

activities, making a dress and wings for her own daughter and photographing (rather than painting) her. There is a subtle but bold hope in these rather domestic fairies of the 1920s. If fairies could be found in the garden and on Oxford Street, and simple daisies could heal the world, perhaps a flower-fairy-child could transform the ruins of the war into foundations for the future.

### **Mother-love**

The first viewer (apart from the photographer) of Eileen's portrait was Amy, and she must have been proud of her creations – child, dress and photo. If Edwardian homemade clothing offered 'visible evidence of care', then this dress made Amy's mother-love manifest in delicate, hand-finished layers.<sup>333</sup> Rose describes motherly desire as a 'form of investment by the adult in the child'.<sup>334</sup> Mothers invest time, effort, money, love – and have an expectation of a return. Amy's labour birthed the child in the photograph, but she also laboured to produce the costume and to create and frame the image. The photograph is a physical remnant of Amy's labour, and a material return on her emotional investment. It is also saturated with fantasy and desire.

In her memoir *Family Secrets*, the historian Annette Kuhn described being dressed up and photographed as a child. In her unhappy experience, 'the daughter in fancy dress ... becomes a vehicle for the mother's desire to transcend the limitations, dissatisfactions and disappointments of her own daily life'.<sup>335</sup> We cannot assume that Eileen felt used as a 'vehicle' for Amy's thwarted desires, but it is worth paying attention to Kuhn's assertion that a child's body could become a carrier or tool of self-expression and desire. Buying and making clothes for Eileen gave Amy pleasure, and she styled Eileen in costumes which were, themselves, transcendent of daily life – such as a fairy or Red Riding Hood, or in later years, performance costumes. Kuhn's mother, in contrast, unforgettably dressed her daughter as 'cinema rubbish', attaching empty sweet packets and other detritus to her daughter's body.

It is worth turning over the echoes between motherhood and photography as forms of reproductive labour. Carol Mavor's *Becoming* reflects at length upon the 'reduplicated desire' inherent in maternal photography, where the camera reproduces the girl, who is herself a reproduction of the mother.<sup>336</sup> She makes the connection between a mother's body and the camera as sites of

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<sup>333</sup> Burman, *Culture of Sewing*, 11.

<sup>334</sup> Rose, *Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, 3.

<sup>335</sup> Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (Verso, 2002), 68.

<sup>336</sup> Carol Mavor, *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 37-41.

reproduction, and argues that in women's photography of their children, 'the female body infinitely reproduces itself'.

Even without the camera, Eileen was shaped as an echo of her mother: she wore Amy's old clothes, had the middle name 'Amy', and was encouraged to follow Amy's interests in dance and performance. The camera caught the performative parts of Amy and Eileen's life together, when the dressing up was most carefully styled and staged – whether in the studio or the back garden. The surviving photographs are distillations of motherly desire, labour, investment, and a child's willingness to please and perform. They are tangible but very narrow slices through complex relations.



Figure 42 'Clementina Maude, 5 Princes Gardens' by Lady Hawarden, 1862-3.<sup>337</sup>

Mavor's analysis of Lady Clementina Hawarden's photographs of her daughters (taken in the 1860s) develops Barthes' analogy between a photograph, which connects the viewer to the object of the image, and an umbilical cord, which connects the child to the world through the mother's body.<sup>338</sup>

This comparison shares some of the qualities of Hawarden's photographs themselves: brightly

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<sup>337</sup> Photograph, V&A 457:344-1968

<sup>338</sup> Mavor, *Becoming*, 47.

illuminated and captivating, yet dreamlike and mysterious (Figure 42). On top of this, we have another of Rose's descriptions of motherly desire – 'a demand which fixes the child and then holds it in place' – resonates with the function of a photograph.<sup>339</sup> In a photograph by a mother, desire and the camera work together to capture and hold a child's body and 'fix' it in time and place. And when that child is dressed as a fairy – a symbol of such lightness that wings replace shoes – the photograph might be an attempt to 'fix' something as flighty and ephemeral as hope.

### Posting the picture

Once Eileen's portrait was printed, she wrote an inscription on the back, 'With llove [sic] to dear daddy from Eileen' (Figure 43). The photograph was sent on 7 July 1921. As the photograph slowly made its way across Europe, a deadly heatwave settled down over the Middle East. In Basra, Will Brock was badly affected. On 20 July a telegram to London reported that he was ill with sunstroke; the next day, Will died. Tragically, this meant he never saw the photograph of Eileen in the fairy costume, which had been carefully staged, printed and inscribed for his pleasure.

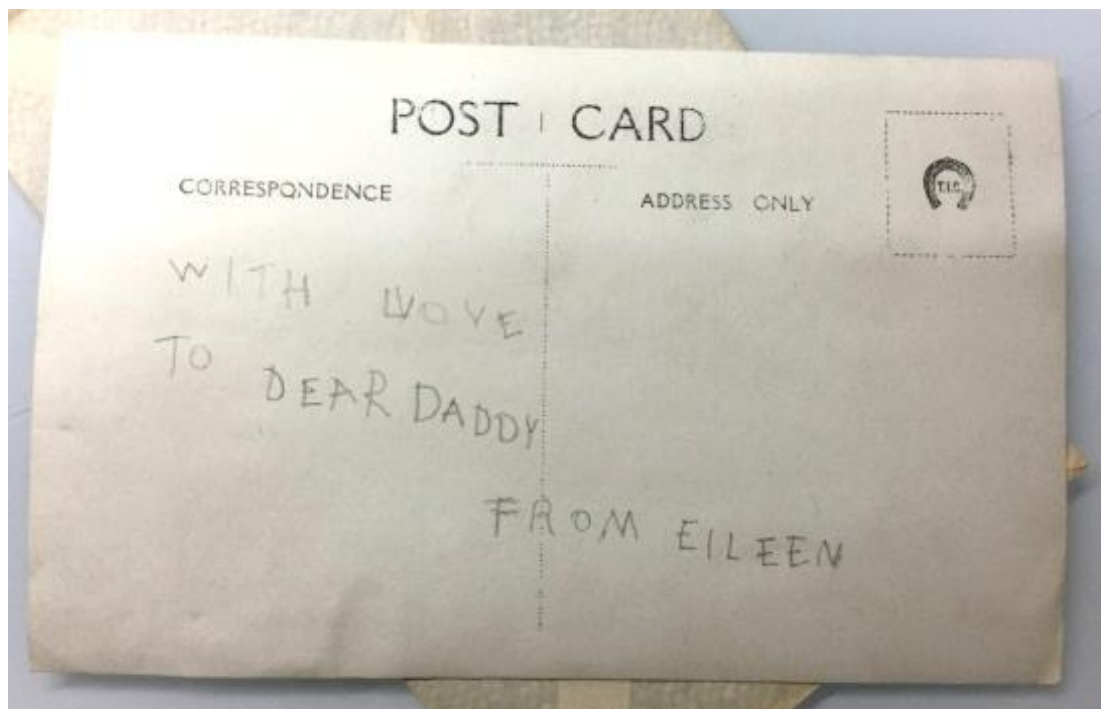


Figure 43 Eileen's annotations on reverse of Fairy photo.

On 22 July, two of Will's fellow soldiers, Privates Truslove and Seutter, sent Amy their sympathies. They told her that Will had 'always been one to keep us smiling and looking cheerfully forward to a quick return to Blighty and thus we also mourn the loss of a true pal'. Will's internment took place at

<sup>339</sup> Rose, *Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, 3.

Makinah Cemetery, following the formalities of a military funeral.<sup>340</sup> Sister J Lindlater from the British General Hospital in Basra wrote, that she was 'so very sorry ... We are all having an anxious time – so many of our soldiers are suffering from this terrible heat wave'.<sup>341</sup> In total, twenty-six men were buried in Makinah Cemetery in July 1921.<sup>342</sup>

When Amy and Eileen's letter of 7 July reached the Mesopotamian sorting office, it was streaked with red ink and marked 'Deceased' (Figure 44). As was procedure, it was returned to the sender and arrived back with Amy and Eileen in October 1921. Until then, they had no idea how many of their letters had reached Will, what he had seen and read in his final days. Only upon the letter's return would they have realised that Will never saw the fairy photograph. Countless families experienced the same procedure and saw the same red 'deceased'. Some returned letters became extremely significant to their original senders. Josephine Fernald, who lost her son in the war, left her final letter to him unopened after it was returned, and for a decade took it to mediums as a 'charged ... psychometric object' that would help her gain contact with her dead son.<sup>343</sup>

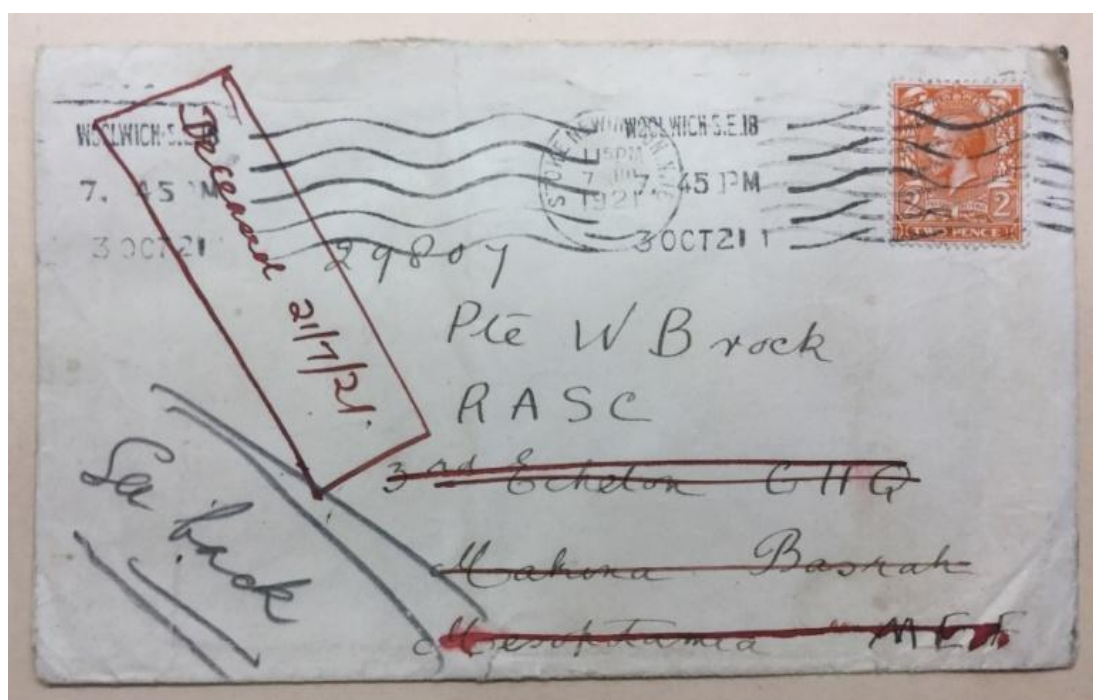


Figure 44 Envelope with annotations, and postmarks. Indicates original date the letter was posted (7 July 1921), date of Will Brock's death (21 July 1921) and date of letter's return (3 October 1921).

<sup>340</sup> Privates Truslove and Seutter to Amy Brock, 22 July 1921. IWM 31/43/2

<sup>341</sup> Nurse Lindlater to Amy Brock, 22 July 1921.

<sup>342</sup> 'Basra War Cemetery,' Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 15 July 2020, <https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/57200/Basra%20War%20Cemetery>.

<sup>343</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, 'Plot 6, Row C, Grave 15,' *London Review of Books* 40, no. 21 (2018).

## Mourning

It is impossible to know how Amy and Eileen reacted to the news of Will's death. It was so sudden. He had survived five years of the army: training camps, coast watch, the Spanish flu pandemic, the Russian Civil War, the frozen winter in Finland. In the last letter that Will sent, he reflected on eleven years of marriage with his characteristic stoicism:

What changes since we two got 'tied up' as they say, if this old war had not happened, we should have been better, but we must console ourselves and be thankful we are alive even after such a world upheaval.<sup>344</sup>

Symbolically at least, the war was over, and London's population had begun the public and private processes of mourning, remembrance and commemoration.<sup>345</sup> It must have been wrenching to suffer this new bereavement just as the danger was meant to have passed.

Amy responded to Will's death by returning to her sewing machine once again. She designed and made Eileen a mourning coat of black sateen, lined with pale blue cotton, and embroidered with forget-me-nots (Figure 45).<sup>346</sup> She followed this with a half-mourning dress of grey linen, embroidered with a butterfly motif (slightly visible under the coat). While Amy sewed, Eileen threaded a necklace for her mother. A faceted piece of jet, followed by a tiny gold bead, alternating one by one onto the fiddly wire.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 8 July 1921.

<sup>345</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory*.

<sup>346</sup> Mourning coat, V&A Misc.85-1986

<sup>347</sup> V&A catalogue, B.646-1993



Figure 45 Eileen Brock's mourning coat and half-mourning dress, made by Amy Brock, 1921.<sup>348</sup>

David Cannadine has claimed that mourning costume disappeared during the war, provocatively asking,

what point was there in donning widow's weeds when the husband lay mutilated, unidentified and unburied on the fields of Flanders? What comfort could crepe or black-edged notepaper bring in the face of bereavement at once so harrowing, so unnatural and so widespread?<sup>349</sup>

His language serves its purpose to trivialise the objects of women's mourning, including clothes and stationery, and it was true that some mourning practices, which were already on the decline since the turn of the century, faded even further as war casualties mounted, especially among working women.<sup>350</sup> But Cannadine overlooked the potential significance of clothing and communication in

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<sup>348</sup> Mourning coat, V&A Misc.85-1986, and dress, B.708-1993.

<sup>349</sup> Cannadine, 'Death and Grief in Modern Britain,' 218.

<sup>350</sup> Strange, 'Death, Grief and Mourning,' 161; Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (Routledge, 2009 [1983]), 149-53. Lucie Whitmore, "'A Matter of Individual Opinion and Feeling": The changing culture of mourning dress in the First World War', *Women's History Review* 27:4 (2018), 579-594.



shaping a personal response and experience within the widespread and overwhelming wave of bereavement. I can imagine that making the black coat played an important function in Amy's coming to terms with Will's death, and in making her loss tangible, visible, and real. The ritual of wearing mourning, the reassuring traditional motifs like forget-me-nots and seeing her daughter wearing black and grey, was a way to inscribe their loss in the social realm and express their loss in a shared symbolic and emotional language.<sup>351</sup> Just as Amy used her sewing machine to craft the fantasy of Red Riding Hood and fashion a hope-filled fairy, by making Eileen's mourning dress, she could materialise the reality of her husband's death. Amy, her sister Maude and many of Amy's friends chose to write their letters on black edged notepaper and envelopes (Figure 46). And these letters, framed by the mark of loss, stand out still today from the mass of other communications. Letters were crucial for holding together families and friends, and the black trimmed envelope demanded notice and gave warning when it appeared among a pile of post.



Figure 46 Black-edged envelope addressed to Amy Brock, 1921.<sup>352</sup>

Similarly, the black coat stands out among the brightly coloured dresses and costumes that Eileen donated to the V&A. It was, indeed, the first item that she gave, suggesting that she supposed it to

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., Strange discusses the functions of black mourning wear, even if it was incomplete or unsatisfactory. On endurance of traditional motifs, see Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 5.

<sup>352</sup> Author's archive.

be the most significant – both objectively to the museum, and to her own story. It is of high quality, and remains in excellent condition. Unusually among Eileen and Amy’s collection of clothing, it was never adapted for different use or handed around the family. It was clearly a singular garment, worn for a short amount of time and stored with great care.

Eileen and Amy’s process of bereavement extended from the shock of the initial telegrams to the pain of informing friends and family, then the ongoing struggle of communications from Basra. During the war, it had been usual for surviving soldiers to inform their dead comrades’ families about the location of burial and describe the funeral, and on the Western Front, official photographers documented grave-markers for families.<sup>353</sup> Soldiers were fully aware how important this kind of information was to the bereaved. On 15 September 1921, Will’s Basra colleague Albert Ewans sent Amy photographs of Will’s grave and the cemetery, writing,

I was a friend of Will’s and perhaps appreciated his numerous good qualities more than anyone ... It is not in our power to do much but I thought perhaps you would like to have a photograph of his last resting place and of Makina Masus cemetery ...

The nearest cross in the photo is Will’s grave and the other film is a view of part of the cemetery. He lies between two comrades of the Echelon, both of whom he knew and who died in the same week. If you wish, these films could be enlarged. Again tendering my greatest sympathy ...<sup>354</sup>

Were the graveyard photographs taken by the same man (and camera) who had photographed Will under the palm tree in his smart uniform with borrowed trousers?

Around the time of this letter, Eileen and Amy suffered yet another loss: Rex died. Rex was Will’s dog, the animal so beloved that he featured in the wedding photographs and in the locket that Will wore to war, and who had appeared as the wolf in the photographs of Eileen. Rex had been deteriorating for some time, and Amy’s final letters to Will had described the medication she was giving him and his sad decline. At some level Rex’s death may have offered a relief from worry, but the experience of cumulative loss for Amy and Eileen must have been shattering, and severed a remaining link to their husband and father. In a few short months, Amy lost her husband, her dog, her income and her identity as wife as well as the hopeful future she had for her family.

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<sup>353</sup> van Emden, *Quick and the Dead*, 150; Audoin-Rouzeau, Becker, and Temerson, *1914-1918: Understanding the Great War*, 205.

<sup>354</sup> Albert Ewans to Amy Brock, 15 September 1921, IWM. Will’s grave has not had an easy history. The headstones which were produced for Makina Cemetery in the mid-1920s quickly crumbled, and the insubstantial replacements have faced transportation, destruction and abandonment due to subsequent events in Iraq.

In October, Amy and Eileen escaped London for a few quiet weeks in Leigh-On-Sea in Essex, where they used to go and visit Will at his training camp. They were escorted to Fenchurch Street station by Ada Kemp, whose husband Frank had been a friend of Will's. After surviving military service, Frank had died of pleurisy in April 1920, while Will was in Finland. While Amy and Eileen were in Essex, Ada Kemp wrote to her friend entreating her:

I hope you are having a nice rest from all worry, and endeavouring to get your nerves a little more steady, you really must try, or you will be a wreck ... You ask how I got on, on the Sunday I received the medal, quite all right but was very tired and a bit depressed ... How is Eileen enjoying her little self? I hope very nicely.<sup>355</sup>

The references to nerves and illness throughout the letters confirm that the previous months had been unsteady times for Amy and Eileen. There is contrast between the words 'nerves' and 'wreck' describing Amy's agitation, and the more subdued 'tired' and 'depressed' feelings of Ada after receiving her husband's posthumous war medal. These two women had spent the war years waiting; waiting to get the old times back, waiting to start their futures.

Amy's old friend Gar Christie sent his sympathies, recognising she

must indeed have been grieved and stricken at receiving such sad news of dear old Will ... always so cheerful and bright, I am sure he leaves only the happiest recollections in the memory of all his relatives and friends. Your dear little girl will be a companion for you in your loneliness, and help you to bear your grief.<sup>356</sup>

Eileen's role as companion and helper shaped the rest of her childhood, and indeed her life. In later years, when she donated the archive to the V&A, she told the curators that she 'began school late because her mother was newly widowed and did not wish to part with her only child so soon after her husband's death'.<sup>357</sup> This was not correct – there are numerous letters from Will that refer to Eileen going to school – but what is significant is that this was how Eileen remembered it. Following her father's death, her mother's protectiveness and need for support interrupted her own development and maybe held her back. In her story of herself, the mourning coat was the beginning, the first object, and its prominence speaks to the place of Will's death in Eileen's life.

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<sup>355</sup> Ada Kemp to Amy Brock, n.d., author's archive.

<sup>356</sup> Gar Christie to Amy Brock, 27 September 1921, author's archive.

<sup>357</sup> 'Information concerning her schooldays by Miss E A Brock', V&A Registered File Brock.

## Conclusion

Amy Brock's original creation of the fairy costume for her daughter's visit to the photographer's studio was invested with desire and optimism. But the commitment to belief which sustained the production of the fairy image quickly turned to impossibility – Eileen would never see her father again and he missed his last chance to see her. As a historian looking at the archive a century later, the story and journey of Eileen's fairy photograph necessarily informed my interpretation of it. Knowing that Will never saw the fairy photograph made its sweet hopefulness seem sadly ironic.

Throughout the war, illustrations and poems about fairies had enabled magical thinking for adults and children alike, and thanks to Frances and Elsie in Cottingley, fairies filled the air in 1921. Themes of belief, reason and contacting the dead – which had previously appeared in the family play *Peter Pan* – became a live news issue. Whether they had seen a real one or not, British people knew from pantomimes and postcards that fairies were small, pretty white-skinned creatures with wings. And the confusion of fairies and children (often distinguishable only by their wings) meant that ordinary children could also be magical beings, full of transformative potential, with the ability to shine gladness into post-war shadows. The trope of the hopeful fairy-child became so prevalent that it attracted the ire of modernist writer Wyndham Lewis, who damned the 'irresponsible, Peterpanish psychology' fuelling a fake utopianism among the upper classes.<sup>358</sup> Fairy-lovers, he suggested, chased reflected glimmers of fantasy rather than facing the cold harsh light of the fallout from the war.

The image of a little girl dressed as a fairy is a persistent one, which erupts generation after generation in response to deep-rooted desires about childhood; the image is historically specific while at the same time appearing to transcend historical specificity. My own fairy memory comes from my second birthday party (in the late 1980s), when I wore a homemade fairy costume and sat in a circle on the floor with other tiny children dressed as elves and fairies. I have a strong sense-memory of the dress my mother made from diamond shapes cut from a faded, soft cotton sheet. She had used pinking shears, and the pieces had a distinctive toothed edge and felt feathery, fluttery. To consider the fairy-child image is to run up against the reality of how fantasy connects individuals to culture: rather than an account of change, it is a history of continuity and inheritance. Desire reaches out and finds the same forms again and again across generations.

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<sup>358</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, ed. Paul Edwards (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1993 [1927]), 51. Even *Peter Pan* was not safe from further infantilisation. In 1925, May Byron produced a version of the play 'for little people' which exorcised the story's more haunting themes. Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Urwin, and Valerie Walkerdine, *Language, Gender and Childhood* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 98.

John Gillis observed that in the early twentieth century, ‘an increasing amount of women’s work was devoted to the creation of the rituals, myths and images on which the newly enchanted world of family had come to depend’.<sup>359</sup> He was referring to social rituals of meals, birthdays and rites of passage, but Amy Brock created more literally enchanted photographs and mythologies of family. By repeatedly invoking fairytale characters in her letter writing and image-making, Amy created a story of her own enchanted family which she shared with her husband and daughter.

The events of this chapter bring the first act of Eileen’s childhood to a close. It played out as a family drama-turned-tragedy, without the promised fairytale ending. But the sequined fairy dress gave a glimpse of what was to come. In the second act, Eileen and Amy will discover the high-kicking, toe-dancing glamour of show business, and will join a new cast of characters on the wider stage of children’s variety theatre.

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<sup>359</sup> Gillis, *World of Their Own Making*, 77.

## Intermezzo

Act Two of this thesis moves out of the Brock family archive, to Eileen's public performances in the mid-1920s as a member of a song-and-dance troupe called 'Madame Grace Behenna's Juvenile Jollities'. As part of this troupe, Eileen performed contemporary hits to large audiences of adults and children, alongside other girls between the ages of four and fourteen. However, before introducing the Jollities and Madame Behenna, it is necessary to establish the legal and social context of children's stage performance. When, where, how and what children were allowed to perform had been the subjects of active debate for at least four decades by the time Eileen came to the stage.

This intermezzo functions as an expository flashback; I will pause the chronology of Eileen's life, and take you back a generation or so. Through the stories of two new historical actors, Madame Victor and Evelyn Behenna, we will observe how incremental legal changes and shifting ideas of childhood had real effects upon theatrical managers and performers. By the end of the intermezzo, we will have caught up with the 1920s and the scene will be set to introduce the cast of Jollities troupe with Eileen Brock among them.

### Victorian and Edwardian stage children and the law

Madame Victor (1852–1927) was a manager of juvenile performers in London from the 1880s to the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> Her obituaries described a 'grand old lady', with the 'breeding and old-fashioned courtesy of the Victorian era', who would 'take children from poor parents, feed them, clothe them, train them, and set them on the first rung of the ladder', before sending them round Europe in a touring show.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of her career, Madame Victor catered to theatre audiences ravenous for children's performance. There was, at that time, barely any regulation on the employment of stage children. Children's industrial employment had been (very) gradually limited from the 1780s, but children on the stage were always an exception.<sup>3</sup> Victorian children appeared onstage as fairies in pantomime, acrobats and comedians in musical hall, in ballet choruses and (more rarely) in speaking parts, across the whole gamut of theatrical genres, from opera to melodrama.<sup>4</sup> As her career progressed,

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<sup>1</sup> A C Astor, 'Just Jottings,' *The Stage* 30 June 1927, 18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., E K Orlando, 'Tribute to the Late Madame Victor,' *West London Observer* 29 April 1927, Letters, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Kirby gives a concise account of legislation starting with the Chimney Sweepers Act 1788, to the Factory Acts of 1833 and 1867. Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870* (Palgrave, 2003), 103-4. The point about stage exceptionalism is well made in Colclough, *Child Labor*.

<sup>4</sup> Davis, 'The Employment of Children in the Victorian Theatre.'

however, Madame Victor faced increasing regulation, licencing requirements and the outright prohibition of children's paid performance based on their age and gender.

Despite the legendary status of masterful child actors like Ellen Terry, not all Victorians were convinced of the benefits of a childhood on the stage.<sup>5</sup> Vigorous 'child-rescue' campaigners – fresh from their victory in raising the age of consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen in 1885 – pointed to the long hours, gruelling training programmes, and exposure to the dangerous immoralities of the theatre. The new Cruelty to Children Prevention Bill of 1889 proposed (among many other protections) a ban on the employment of stage children under the age of ten, to bring theatre work in line with all other work.<sup>6</sup>

The 1889 Bill ignited a public and well-documented parliamentary debate around the morality and suitability of theatrical performance for children, which exposed ideological assumptions about work, enjoyment, class and talent. Campaigners made accusations of exploitation and raised concerns for moral safety. On the other side, the theatre industry projected a fantasy, the glimmer of a 'little dancer', plucked from a dark hovel and elevated into the spotlight. In the parliamentary debates, many MPs read from the script provided by the theatre managers. They evoked the moral dangers of leaving children in their poor homes, the opportunities available on the stage for gifted children, and insisted on the exceptional nature of theatre work: 'there is a great gulf between the little ... dancer, and the haggard half-timer "doffing" in the mill'.<sup>7</sup>

The resulting legislation, the so-called Children's Charter of 1889, ratified Victorian reformers' moral vision to save the 'haggard half-timers'. Building on the introduction of compulsory education (Education Act 1880) it established categories of childhood based on gender and age, reinforced the interventionist relationship between parents and the state, and made 'child abuse' a crime.<sup>8</sup> The Charter's treatment of 'little dancers' was a compromise: girls under the age of sixteen (in line with the age of consent) were required to be out of the theatre by ten o'clock at night, as protection

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<sup>5</sup> The debates are discussed in: James Winter, Peter Bailey, and J S Bratton, *Music Hall: The Business of Pleasure* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 1986); Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 137; Jacqueline Susan Bratton and Peter Bailey, *Music Hall* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004); Varty, *Children and Theatre in Victorian Britain*; Marah Gubar, 'The Drama of Precocity: Child Performers on the Victorian Stage,' in *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, ed. David Denisoff (Routledge, 2008), 65; Colclough, *Child Labor*.

<sup>6</sup> Deborah Gorham, 'The "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" Re-examined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England,' *Victorian Studies* 21, no. 3 (1978).

<sup>7</sup> Mr Jennings MP, Debate on the Cruelty to Children Prevention Bill, (Hansard, 10 July 1889).

<sup>8</sup> Harry Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13.

against moral dangers of a sexual kind; and though the minimum age of stage employment was raised to ten, children aged seven and upwards could work with a licence from the local magistrate.<sup>9</sup>

We can see in these age-based regulations how the limits of childhood were defined and refined over time. The age at which a human being becomes – and ceases to be – a child has never been fixed, and is contested at a personal, familial and social level. I intentionally use the present tense here, as these are continuous, fluctuating processes of redefinition. At any given time, the bounds of childhood have traced shifting contours of physical development, economic status, moral and criminal responsibility, and sexual maturity and freedom.<sup>10</sup> Over the last decades of the nineteenth century, British childhood incrementally lengthened, as a consequence of compulsory education and restrictions on employment. Children were territorialised by the state education system, in a shift towards the modern, ‘economically useless’ child described by Viviana Zelizer.<sup>11</sup> Broadly speaking, childhood was redefined as a state of difference and dependency: children were physically separated into classrooms where they received appropriate education and discipline, and the restrictions on child employment meant wages were something that adults earned and children absorbed. As the school system became more entrenched, attitudes to children shifted from rescue and reform to consciously designed systems of education, hygiene and preventative medicine.<sup>12</sup> Davin has written that these political moves met ‘ready acceptance’ because of the Victorians’ ‘cult of childhood’ sustained by commercial imagery, which relied on binary stereotypes of the rosy-cheeked child at play, and the wan, pathetic orphan.<sup>13</sup>

The theatrical industry, however, resisted the categorisation of children’s stage performance as ‘work’. This succeeded into the twentieth century, although regulation made gradual encroachments: in 1903 the 10.00pm curfew was brought forward to nine o’clock.<sup>14</sup> In 1904 the minimum age increased from ten to eleven.<sup>15</sup> In spite of this, children who were younger could still work later with a licence, if a magistrate was convinced that ‘proper provision has been made to secure the health and kind treatment of the children’.<sup>16</sup> In 1909–1910, 246 children aged ten to

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<sup>9</sup> Prevention of Cruelty to, and Protection of, Children Act, 1889, Section 3.

<sup>10</sup> James and Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*; Hugh Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (Random House, 2012); Stearns, *Childhood in World History*; Heywood, *A History of Childhood*.

<sup>11</sup> Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child*; Daniel Thomas Cook, ‘Pricing The Priceless Child: A Wonderful Problematic,’ *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 5, no. 3 (Fall 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Through, for example, school medicine, school meals, school inspections and so on. James and Prout, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 42; Imogen Lee, ‘Creating Childhoods: Ideas of Child and School in London 1870–1914’ (PhD Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Employment of Children Act, 1903.

<sup>15</sup> Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, 1904.

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



thirteen were licensed by London magistrates.<sup>17</sup> This number probably included eleven-year-old Gracie Fields, who was born in 1898 over a fish-and-chip shop in Yorkshire and joined the 'Nine Dainty Dots' troupe in 1908; she was on her way to becoming the highest paid movie star in Britain in the mid-1930s.<sup>18</sup>

In 1912 Madame Victor appeared in court against a theatre agent named Edward Platt. She complained that Platt had booked her troupe of fourteen to sixteen-year-old girls, The Black Cats, into a 'place in Vienna known as the Casino de Paris' ...

On arriving there they found that the performance did not begin until eleven o'clock at night ... The place was not a music hall. There was no stage, the performance being given on the floor of the hall. At its conclusion they had to sit in their stage costumes at tables, they were not to refuse drinks and cigarettes offered them ... some of the girls began to cry.<sup>19</sup>

A series of similar incidents exposed the vulnerability of teenage girls when they ventured overseas. In response, the Children (Employment Abroad) Act 1913 introduced further licence requirements and Members of the House of Lords congratulated themselves on their chivalry: 'we shall be throwing a very necessary shield round the children of the nation'.<sup>20</sup> Ironically, international tours were promptly curtailed by the start of the First World War, which saw the dancing troupes replaced by marching troops. Madame Victor's personal sorrow at the war was compounded by 'heavy losses in the profitable field she had built up on the Continent'.<sup>21</sup>

Up until this point, the laws concerning stage children had proliferated in response to moments of crisis as well as the general trend towards the lengthening of childhood and the redefinition of children as school pupils, not workers. Performing children passed a series of administrative thresholds based on their age and gender: aged ten they could work with a licence; at eleven they could perform without a licence before 9.00pm, with a licence after; at fourteen they could work abroad with a licence; and at sixteen girls could perform at any time without regulation (fourteen for boys).

Despite set-backs in touring, the war offered new opportunities for canny theatrical managers. Clubs and societies staged fundraising concerts for war causes, and London's war hospitals held a huge

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<sup>17</sup> Winston Churchill, Parliamentary Questions, (Hansard, 6 April 1911).

<sup>18</sup> 'Leading In, By Request,' *The Era* 9 June 1926, 8. Fields' now-legendary rags-to-riches story from chip shop to child-star on the West End was being promoted at the time of Eileen's participation in the Jollities.

<sup>19</sup> 'Complaints Against an Agent,' *The Era* 8 February 1913, 22.

<sup>20</sup> Lord Bishop of London, Debate on the Children (Employment Abroad) Bill, (Hansard, 15 April 1913).

<sup>21</sup> Astor, 'Just Jottings,' 18.

population who needed to be entertained. Eileen Brock's twelve-year-old cousin Enid performed a skirt dance in Finsbury Park for the Red Cross and in the West End, the avant-garde dance teacher Margaret Morris choreographed special ballets for pupils aged six to eighteen in the *Margaret Morris Matinees in aid of the Homes of Rest Society for Discharged and Disabled Sailors and Soldiers*.<sup>22</sup> In March 1916, one of Madame Victor's most promising pupils performed at a free concert for injured soldiers. Little Evelyn Behenna sang the popular comedy tune 'Burlington Bertie' and performed a dramatic monologue, receiving a favourable review in *The Stage*, which praised the eleven-year-old as 'a clever child'.<sup>23</sup>

With the help of Madame Victor, Evelyn Behenna graduated from charity concerts into paid employment in pantomime, winning the role of Red Riding Hood at the King's Theatre, Hammersmith for Christmas 1917.<sup>24</sup> Twelve-year-old Evelyn needed a licence to work after 9.00pm, but she was either performing without one, or her licence included a curfew, as she had to miss the end of the Boxing Day performance. Proving that all publicity was good publicity, the *Sporting Times* reported, 'dainty little Evelyn Behenna is so young that officialdom vetoed her appearance in the last scene'.<sup>25</sup> As Evelyn's situation demonstrates, theatre managers who employed 'dainty' young children had to face the interference of 'officialdom' and the additional administration of licences, but they persisted nevertheless.

Performing children like Evelyn Behenna disrupt the historiographical narrative of the 'economically useless' child. She was economically useful: she earned professional wages, and though there are no records of how much she earned, we can presume a portion went to her manager Madame Victor, and another portion to her mother (as was conventional among all working girls<sup>26</sup>), plus she contributed money to charity.<sup>27</sup> And Evelyn was not defined by school: she appeared in public, social spaces (including theatres and daytime concerts) and shared a stage with adults. As a worker and performer, Evelyn and others like her acted as a reminder of the fluidity between adult and child.

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<sup>22</sup> Programme of Juvenile Concert, MOC/BROC/1/5. 'Wargill Athletic Club,' *West London Observer* 26 July 1918. Margaret Morris, *Creation in Dance and Life* (Owen, 1972), 29.; Anne Robinson, 'Penelope Spencer (1901–93) Dancer and Choreographer: A Chronicle,' *Dance Research* 28, no. 1 (2010): 39, *Dance Research*.

<sup>23</sup> 'Amateurs,' *The Stage* 2 March 1916, 15.

<sup>24</sup> 'In Memoriam - Behenna,' *The Stage* 20 January 1944. Evelyn Behenna (born 1905) was the youngest child of Joseph (who was a cellist and a plumber), and Lisetta (a photographic model).

<sup>25</sup> 'On and Off,' *Sporting Times* 19 December 1917, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Dyhouse, *Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, 18, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Evelyn is listed contributing to 'Actors' Benevolent Fund,' *The Era* (8 May 1918): 5.

## The Education Bill 1918

In the final months of the First World War a new Education Bill was introduced for debate in Parliament. This landmark legislation, masterminded by President of the Board of Education Herbert Fisher, responded to the seismic disruptions of the previous four years, including the conscription of men and employment of women. The repercussions (separation allowance, widows' pensions, means-testing and so on) had entailed unprecedented interventions by the state into family life and destabilised the boundaries of gender and class – prompting widespread scrutiny of welfare, education, and the role of the family.<sup>28</sup> It also reflected changes in attitudes to children; as Hugh Cunningham explained, 'in wartime, people looked to a better future ahead, and the future was the children'.<sup>29</sup>

Fisher's Bill explicitly defined a 'child' as a person who is 'required to attend school' – for the first time legally binding the status of child to school attendance.<sup>30</sup> But the education legislation extended its reach into many areas of children's lives, including their employment during evenings and weekends. It prohibited all work under age twelve, banned employment in factories, workshops and mines under fourteen and raised the school-leaving age a year to fourteen, although a further increase was planned. Within the Education Bill 1918, a 'young person' was a person under eighteen 'who was no longer a child' – a group which was shrinking as the definition of 'child' was lengthening.<sup>31</sup> In short, the Bill conceptualised children as investments in the future (of the individual, family and state), not as earners in the present.

So how did the proposed legislation deal with the exceptional case of stage children? The discussions in parliament in July 1918 shaped the exact provisions and wordings of the law, which would later be carefully read, interpreted and discussed by dance teachers and managers – thus directly affecting girls like Evelyn Behenna, Eileen Brock and their contemporaries across the country. It is worth, then, looking in detail at what the Bill proposed and how the final Fisher Act took shape.

Section 13 of the Bill concerned the same questions of licences and age which had dominated hitherto. However, Section 13 moved licence-granting powers from magistrates to the local education authorities (LEAs, which replaced the school boards after 1902), further confirming the dominance of education and making children's *work* an *educational* question (not a *moral* one, as it

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<sup>28</sup> Marwick, *The Deluge*; Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People* (Springer, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, 178.

<sup>30</sup> Education Act 1918, Definitions.

<sup>31</sup> At eighteen, young people became adults in educational terms, however twenty-one was still the age to vote (for men), inherit or take legal action. Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, 4. *Education Act 1918*, Section 48.

was in 1889).<sup>32</sup> Section 13 also raised the minimum licencing age for paid performances from ten to twelve. Although this merely brought stage children in line with other working youngsters, it met strong resistance from all political parties. The opposition to Section 13 was led by Conservative MP Basil Peto. His opening speech explained

why it is absolutely essential, if we are to give to poor children with theatrical talent ... the opportunity of being properly trained and brought out, and to make the best use of their training, it should commence at the age of ten ... After the age of twelve, almost immediately, children begin to change from the stage of first childhood. The boy's voice soon after begins to break, and the children become self-conscious, and as a rule, cease to be really little children. They are not, therefore, suitable to play the part of very little children.<sup>33</sup>

These comments established the basis of the Commons debate, which repeated some persistent ideals and fantasies of childhood. Peto's assertion that there is 'all the difference in the world between ten and twelve' illustrated how the age of twelve was a significant threshold, even though childhood as a whole was gradually extending upwards. He defined those in 'the stage of first childhood', up to twelve, as '*really little* children' – betraying an essentialist notion of *real* childhood based on a fantasy of the idealised *littleness* of youth. Peto's concerns were echoed by Edward Hammerde, who was sure that after twelve, a child actor's 'actions become stereotyped, and it is perfectly impossible to train them'.<sup>34</sup> What did these men think was lost at age twelve? Passivity, malleability perhaps? Littleness, certainly. Without the language of puberty, adolescence, biological or psychological development (which would become more widespread later in the 1920s), they fell back on tropes of nature and realness, harking back to the Romantic ideal of childhood, which might be defined as a 'primal state of unselfconscious unity'.<sup>35</sup> The paradox of training a child into 'acting naturally' went apparently unnoticed.

The Members of Parliament were not immune to fantasies of glamour, stardom and opportunity. Peto's evocation of 'poor children with theatrical talent' made a political argument out of the star-making fantasy narrative that a poor, talented child could work their way to wealth and fame (with the earliest possible training from a middle-class manager). Conservative MP Henry Wilson-Fox confessed he was

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<sup>32</sup> LEAs had been created by the Education Act 1902.

<sup>33</sup> Basil Peto, Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill, 836-37 (15 July 1918).

<sup>34</sup> Edward Hemmerde, Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill, 840.

<sup>35</sup> Schiller, quoted in Amanda Phillips Chapman, 'The Riddle of Peter Pan's Existence: An Unselfconscious Stage Child,' *The Lion and the Unicorn* 36, no. 2 (2012): 138.

compelled to preserve the liberties of the classes with which [he was] not usually associated ... What we are trying to do is protect the rights of the children of the poorer classes ... those children possessing those very rare and very special gifts.<sup>36</sup>

From across the benches, Labour MP Tyson Wilson agreed that the law should not stand in the way of any 'boy or girl making his or her way in the world'.<sup>37</sup> Their language valorised the idea of children's innate talent as a route out of poverty, while simultaneously reinforcing the power of the adult to shape, train, and mould children who were 'very young indeed'.<sup>38</sup> The opposition to Section 13 confirmed that theatrical children were not a straightforwardly party-political issue. The issue cut deeper, to questions of what rights and expectations children had for opportunity, employment and protection. To some, it was the child's *right to earn*, not the children themselves, which needed protecting. The Bill's inconsistent treatment of working children was approved by Harold Smith: 'the stage has always been treated differently from other professions, and always must be'.<sup>39</sup>

There were only two speakers in favour of raising the age to twelve. Sir John Spear attempted to dispel the theatrical glamour, with his statement that the stage 'is an awful place for a child of ten years to be'.<sup>40</sup> He found support from Herbert Samuel, whose views on children were clear: 'it seems to me that the right place for a child is school in the daytime and bed at night-time'.<sup>41</sup> Both these men's paternalistic arguments sought to put stage children back *in their place*.

Herbert Fisher defended the Bill he had authored. He asserted that the Bill did not prevent training, but performances, i.e. it allowed education and banned work. Perhaps he was trying to exorcise the fantasies of genius and artistry that had suffused the debate, when he argued that the restrictions were not directed at the

great masterpieces of English drama ... We are legislating for screaming farce, for bloodthirsty and blood-curdling melodrama, we are legislating for the circus, the pantomime, the travelling company, and the music hall.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Fox, Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill, 850.

<sup>37</sup> Wilson, Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill, 845.

<sup>38</sup> Hemmerde, Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill, 842.

<sup>39</sup> Harold Smith, Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill, 849. The Commons debate revealed heavy lobbying by the theatre industry. Captain Carr-Gomm referred to 'the circulars sent round by Mr Irving' (president of the Actors' Association). Several other speakers deferred to the expertise of theatre managers and actors of their acquaintance: 'it is those men we have to consider in this matter'. Was it not the children who should have been uppermost in their thoughts? Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill, 844.

<sup>40</sup> Sir John Spear, Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill, 851.

<sup>41</sup> Herbert Samuel, Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill, 848.

<sup>42</sup> The fine gradations of class identity distributed across the different genres on the Edwardian stage are sifted in Crozier, 'Notions of Childhood.'

Fisher (and his snobbish definition of performance) mostly prevailed. Once passed, Section 13 of the Education Act 1918 did include more robust rules for performing children, once again using an age-based framework: No children under twelve could be employed at all; children aged twelve to fourteen required a licence to perform after 8.00pm; and girls fourteen to sixteen could perform until 9.00pm. As a concession to the theatrical profession, the implementation of these changes was delayed for three full years, while a committee of stage professionals advised on how the licensing system should be implemented.

### **Evelyn Behenna and the shifting bounds of childhood**

The delay in enacting Section 13 gave Evelyn Behenna three extra years of work. The emerging young star turned thirteen the year the act passed, but was able to continue working through 1918 and 1919, as the new laws never quite caught up with her. As the legal definitions of childhood shifted, Evelyn regained her position – on the cusp between child and young person – and her ability to play child's parts. She was not at the bottom end of the licensing bracket (the children who should be in school in the day and bed at night) but was at the youngest end of the girls who had to be out of the theatre by 9.00pm to protect them from the 'ruin' envisaged by the Victorian child rescuers.<sup>43</sup>

In late 1919 Evelyn reprised her role as Red Riding Hood at the Wimbledon theatre, in a performance *The Globe* described as 'most fascinating'.<sup>44</sup> Although Evelyn was fourteen by this time, Madame Victor continued to promote her pupil as the diminutive 'Little Evelyn Behenna', a childish public persona which was exaggerated by a photograph in *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* (Figure 47). In the picture, her high-waisted white dress is loose-fitting like a girl's. It is short, as are her socks. The relaxed pose foregrounds a black pointe ballet shoe, and she looks upwards, creating an impression of sweet subservience. In costume, pose and character there is much in common between this photograph and the picture of Eileen in her fairy dress, discussed in chapter three. Both aspire to perfect prettiness. Yet there is a certain awkwardness, rising out of that incongruous leopard skin, whose paw hangs down as a limpid, hairy echo of Evelyn's smooth bare leg. In the picture, Evelyn is an overgrown child, an adolescent.

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<sup>43</sup> Debate on the Cruelty to Children Prevention Bill.

<sup>44</sup> 'Red Riding Hood,' *Globe* 27 December 1919, 6.



Figure 47 Evelyn Behenna, 1919 <sup>45</sup>

We have already encountered Little Red Riding Hood as a symbolic child in danger; Eileen was a very young child imperilled by war, but Evelyn faced the sexual dangers of the adult world. Perrault's seventeenth-century version of the story concluded with a clear statement of its intended meaning:

Moral: Children, especially attractive, well bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf.<sup>46</sup>

So *Red Riding Hood* is a warning about the dangers of men, those urban 'wolves who seem perfectly charming, sweet-natured and obliging, who pursue young girls in the street and pay them the most flattering attentions' – in Angela's Carter's translation.<sup>47</sup> Since 'the wolf knows no better', the responsibility falls to Red Riding Hood (and all girls and young women) to protect herself, to remain on the path and not stop to pick flowers.<sup>48</sup>

Evelyn's position on the tipping point between child and adolescent, innocence and knowingness, made her perfect for this part. In 1917, when Evelyn played Red Riding Hood at Hammersmith aged twelve, she was at the school-leaving age, and as her run-in with the licensing laws demonstrated,

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<sup>45</sup> 'Portraits,' *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* 20 December 1919, 21.

<sup>46</sup> Reprinted in Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book* (Longmans, Green and Co, 1889), 53.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Perrault, *The Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault*, trans. Angela Carter (Gollancz, 1977).

<sup>48</sup> Warner, *Beast to the Blonde*, 243.

Evelyn truly was out too late at night, a fact which added an extra frisson of excitement to her performance. At fourteen in 1919, she had magically, legally, sustained her place on the cusp, the exact age when a girl left the real and symbolic protection of school and made her way into the world.

In her histories of interwar girlhood, Sally Alexander has described how the need for ‘protection’ in the years between leaving school and full adulthood ‘meant accompanying daughters or sisters to work or across London, looking out for them’.<sup>49</sup> The threat of ‘seduction’ was present and real. *Little Red Riding Hood* presented interwar audiences with a narrative of these fears. As the title character, ‘Little’ Evelyn Behenna could play out anxieties around fourteen-year-olds walking alone and play with concerns around girls’ maturity, culpability and need for protection. Although we do not know how the pantomime version ended (with a rescue by a woodsman or father?), the story of *Red Riding Hood* offered commentary on live legal questions: at what age should girls leave school? At what age should girls enter the theatre? How responsible are girls for their own seduction? The producers’ choice both times to cast an actor of school-leaving age drew an equivalence between the girl in the story and the real girls onstage and in the audience, thereby amplifying the resonance between the fantasy narrative and real-world fears.

Consider the two versions of the character offered by Evelyn Behenna and Eileen Brock. In the photograph with Rex, Eileen was one of the ‘really little’ children of Peto’s fantasy, very young and genuinely naïve. Her affiliations with the character centred on her vulnerability and fatherlessness. In contrast, Evelyn inhabited the character as a ‘self-conscious’ adolescent of uncertain position – between child and adult, predator and prey. The substitution of a four-year-old with a fourteen-year-old produced new conjunctions between the mythic fairytale and contemporary concerns, and a raft of new significations. It also reminds us to mind the contours *within* childhood, not just its boundaries.

### **Theatrical Children Licensing Committee, 1919**

The condition of delaying the enactment of Section 13 was the establishment of the Theatrical Children Licensing Committee. As well as the administrative processes of licensing and the terms of children’s employment, the committee sought to reconcile the paradox of schoolchildren at work, and determine

whether full-time attendance at school beginning generally at nine in the morning coupled with employment at entertainments ending frequently at a

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<sup>49</sup> Alexander, ‘Memory-Talk,’ 141.



late hour of the night can really be consistent with the welfare of children under 14 years of age.<sup>50</sup>

Every member of the committee supported children's work in the theatre and the foregone conclusion for their investigations was that business should continue as usual: licences had to allow children to work within the existing hours and practices of the theatre industry.<sup>51</sup> In light of the paradox described in the quote above, the only solution was to take children out of school. The Committee represented a serious push-back against the territorialisation of children by the education system. Dyan Colclough has argued that the Committee's compromise between employment and education signified 'an acceptance that protection and access to education were somehow less important for child entertainers than it was for all other children', and consequently 'disenfranchised' stage children by making them an exception.<sup>52</sup>

To support their case, members of the committee used a series of arguments: performance was play, gainful employment, education, and even a medicine. Arguing against giving children fixed minimum holidays, the theatrical teacher and manager Italia Conti wrote, 'some engagements are often in the nature of a holiday or rest to ... a child of poor or invalid parents, living in a city, in crowded and insanitary conditions', repeating the familiar fantasy narrative of stage children escaping poverty, but here appealing to the benefits of fresh air and sunlight rather than the spotlight.<sup>53</sup> She went on to express concern that if weekday matinees were prohibited (to avoid taking children out of school), then managers would not employ children, and this would 'encourage the exploitation of freaks and children of stunted growth of 14 and upwards', thus suggesting that it was children's *physical littleness* which made them so appealing to theatre audiences.

### **Enforcement and avoidance**

The rules for stage children set out in the Education Act 1918, plus the advice from the Licensing Committee, finally came into force on 8 August 1921. Madame Victor maintained her roster of at least eighty children in touring troupes up until pantomime season at the beginning of that year, including a starring role for Evelyn Behenna as Cinderella.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Francis Hamer Oates, Theatrical Children Licenses Committee Report, 4 (1919).

<sup>51</sup> Oates, Theatrical Children Licenses Committee Report, 6. For example, the resistance to having any kind of curfew, 'children should be allowed to take part in entertainments and theatrical plays'.

<sup>52</sup> Colclough, 'British Child Performers 1920–40: New Issues, Old Legacies,' 76; Colclough, 'Child Performers.'

<sup>53</sup> 'Additional Reservations by Miss Conti', Oates, Theatrical Children Licenses Committee Report, 13.

<sup>54</sup> 'Madame Victor's Celebrated Juveniles,' *The Stage* 13 January 1921.

Noel Streatfeild's novel *Ballet Shoes*, set in the 1920s, provides insight into the new administrative processes. Its protagonists, three girls known as the Fossil orphans, are so desperate to earn money that they eagerly anticipate their twelfth birthdays and apply for their licences as soon as they come of age.<sup>55</sup> Streatfeild described in great detail registering with LCC: the curfews, matrons, medical inspections and school certificates.<sup>56</sup> Basil Peto's claim that there was 'all the difference in the world between ten and twelve', took on the quality of a prophesy, as the significance of *twelve* was mutually reinforced by law, practice and culture.

Nevertheless, some children continued to work (illegally) in professional productions despite being far off the age of twelve. In 1927 *The Era's* report on the Margate summer season included,

Little Zona Foster ... [T]he pretty little singer and dancer, who is only six years of age, has also scored an immense success at the Normandie Café, and also with the Peddlers at Cliftonville and the Cabaret Follies at Broadstairs.<sup>57</sup>

Zona's busy performance schedule suggests that these seaside towns didn't enforce the rules too stringently in high season. She was performing alongside her father 'the singing showman drummer and throat whistler' Ed E. Foster, so perhaps his presence was considered protection enough. Oral history interviews have revealed other ways that children bypassed the licensing laws. Hilda Black (born 1918) recalled that 'younger sisters in dance troupes often impersonated older sisters so they could earn'.<sup>58</sup> Nine-year-old John Knight worked as a magician's assistant in 1926, and overcame restrictions by sitting in the audience at the beginning of each show, only coming onstage when the adult magician asked for a child volunteer from the audience.<sup>59</sup>

The report of the Theatrical Licensing Committee had recommended 'almost constant supervision' by approved matrons for girls between the ages of twelve and fourteen; and the 1918 Act had required two further years of watchfulness (in the form of curfews) up to sixteen. However, there were significant regional disparities regarding how much freedom and protection was given to these dancing adolescents. The following advert ran for several weeks in *The Era* in 1923:

Wanted, Eight Girls, aged about 12 to 14 years, for juvenile troupe, with good knowledge of dancing. To be trained at 'The Thorne Academy' free of cost to

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<sup>55</sup> Streatfeild, *Ballet Shoes*.

<sup>56</sup> 'Books for Children,' *The Observer* 8 November 1936, 8.

<sup>57</sup> 'Bandsmen,' *The Era* 14 September 1927.

<sup>58</sup> Hilda Black interview, in Colclough, 'Child Performers,' 78.

<sup>59</sup> John Knight interview, in Colclough, 'Child Performers,' 77.

parents, producer paying all fees, and afterwards live in at Sheerness. Call at 'The Thorne Academy' ... on Saturday between 11.30 and 12.30<sup>60</sup>

This is alarming evidence that twelve-year-old girls were still – with licences – being effectively indentured to troupe managers and taken to 'live in' around the country. At the other extreme, a spa in Bridlington banned 'young children' under fourteen from dancing at social occasions after 8.00pm, following advice from the local Medical Officer.<sup>61</sup>

There were others who thought the new rules did not go far enough. A meeting of the Portsmouth Trades Council and Labour Party in February 1923 revealed the persistent fear that girls aged fourteen were at risk. The education committee had refused a series of licence applications for under-fourteens and, 'was sure the conditions of those over fourteen must be extremely deplorable'.<sup>62</sup> One committee member was concerned

there was a lot of scab companies going about preying on girls in the way of cheap labour ... in the case of one company that came to Portsmouth it was doubtful whether it was a travelling company or a travelling harem.<sup>63</sup>

Spurred by this reference to child prostitution, Portsmouth authorities immediately started an investigation and used by-laws to require supervision to the age of sixteen or even eighteen in some cases.<sup>64</sup>

Lengthening childhoods led to greater subdivision within childhood and the entrenchment of 'adolescence' as a separate phase of development. Again, parliamentary debates and reports provided an official commentary on this socio-cultural shift. The 1926 'Hadow Report' on the Education of the Adolescent recommended that adolescents should be treated differently from younger children, and moved into different schools where they 'will thrive to a new height and attain a sturdier fibre'.<sup>65</sup> The distinction rested on oblique metaphors – 'a tide which begins to rise in the veins of youth at the age of eleven or twelve. It is called by the name of adolescence' – which seemed to refer to physical development and menstruation in particular. Hadow also called for the school-leaving age to be raised another year, to fifteen, which had the practical benefit of keeping 450,000 teenagers out of the labour market during a time of mass adult unemployment. But it also

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<sup>60</sup> 'Artists Wanted,' *The Era* 27 June 1923, 2.

<sup>61</sup> 'Bridlington Ban on Young Dancers,' *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* 4 April 1923, 4.

<sup>62</sup> 'Juvenile Problems,' *Portsmouth Evening News* 2 February 1923, 5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> 'Panto Pixies: Supervising the Welfare of Stage Children,' *Portsmouth Evening News* 24 December 1924, 5.

<sup>65</sup> William Henry Hadow, *Report of the Consultative Committee on the Education of the Adolescent* (H.M.S.O., 1926).

introduced the language of unspecified, fantasy threats back into official discourse: without naming them, Hadow spoke of 'the dangers to which many boys and girls are exposed at a critical period of their lives', if they left school at fourteen.

In dance and performance, the upwards extension of childhood beyond the legal definitions was plainly visible in the *Dancing Times*. This monthly magazine launched a 'Children's Circle' membership club in 1927, intended for 'children aged under seventeen having at least one dance lesson a month' with a fee of five shillings, valid until the applicant's seventeenth birthday.<sup>66</sup> In law, sixteen-year-olds had reached the age of consent and were 'young persons', but in the specialist discourse of the *Dancing Times*, they were explicitly defined *as children* by membership of a specific club. As was happening in the state education system, the increased maximum age of childhood led to more subdivision within childhood. This was most obvious in the formal examinations and competitions in which children were grouped into age-based categories for assessment. The 1927 'All England Sunshine Homes Competition' included the following categories:

- Babies - under 5
- Class A - age 5 - 8
- Class B - age 8 - 12
- Class C - age 12 - 15
- Class D - age 15 - 17<sup>67</sup>

These age divisions map closely onto the structure of state education (preschool; infants; primary; secondary) which was being finessed by a series of Hadow reports and finally enacted in the Education Acts of 1936 and 1944. This suggests how ideas of children's developmental phases were being standardised across institutions and almost all areas of young people's experience. Decades before, children were sorted by other taxonomies, including educational attainment (in elementary schools) or even height; the 'Living Miniatures' who performed in London in 1867 were all children between thirty and fifty inches tall.<sup>68</sup> Dividing children into age groups (a practice so familiar now as to go unnoticed) was an invention of the twentieth century, enforced not only through official channels like Herbert Fisher's Act and William Hadow's Report, but also through the cultural practices of national dance competitions and membership of the Children's Circle.

### **Education (Consolidation) Act 1921**

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<sup>66</sup> 'Children's Circle,' *Dancing Times* 17, no. 200 (1927): 185.

<sup>67</sup> 'Children's Circle,' 187.

<sup>68</sup> Gubar, 'Drama of Precocity,' 67.

This interlude of debate, legislation and licensing has nearly reached its conclusion. I have narrated three decades of legal changes, from 1889 to 1921, spotlighting the regulation of child performers and definitions of childhood.<sup>69</sup> As a finale, I present the Education (Consolidation) Act 1921, which brought together and clarified all previous Acts in one document and firmly enclosed children within the territory of education. It repeated the 1918 regulations on under-twelves, licences and curfews.

But there is a twist at the end of this story. The 1921 Act included an entirely new clause, which was unprecedented in any previous Act or Bill. Rather than tying everything up neatly, the document served up a surprise. Paragraph 100, subsection 1.ii. removed *all restrictions* on the times and ages of performing children,

in the case of occasional sale or entertainment the net proceeds of which are wholly applied to the benefit of any school or to any charitable object.<sup>70</sup>

This new loophole in the law permitted unlicensed child performances of any age, at any time of night, provided that nobody was getting paid. This clause – which I term the charity clause – dispensed with the protective accretions of age limits, licences, matrons and curfews. Under this clause, school pupils could perform late on weeknights, and children under five could return to the stage.<sup>71</sup> Through this clause, the law made a space for the continuation of the very practices it sought to prohibit.

Following decades of gradually tightening regulation, battling lobbyists and shifting public opinions, the charity clause seemed to let it all go at once. In *States of Fantasy*, Jacqueline Rose describes this precise structure, ‘where statehood takes hold and binds its subjects, and then, unequal to its own injunctions, lets slip just a little’.<sup>72</sup> The charity clause is a slip, a letting go of restrictions, which is predicated on a new (fantasy) narrative to keep children on the stage. In this new legislative context, the old fantasy of a poor child dancing her way out of the slums was unsustainable, so a new fantasy was produced to replace it, one of ‘occasional charity’. The words ‘occasional’ and ‘charity’ became alibis for a divestment of protection, and desires to watch children could be fully indulged under the veneer of philanthropy.

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<sup>69</sup> My account has left out many important issues relating to School Meals, children with disabilities, medical inspections, school administration, continuation schools and so on, which I have not discussed here as they are beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Education (Consolidation) Act 1921.’

<sup>71</sup> A similar paradox arose in the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, 1884, which outlawed the training *outside the family* of children under 16 for acrobatics, contortionism and other dangerous acts. Of course, it was within the family that the most cruel training regimes were enforced. Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 103.

<sup>72</sup> Rose, *States of Fantasy*, 14.

A precedent had been set during the war, when children participated in a wide range of entertainments to raise funds and boost morale; from park concerts to military hospitals, children had contributed their talent to the war efforts. And in the immediate aftermath, there were plenty of organisations in desperate need of funds. Britain's particularly active post-war voluntary sector attempted to support returned soldiers and their families as the government reduced pension obligations.<sup>73</sup> A children's version of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* raised over £2000 for the Prince of Wales Hospital through their theatrical efforts (this was the production which so pleased Amy Brock: 'I have never seen anything so good we quite enjoyed it & it was packed').<sup>74</sup> In this sense, the war had reorganised priorities in British culture, in which patriotic philanthropy overrode the previous generation's desire to rescue children from late nights in the theatre. It seems as though, by removing children from the entertainment *industry*, or the marketplace, they were also removed from the reach of the law.

The women's suffrage periodical *Common Cause* had a unique and interesting interpretation of the legislative developments, applauding the fact that 'entrance to [the stage] profession, in itself dangerously alluring, should not be made too easy' for those driven by fame and fortune, while '[w]e may be glad that the Board of Education ... still gives a loophole for the child who has, for herself and the world, the gift of genius' (by allowing her to perform for free).<sup>75</sup> Their particular interpretation held onto late-nineteenth-century ideals of genius and innate talent, and harnessed them to a disdain for financial rewards or crass popularity.

The paradoxes and conflicts of interest created by the charity clause were illuminated by a fracas between councillors, theatre managers and local press over the Christmas fairy play *The Windmill Man* in Hull in December 1928, which proposed to use sixteen children from the local dance school of Miss Joan Broady.<sup>76</sup> The production ran for three weeks, with two performances a day for the first fortnight, then matinees only for the final week, a schedule which was hardly 'occasional'.<sup>77</sup> The children were unpaid and therefore licences were not sought, but because permission was required to remove them from school, the situation reached the attention of Hull LEA School Attendance Sub-Committee. With support from the head teachers of the schools, the Lord Mayor and the

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<sup>73</sup> Michael Roper, 'Little Ruby's Hand: Young Women and the Emotional Experience of Caregiving in Britain after the First World War,' in *Total War An Emotional History*, ed. Lucy Noakes, Claire Langhamer, and Claudia Siebrecht, Proceedings of the British Academy (British Academy, 2020), 6.

<sup>74</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 19 April 1921. 'A Charity Matinee,' *The Stage* 14 April 1921, 12.

<sup>75</sup> 'Children and the Stage,' *The Common Cause* (30 January 1920): 544.

<sup>76</sup> 'Well Into Stride,' *Hull Daily Mail* (1 January 1929): 3. The children in *The Windmill Man's* annual London performances at the Victoria Palace were trained and managed by Italia Conti (whose influence in shaping the law has already been mentioned).

<sup>77</sup> 'To See The Windmill Man,' *Hull Daily Mail* 20 December 1928, 8.

Archdeacon, the committee refused the application, thereby provoking a bitter debate that played out across the pages of the *Hull Daily Mail*. It involved the same questions of talent, opportunity, and the respectability of the theatre heard in earlier discussions, but with the added dimension of charitability and good deeds.

In their defence, the theatre managers argued that the children would be onstage 'not more than ten or twelve minutes', and 'under no circumstances could the children be regarded as wage-earners, as no salaries were paid'. The councillors countered that the performances were not for local charities, but for private profit, and one suggested that a sum equivalent to payment should be donated to charity by the theatre.<sup>78</sup> The *Hull Daily Mail* railed against the interference from the authorities: 'surely as to whether or not the children concerned should receive salaries is a matter for parents'. The newspaper continued to argue that *all work* 'devolves into "exploitation" for "private gain"' and that if the theatre managers were obliged to donate to charity before children could perform there, that would be exploitation also.<sup>79</sup> The show's producers offered to host all the performing children for a special Christmas Day dinner as an act of charity, but the gesture was dismissed by Alderman Dr Webster, who claimed 'such charitable efforts were, in his experience, often in the nature of fisherman's groundbait', i.e. a marketing ploy to attract paying customers. On the 'Letters' page, misunderstanding reigned, with some angry correspondents calling for a ban on all children's concerts, while parents complained that their 'children are prevented from giving vent to their childish aspirations'.<sup>80</sup>

Hull's trouble with 'The Windmill Man' demonstrated how the demand to see children perform onstage, especially in Christmas plays and pantomimes, persisted into the late 1920s, and how theatre managers cooperated with local press to overturn restrictions. The conflict turned on whether children's Christmas holiday activities had anything to do with the education authorities; the law may have defined children purely in relation to school attendance, but not everybody agreed that head teachers and councillors had the final say over children's lives. In the end, the show did go on. The compromise resolution depended on precise interpretation of Section 13 and the charity clause. Three-week licences were issued for eleven of the original children, who were over twelve and would not miss school. All the original children and more besides appeared in an additional performance of *The Windmill Man* staged on Christmas Eve for the benefit of war orphans sourced through the local British Legion.<sup>81</sup> Reviewing this 24 December performance, the *Mail* announced

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<sup>78</sup> 'A Fairy Play,' *Hull Daily Mail* 30 November 1928, 8.

<sup>79</sup> 'The Windmill Man,' *Hull Daily Mail* 6 December 1928, 4.

<sup>80</sup> 'Letters,' *Hull Daily Mail* 10 December 1928, 6; 'Letters,' *Hull Daily Mail* 12 December 1928, 10.

<sup>81</sup> 'To See "The Windmill Man"', *Hull Daily Mail* 20 December 1928, 8.

triumphantly that the production included barely half-a-dozen adults, and listed thirty-four children who had danced in the show, which was 'eminently suitable for a company of juveniles'.<sup>82</sup>

The charity clause was a significant step in the twentieth century's redefinition of childhood as a non-economically productive lifestage, although this extraordinary legislative *volte-face* has to date garnered no attention from historians. The second act of this thesis investigates the industry of children's charitable performances which sprang up in response to the new loophole, with particular and localised attention to the activities of Madame Grace Behenna's Juvenile Jollities.

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<sup>82</sup> 'The Windmill Man,' *Hull Daily Mail* 24 December 1928, 7.



## ACT 2

At 7 o'clock, on the evening of Thursday 10 May 1923, there was a full house in the dining hall of the Mile End Hospital and Institution. Rows of chairs and benches faced a stage at one end of the room, and the front seats were taken by local worthies: The mayor and his wife, local councillors, businessmen, and ladies of the Jewish guilds mixed with hospital management. Behind them sat over 350 'inmates', nurses and porters.<sup>1</sup>

The first performers took to the stage, and the audience's attention was seized by the procession of children, brightly dressed and smiling wide, as they started to introduce themselves as the 'Babies' of Madame Grace Behenna's Juvenile Jollities. As the reviewer from the *East London Observer* reported:

This talented band of children (ranging in age from 4 to 13 years) kept an enthusiastic audience perfectly interested and enthralled for four hours. The programme comprised songs, dances, floral ballet, tableaux, recitations and dialogues. Several of the little artistes made a change of dress no less than twenty times. The Bijou Orchestra, under the direction of Mr P Behenna, contributed largely to the cheerful atmosphere.<sup>2</sup>

After the concert, the Reverend Joseph Stern stood and addressed the crowd; the display, he said, had 'appeared to him to be like the Coliseum Leicester Square, and that it was a great difficulty to realise the difference between the Coliseum and the Institution Dining Hall that evening'.<sup>3</sup>

The second act of Eileen's Brock's childhood played out onstage as a member of Madame Grace Behenna's Juvenile Jollities. For over a year and a half, from January 1925, she took part in at least fifteen substantial concerts, at venues from Cane Hill Mental Hospital in Croydon to the Hackney Empire theatre. She was one of twenty to thirty troupe members who all wore a dazzling array of costumes to sing the latest hits and dance the hottest crazes, getting home past midnight and going to school the next day. To twenty-first-century minds, it is astonishing that children as young as four performed such long elaborate concerts to so many people. What is more, the Jollities reportedly produced enough magic to transform a workhouse dining hall into a West End theatre, and their audiences were *enthralled*.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Concert at the Mile End Hospital and Institution,' *East London Observer* 19 May 1923.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The Jollities were just one of a huge cast of troupes who sprang up after 1921 to take advantage of the charity clause which deregulated children's entertainment. The second half of this thesis presents the performers, producers and audiences who shaped this industry, and shines a spotlight on the bewildering range of fantasies that performing children inspired. Language, costume and choreography transformed ordinary children like Eileen Brock into embodiments of littleness, perfection and hope. Like Tinkerbell, the visions onstage were reflections, produced offstage by hard work and stagecraft.

Performing children have always been, in Steedman's words, 'both the repositories of adults' desires ... and social beings, who lived in social worlds'.<sup>4</sup> The Jollities concerts intentionally blurred the distinction between the two, through a kaleidoscope of costumes, music, and choreography. Their shows included a dizzying array of cultural references and stereotypes: Dixieland songs played on ukuleles by Jewish children in London's East End, followed by a quick change into Japanese costumes for an acrobatic dance accompanied by a group of soldiers playing jazz hits on the saxophone. The problem for this historian is one of focus: to floodlight the wider scene of popular entertainment in the 1920s, which both informed and included the Jollities, while keeping a steady spotlight on the fantasies which fuelled children's performance. My solution to the *mise-en-abyme* of social reality and fantasy is to try, for a short time, to prise them apart and consider them separately, before allowing each to reflect upon the other.

Who were the members of the Juvenile Jollities? Chapter four surveys the population who participated in the concerts and worked behind the scenes. I use a prosopographic analysis of common themes, networks and connections to highlight the main characteristics of the seventy recorded Jollities children and the adults around them.<sup>5</sup> A large proportion of the Jollities performers came from Jewish families, and I consider how the story of this troupe conforms to other histories of the interwar East End, and their narratives of anglicisation and secularisation among the Jewish community.<sup>6</sup> I particularly draw on Susan Tananbaum's scholarship, which addresses the male

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<sup>4</sup> Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 97.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Cunningham, 'Innovators, Networks and Structures: Towards a Prosopography of Progressivism,' *History of Education* 30, no. 5 (2001).

<sup>6</sup> The historiography of Jewish life in London includes; Israel Finestein, 'Joseph Frederick Stern 1865–1934: Aspects of a Gifted Anomaly,' in *The Jewish East End 1840–1939*, ed. Aubrey Newman (Jewish Historical Society of England, 1981); Bill Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry, 1740–1875* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); David Englander, *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain, 1840–1920* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1994); David Cesarani, 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Suburbs: Social Change in Anglo-Jewry Between the Wars, 1914–1945,' *Jewish Culture and History* 1, no. 1 (1998); Benjamin J Lammers, 'The Birth of the East Ender: Neighborhood and Local Identity in Interwar East London,' *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 2 (2005); Adam D Mendelsohn, *The Rag Race: How Jews Sewed Their Way to Success in America and the British Empire* (NYU Press, 2016).

dominance of this historiography by focussing instead on the experiences of women and children arriving or born in London between 1880 and 1939.<sup>7</sup> I conclude that the Jollities were part of the anglicising process; dance lessons and speech training shaped their bodies and voices to more perfectly perform the role of British girlhood.

Chapter five reveals the national scope of children's performance in the 1920s, and addresses why juvenile performances were so popular for adult audiences. Close observation of newspaper articles and reviews demonstrates the dominant motifs of littleness, perfection and miniaturisation, and the related tropes of whiteness, femininity and fame. There are continuities with the appeal of Victorian performing children, but I argue that the Jollities and their contemporaries had particular attractions in the aftermath of the war. My analysis of Jollities' programmes demonstrates how children actively participated in, and contributed to, performance culture in the 1920s, a fact which has been overlooked in histories of the period. Through the Jollities' version of revue, inmates of the Mile End workhouse, Cane Hill mental hospital and the members of the Ancient Order of Druids all encountered Tango, Dixie and jazz.

Chapter six returns the focus to Eileen and the other girls onstage. What were their motivations and fantasies? I use insights from memoir, material culture and psychoanalysis to imaginatively reconstruct children's experience. Using Eileen's solo performance 'Dream Daddy', I bring together the themes of the entire thesis: fantasy family relations, and the use of cultural tropes – dream texts and fairytales – to communicate emotion. The thesis concludes by returning to the costumes in the V&A archive that remain Eileen's most tangible legacy, and the opportunities for escape and enjoyment that they offered.

## Sources and approach

Over a dozen printed programmes for Jollities concerts survive; they include the venues and dates of concerts, as well as the titles of songs, dance numbers, sketches and recitations included in 1925–1926 performances.<sup>8</sup> These are complemented by Eileen's surviving costumes, which provide evidence for the appearance and texture of Jollities' performances, and indicate what the children

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Berkowitz, Susan L Tananbaum, and Sam W Bloom, *Forging Modern Jewish Identities: Public Faces and Private Struggles* (Valentine Mitchell, 2003); Susan L Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880–1939* (Routledge, 2015); Elaine R Smith, 'Class, Ethnicity and Politics in the Jewish East End, 1918-1939,' *Jewish Historical Studies* 32 (1990); Tony Kushner, *Sex and Semitism: Jewish Women in Britain in War and Peace* (Berg, 1993); Lara Marks, *Model Mothers: Jewish Mothers and Maternity Provision in East London, 1870-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Collection of Concert Programmes, V&A Misc.165-1986.

looked like, and how they might have moved. Sheet music and handwritten lyric sheets testify to what the children performed, where their material came from, and how it may have been adapted.

To fill in gaps left by the Brock archive, I turn to contemporary newspapers' accounts and descriptions of variety performance, stories from memoir and fiction, and histories of popular culture. The magazine *Dancing Times*, published monthly throughout the 1920s, provides useful points of elaboration and comparison with the Jollities. With the addition of reports and adverts from the *East London Observer* and *Jewish Chronicle* newspapers, I have been able to build a picture of the Jollities and their activities from 1923 to 1928, a five-year span that includes Eileen's period of participation.

## Chapter 4: Madame Grace Behenna's Juvenile Jollities

The earliest mention of the Juvenile Jollities troupe came in May 1921. A brief report in the theatre industry's weekly newspaper *The Stage* included the line that 'Grace Behenna's Juvenile Jollities are featuring a number of Feldman songs'.<sup>9</sup> It cannot be a coincidence that Evelyn Behenna's older sister Grace established a children's variety troupe. Evelyn's success under the management of Madame Victor had shown there was an audience for child performers, and demonstrated how they might be trained and promoted. Perhaps Madame Victor was a mentor of sorts for Grace; after Victor's death in 1927, Grace dedicated *in memorium* notices 'in affectionate remembrance' of the older woman.<sup>10</sup> However, Madame Grace Behenna – as she became – belonged to a new generation of managers, who operated in a different theatrical and legal landscape.

Grace Behenna was born in 1892 in Kilburn, North London. This was a background of modest means: at the time of the 1911 census, aged nineteen, Grace lived and worked as a draper's assistant with fifty-seven other young women at the premises of Messrs Davies in Bayswater.<sup>11</sup> Grace was not a dancer and actress like her sister, but an elocution specialist. As a teenager, her performances comprised recitations of poetry and 'musical monologues', accompanied by piano.<sup>12</sup> In 1916 (the year that Evelyn started performing for soldiers) Grace married James Edwin Behenna, possibly a distant relation. James had been in the territorial army before the war and volunteered again on 24 September 1914, serving in France from March 1915. He was granted ten days leave for the wedding, though he was suffering from scabies at the time, so their enjoyment was probably compromised.<sup>13</sup> The couple soon moved to Hillside Road, Stoke Newington, and their only child, Denis, was born in early 1920.<sup>14</sup> Within a year of giving birth, Grace Behenna had established the children's troupe that she would manage for nearly forty years: the Juvenile Jollities performed under her continuous management until at least 1960.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'Song Notes,' *The Stage* 12 May 1921.

<sup>10</sup> Grace Behenna, 'In Memorium,' *The Stage* 11 April 1929, 2.

<sup>11</sup> 'Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911', digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), Grace Behenna, RG14/1045; The National Archives.

<sup>12</sup> 'Brondesbury Pleasant Saturday Evenings,' *Kilburn Times* 29 March 1907, 6. 'Concert at Shirehampton,' *Western Daily Press* 2 March 1914, 5.

<sup>13</sup> 'British Army WWI Service Records, 1914–1920', digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), James Edwin Behenna; The National Archives. 'London, England, Marriages and Banns, 1754-1921', digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), Saint Stephen, Paddington, P87/STE/008; London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>14</sup> 'England & Wales, Birth Index: 1916-2005', digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), s.v. 1920, Hackney, Denis Behenna; General Register Office.

<sup>15</sup> A poster advertising a Jollities concert in 1954 was posted on a Stoke Newington History twitter account, Trudy Robins, 'Poster for Juvenile Jollities,' in *@HistoryofStokey* (11 Dec 2015).

<http://twitter.com/HistoryOfStokey/status/675582450668609536>. An interviewee whose mother was friendly

Eileen and Amy Brock first saw the Jollities in concert in January 1923, at St Matthew's Hall Clapton.<sup>16</sup> Although the printed programme looked professional, there were suggestions that the troupe were still finding their feet. An item titled 'The Coming of the Seasons' was prefaced with the caveat, 'our First Attempt at a Ballet, after only 3 Months Tuition'.<sup>17</sup> The format of this concert set the pattern for the rest of the decade: twenty-four children performed forty-six different items including recitations, two dramatic scenas, and a series of national dances as well as the aforementioned ballet. The programme announced: 'Madame Grace Behenna wishes to make known that the Children will be pleased to give their Services for any Charity'.<sup>18</sup> This is confirmation that Behenna astutely positioned her troupe within the loophole of the charity clause. Unlike her predecessor Madame Victor, Behenna did not pay her performers, but instead donated their labour to good causes.

No documentation survives of how the Jollities were funded, but it is likely that Behenna charged for the children's elocution and dance training, and retained some income from concert ticket sales to cover her costs. How much the children (or their families) paid we do not know; very few teachers printed their prices, and those who did varied widely. The nearby Bodleian House Academy in Clapton Common offered 'a special class for Toe-Dancing ... every Saturday. Fee £1-5-0' for a ten-week term. Plain dancing classes were much cheaper at 15 shillings per term.<sup>19</sup> This was a mid-market price for London lessons. Cheaper options included children's ballroom dancing classes on the King's Road, Chelsea at 6d each, and in Hendon, Madame Nicholls charged 3s. per month for lessons and fancy dress balls (half the cost of the Clapton academy). More expensive options in West London included 'refined ballroom dancing' with Oliver Curzon, and ballroom and ballet with Eileen Dell (both charged the equivalent of 3s. per lesson). The most exclusive were Tacchomo Studio's 'kallirhythmic' methods, which cost 35s for 10 lessons.<sup>20</sup>

As well as the price range, these listings suggest the heterogeneity of children's dance classes in the early 1920s. Dance teachers capitalised on this variety, and offered lessons in ballroom, ballet and character dancing (of the sort seen in musical theatre). For the more serious-minded, there was the scientific approach of Eurhythmics. The Children's Guild of Song and Dance had the ambition to

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with Grace Behenna, remembers the troupe was still running when she left home in 1960. Maureen Williams, 'Interview: Memories of the Juvenile Jollities,' interview by Alice Sage, 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Programme, V&A MOC/BROC/1/5

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Programme, MOC/BROC/1/5

<sup>19</sup> Programme, MOC/BROC/1/7

<sup>20</sup> 'Dancing Lessons for Children,' *Hendon and Finchley Times* 15 December 1922; 'Children's Ballroom Dancing Class,' *West London Observer* 15 June 1923; 'Dancing for Children,' *West London Observer* 15 June 1928; 'Constitutional Hall,' *West London Observer* 10 February 1922.

spread its historically-rooted revival of folk dance 'to all Elementary schools in London'.<sup>21</sup> But one ambitiously hegemonic institution had its sights set on the diverse ecology of interwar children's dance. The Association of Teachers of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain (AOD, later to become the Royal Academy of Dance) was established in London in 1920, with the aim of improving ballroom and ballet dancing in Britain, and creating a national style by radically reforming dance training for children.<sup>22</sup> Within five years, the AOD brought in systems of training for dance teachers, and a series of standardised examinations and national competitions to 'improve and assess' dance in schools across the country.<sup>23</sup>

Three thousand dancers entered the AOD's first under-twenty-one's solo competition in 1923, proving the widespread participation in dance classes.<sup>24</sup> Very soon, regional competitions and AOD-qualified teachers were established around the country. Competition winners were showcased at the 'Sunshine Matinees' in London, with all profits from ticket sales going to the Sunshine Homes for Blind Babies, in keeping with the requirements of the charity clause.<sup>25</sup>

In December 1926 the *Dancing Times* stated that 'there are some thousands of parents in this country whose children are having lessons in dancing'.<sup>26</sup> And these thousands of dancing children found willing public audiences for their charity performances, from Edinburgh to Eastbourne and Whitechapel to Kensington. One Glasgow dancing school attracted a huge crowd to its annual Children's Ball on 9 April 1927: 'spectators numbered about two thousand and dancers over three hundred'.<sup>27</sup> In Piccadilly, the fashionable restaurant Prince's presented weekly children's shows on Saturday afternoons. A gossip columnist for *The Bystander* surely exaggerated with reports of *hundreds* of little girls dressed as flowers or Japps or Russians or even Scotch, and *thousands* of proud mamas and people to watch them perform'.<sup>28</sup> Performances could demand high ticket prices (with income going to charity, of course). Tickets for a cabaret and Charleston competition 'performed entirely by society children, between the ages of four and fourteen' cost 12/6.<sup>29</sup> That

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<sup>21</sup> 'Child Dancers,' *Daily Herald* 18 December 1920.

<sup>22</sup> Derek Parker, *The First Seventy Five Years* (Royal Academy of Dancing, 1995), 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> 'Anniversary Edition,' *Dancing Times* (1999).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> 'All About the Children's Exams,' *Dancing Times* December 1926, 300.

<sup>27</sup> 'Provincial Notes,' *Dancing Times* 17, no. 200 (1927): 225.

<sup>28</sup> Blanchette, 'If Wembley Comes,' *The Bystander* 23 April 1924, 54. Emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup> 'Theatrical Gossip,' *The Era* 15 June 1927, 8. 'Society Children's Cabaret,' *Western Morning News* 30 June 1927, 6.

was more than a day's wages for a skilled manual worker.<sup>30</sup> *The Era* listed seven of the girls, all daughters of aristocrats and admirals.<sup>31</sup> The pupils' wealth and celebrity meant photographs of 'Society Children's Cabarets' frequently featured in society press, including *The Sketch* magazine, thus further increasing their aura of glamour.<sup>32</sup>

### Who were the Jollities?

Although a total of seventy children were listed as members of the Juvenile Jollities between January 1923 and February 1927, it is difficult to find official records for many of them (see Appendix 1). With only one exception, they were all born after 1911 (so do not appear in that year's census) and many of their names were too popular to identify their birth records conclusively (e.g. Sadie Goldstein, Ethel Jones). However, a significant proportion can be traced through immigration, birth and school records, and the 1939 Register, which was a survey of the civilian population at the outbreak of the Second World War.

We can draw some conclusions about the composition of the troupe. The youngest children in the Jollities were four years old, and the oldest were fifteen. The average age was around nine.<sup>33</sup> And the Jollities was essentially a troupe of girls. In five years, only three boys participated: Denis Behenna, the son of Grace Behenna; Laurie Page, whose father and sister were both involved in the troupe; and Ray Rubenstein, who was not obviously related to any other members, but appeared only twice, in October 1925 and January 1926.<sup>34</sup>

Each concert involved between eighteen and twenty-nine named performers, and the *corps* of Jollities performers was in constant flux. Though some children remained core members throughout the whole period, others came and went as their lives developed. The turn of the academic year saw the greatest changes, with thirteen new children performing in October 1925.<sup>35</sup> Some children left the Jollities when they started secondary school; Eileen Brock left in 1926, the year she started at

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<sup>30</sup> 'Society Children's Cabaret,' *The Era* 22 June 1927, 6. For a breakdown of weekly wages in industry in 1925, see Average Weekly Wages, (Hansard, 30 July 1925).

<sup>31</sup> 'Society Children's Cabaret.'

<sup>32</sup> This had also been well-established during the war at events like Margaret Morris's matinees, which included many young heiresses who grew up to be the Bright Young Things of London society in the 1920s. The balletomane crowd included Penelope Spencer, the Baddeley sisters, Kathleen Dillon, Elsa Lanchester, Joan Lawson and Betty Scorer as well as future composer and choreographer Constant Lambert. Robinson, 'Penelope Spencer (1901–93) Dancer and Choreographer: A Chronicle,' 39. 'Children Dance to Help Children: The Vacani Matinee,' *The Sketch* 22 June 1927, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Date of birth information has been found for twenty-eight children - see Appendix.

<sup>34</sup> Laurie became a professional saxophone player in dance bands in the late 1930s. 'Two Car Loads of Instruments,' *Norwood News* 20 December 1935, 6; 'The Latest in Rhythm,' *Norwood News* 13 March 1936, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Programme of Grand Concert, V&A Misc.10-1986



Clapton County Secondary. Some went to join other troupes: Rita Grant and Nellie Green, for example, who belonged to the Jollities in 1925, were both listed as performers with 'Mesdames Saville and Sharp' in February 1926.<sup>36</sup>

Like the fictional Madame Fidolia in *Ballet Shoes*, Grace Behenna provided training for children who wanted to graduate to paid performance at age twelve. Enid Page was launched professionally in a touring show as the 'junior Marie Lloyd', just weeks after her twelfth birthday in 1929, but she had started as a member of the Jollities at least as early as April 1924, when she was described as 'a mere babe of only six summers'.<sup>37</sup>

Other girls stayed on with Madame Behenna beyond the age of twelve, although their roles could develop. In contrast to the 'almost constant supervision' recommended by the Theatrical Licensing Committee Report, adolescent members of the Jollities were given positions of responsibility.<sup>38</sup> The choreographer for the January 1923 concert was fourteen-year-old Miss Linda Plumb (born 1908), who went on to establish her own dance school in Slough two years later, with Madame Behenna's assistance.<sup>39</sup> Other teenage girls acted as accompanists on piano or violin, or featured as lead dancers in the ballets.

The list of seventy members includes at least fifteen sets of siblings, and sisters were often paired for performances. Clarice and Stella Stone (both born in Camberwell to Israel Stone and Florence née Solomons) performed the popular duets 'Tea for Two' (Irving Caesar, 1925) and 'I'm a Little Bit Fonder of You' (Irving Caesar, 1926), as well as solos and company dances. Betty and Kitty Fortuin were joined by their sister Millicent as well as their cousins, Catherine and Millicent Moscow, who were often grouped together. Having sisters perform together had practical advantages – they could rehearse at home, and benefit from sisterly support and rivalry. Family members in the audience might also have expected and enjoyed it.

### **The role of adults in the Jollities**

Though the Jollities onstage were children, a large troupe of adults worked behind the scenes, both professionals and keen parents with performance experience like Eileen's mother. Amy Brock invested considerable time, money, and dressmaking skills to purchase fabric and make costumes

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<sup>36</sup> 'Concert for Home for Aged Jews organised by Mr and Mrs Sam Levy,' *Jewish Chronicle* 5 February 1926.

<sup>37</sup> 'Regent Theatre Barnstable,' *North Devon Journal* 25 July 1929, 4. P, 'Miss Linda Plumb's Pupils at Slough,' *Reading Observer* 7 June 1924, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Oates, Theatrical Children Licenses Committee Report.

<sup>39</sup> P 'Miss Linda Plumb's Pupils at Slough.'

for her daughter, she played the piano during some rehearsals and was responsible for providing sheet music.<sup>40</sup>

There were a number of professional adult performers involved in the Juvenile Jollities' productions. One long-term contributor was Eugene Francis, a musical director and stage manager who led his own vaudeville troupe called the Chocolates. Francis had worked with Evelyn Behenna since 1916, and shared his stage-managing talents with her older sister throughout the 1920s. On occasion, children from the Jollities – including Eileen Brock – were 'borrowed' for Chocolates concerts. Another member of the Chocolates, Johnny Leoni, sometimes shared Jollities stage management credits with Francis. A third Behenna sibling led the 'bijou orchestra' which 'cleverly accompanied all the numbers on the programme'.<sup>41</sup> In his professional life, Sergeant Percival James Behenna (born 1897), known as Percy, was conductor of the Royal Artillery Band Octet.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the leadership of Grace and Percy, there was never any mention of Evelyn Behenna in the Jollities programmes or reviews. In 1921, the year the Jollities were first mentioned in the press, fifteen-year-old Evelyn was striving to establish a professional career. After pantomime stardom as Cinderella in 1921, she had a successful summer season in Westcliff, but then had 'more than her share of ill-luck ... the day before the season ended she fell and broke her wrist', and then in October underwent an operation for appendicitis.<sup>43</sup> Evelyn returned to the stage for the following two seasons, including as headline comedienne for the Chocolates in 1922, but then her story ended tragically. After a 'long illness', Evelyn died on 7 April 1924 aged only eighteen.<sup>44</sup> With sad irony, Evelyn's early death meant she never achieved an adult performing career. Announcing her death, *The Stage* anticipated, 'she will be remembered as a child in ... pantomimes, where she played Red Riding Hood with success'.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout her sister's illness and after her death, Grace Behenna continued to manage and promote the Jollities. After Linda Plumb departed to Slough, Behenna enlisted Miss Madge Martin to arrange the dances. The Jollities were not Martin's only employment; she also choreographed the semi-professional Metropolitan Police Minstrels, and advertised her services as Ballet Mistress in

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<sup>40</sup> Grace Behenna, 30 August 1925; Grace Behenna, 20 December 1925; Grace Behenna, 8 June 1925. Amy Brock's ability to provide specified sheet music at short notice was proven during the war and its aftermath, when she despatched the required scores, hidden within newspapers, to her husband and brother-in-law on service overseas.

<sup>41</sup> 'Concert at Mile End.'

<sup>42</sup> 'In Memoriam,' *The Stage* 7 April 1927, 2.

<sup>43</sup> 'Belfast,' *The Stage* 13 January 1921, 2.

<sup>44</sup> 'Miss Evelyn Behenna,' *The Stage* 10 April 1924, 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

*The Stage* newspaper (Figure 48).<sup>46</sup> Between them, the group of Francis, Leoni, Martin, and Percy and Grace Behenna, had experience in a range of light-entertainment genres from the military band to minstrelsy and pantomime.



Figure 48 Advertisement for Madge Martin<sup>47</sup>

The Jollities benefitted from the contributions of the troupe members' parents, who, as well as providing performers and paying tuition fees, booked concerts, sold tickets, and bought and/or made costumes. In 1924 the troupe's piano accompanist was Mrs Greene, whose daughters Pearl and Nellie were in the troupe. Occasional stage manager (and full-time insurance agent) Joseph George Page was the father of troupe members Laurie and Enid.<sup>48</sup> Jessie Coombes' father made large props for comedy sketches, which included a wedding cake and motor car.<sup>49</sup>

Other parents were instrumental in organising concerts; they used their positions in networks of local charities and societies to book venues and sell tickets. Hilda Schiska's mother Rosetta organised the Jollities' 1923 and 1925 concerts at the Mile End Hospital and Institution.<sup>50</sup> She was a well-known and active philanthropist for a number of causes alongside her brother, Councillor Isaac Goldstein.<sup>51</sup> Harry Moscow was secretary of the Metropolitan Hospital Jewish Aid Society, and in that capacity he organised concerts to showcase the Jollities, including his daughters Catherine and Millicent and his nieces Betty, Kitty, and Millicent Fortuin. Philanthropic endeavours could be deeply

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<sup>46</sup> The Metropolitan Police Minstrels were a black-face group made up of service policemen, who were managed in the 1920s by pantomime dame Clarkson Rose. 'Police Minstrels,' *The Era* 11 January 1923, 10. 'Police Minstrels,' *West London Observer* 26 December 1924, 12. Rachel Cowgill, 'On the Beat: The Victorian Policeman as Musician,' in *Music and Institutions in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul Rodmell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> 'Miss Madge Martin,' *The Stage* 21 January 1926, 2.

<sup>48</sup> 'Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911', digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), Joseph Page, 103/2999; The National Archives. '1939 England and Wales Register' digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), Joseph Page RG101/39J; The National Archives.

<sup>49</sup> Programme, V&A Misc.165-1986

<sup>50</sup> 'Concert at Mile End.'

<sup>51</sup> 'Mile End Old Town Board of Guardians,' *Jewish Chronicle* 18 May 1923.

personal: Harry Moscow's daughters' performances raised money for the hospital where his wife (their mother) Annie had died in 1921.<sup>52</sup>

This staff of adults behind the scenes generally went uncredited. Amy Brock could not have been the only mother who contributed to the production of the troupe's 150 costumes. During concerts, women were on hand to help children in and out of their dresses. From 1928 to 1931, Sylvia Mindel (born 1914) assisted backstage, where she supervised the children, 'and made sure they were spick and span and their costumes were alright', only stopping when she started full-time work aged seventeen.<sup>53</sup> Although these wardrobe assistants were usually overlooked in acknowledgements, a report of a Jollities concert in 1936 explicitly mentioned three women (Mrs Gregory, Mrs Coward and Mrs Scott) as 'dressers to the children'.<sup>54</sup> There were helpful supporters even at the periphery of the group's activities, for example Behenna's favoured shop-girl Miss Clark, who worked at Harry Spokes drapers, and ensured that the dancers got the right sewing patterns.<sup>55</sup>

## Demography

Almost all the Jollities children lived within a small area of the Metropolitan Borough of Hackney, including Dalston, Stoke Newington, Clapton and Stamford Hill. These were inner suburbs, mostly residential areas of Victorian terraces, which swelled at the end of the nineteenth century as the population of London moved outwards, well-served by public transport. There was a significant range of wealth in Hackney, from the poorer fringes of Bethnal Green in the south, up to the wealthier parts of Upper Clapton and Stamford Hill, though as slum clearances got underway in the mid-1920s, the contrast became less distinct. *The New Survey of London Life and Labour* (1932) claimed one in five of the population of Hackney was middle-class; which the *Survey* vaguely defined based on the male head-of-household's profession or earnings of over £250 per year.<sup>56</sup>

Among the Jollities families there was a range of employment and possible incomes that cut across definitions of the upper-working class and lower-middle class. Typically for the northern parts of the borough, many Jollities' fathers were tradesmen, clerks or small shop owners. Winnie Edridge's father was a glassblower, and Queenie Oakes's father was an electrotype finisher. The Moscow

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<sup>52</sup> 'Metropolitan Hospital Jewish Aid Society,' *East London Observer* 24 March 1923.

<sup>53</sup> Ruth Mindel, Email, 10 January 2018.

<sup>54</sup> 'Madame Grace Behenna's Concert,' *Buckingham Advertiser and Free Press* 25 April 1936, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Costume list, V&A Misc.165:26-1986

<sup>56</sup> London School of Economics and Political Science, *The New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol III: Survey of Social Conditions. The Eastern Area* (P. S. King & Son, 1932), 31. An analysis of the class definitions and survey methodology can be seen in, Simon T Abernethy, 'Deceptive Data? The New Survey of London Life and Labour 1928-31', *Working Papers, Department of Economic and Social History at the University of Cambridge* 16 (2013).

sisters and Hilda Schiska had fathers working as travelling salesmen, as Eileen Brock's had been before the war.<sup>57</sup> There is no clear information about Amy Brock's income after Will's death. She would have received a paltry Widow's Pension (as long as she remained unmarried), but it would not have been enough to support her and Eileen.<sup>58</sup> Without further evidence, we can only assume that she had family support and probably informal income (from lodgers and sewing, perhaps) alongside any state provision or private insurance. Eileen's participation in ballet, and later attendance at secondary school, is evidence of Amy's stable middle-class status, whatever the financial realities. However class lines may have divided them, all the Jollities' families were united by having a certain amount of disposable income to pay for weekly dance classes, and the additional expense of shoes and costumes.

And just as class was not synonymous with income, so also was it complicated by ethnicity and nationality. Approximately half the Jollities troupe came from Jewish families, which is to be expected for their area of London. By 1929, a third of the East End's Jewish population had moved out of Stepney and Bethnal Green (which was home to 83% of London's Polish and Russian Jews in 1911) to the 'richer pastures' of Stoke Newington and thereabouts, 'or via the north-west passage into Golders Green and Hendon'.<sup>59</sup> The girls of the Jollities troupe were the daughters of the 'upwardly-mobile middle-class' sections of this community, familiar from Jewish interwar histories by Elaine Smith, Jerry White and others.<sup>60</sup> We must mind David Cesarani's warning, though, not to overestimate the wealth of families moving out of Whitechapel to the inner suburbs: they often lived in shared houses and had the same low-paid jobs as previously.<sup>61</sup>

A significant percentage of the Jollities families worked as tailors, drapers, sack manufacturers, and outfitters. The *schmutter* or rag trade was an 'ethnic economy' with a large proportion of Jewish members.<sup>62</sup> It was simultaneously 'a distinct, closed world, complete with its own language, customs and rhythms', and a large-scale, profitable industry which fuelled 'economic ascent across generations'.<sup>63</sup> Louis Maister (father of Jollities performers Frances and Raie Maister) arrived in

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<sup>57</sup> According to the 1921 census, Stoke Newington in fact had the highest concentration of commercial travellers in London, with 21 men in 1000 working as salesmen. A P Baggs, Diane K Bolton, and Patricia E C Croot, 'Stoke Newington: Growth Between the World Wars', vol. 8, *A History of the County of Middlesex* (Victoria County History, 1985).

<sup>58</sup> Janis Lomas, 'Soldiering On: War Widows in First World War Britain', in *Home Front*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> Cesarani, 'A Funny Thing Happened'; Jerry White, *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East-End Tenement Block 1887-1920* (Random House, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> White, *Rothschild buildings*.

<sup>61</sup> Cesarani, 'A Funny Thing Happened', 8.

<sup>62</sup> Mendelsohn, *Rag Race*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Freedland, *Jacob's Gift: A Journey into the Heart of Belonging* (Hamish Hamilton, 2005), 115.

London from Lithuania before 1905 and set up a workwear company in Princelet Street in Spitalfields. He was well placed to benefit from the 'khaki boom' of government uniform contracts from 1915, and in 1923 the Maisters moved to a 'spacious house' in Finchley Road.<sup>64</sup> Sylvia Mindel's father Barnet (born 1880 in Dunlovich, Russia) was described in a family memoir as 'a tailor [who] went from nothing, an immigrant who slept under the table in a sweatshop, to owning his own store'.<sup>65</sup> His middle-aged respectability also included a place on the board of Stoke Newington Synagogue and at the local lodge of the Grand Order of Israel. The Mindels were described by contemporaries as members of 'the Jewish bourgeoisie', a characterisation which would have applied to many of the Jollities' Jewish girls.<sup>66</sup> For many of the Jollities girls' families, this ascent had started two or three generations earlier, before the Aliens Act 1905 restricted the immigration of European Jews. Isaac Fortuin was a master draper; his grandparents came to London from Amsterdam in the early 1850s, and brought up their children in Tewkesbury Buildings, a densely populated tenement for recent arrivals next to Aldgate East station.<sup>67</sup> Wendy Warman's father Angel (born 1885) grew up in the nearby Gloucester Buildings, with parents who had migrated from Krakow, Poland.

The demographic and biographical patterns outlined confirm that the group of children who made up the Jollities troupe had much in common: mostly girls born around the time of the war, they grew up within a small area of north-east London with a high proportion of Jewish immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe. They would have attended the same London County Council elementary schools and applied for the same scholarships at the County Secondary. Their families had historical connections to the East End and they had current links with the garment and cloth trades. Madame Behenna's classes and the public concerts brought together a group of adults and children who already had much in common, and provided a forum for their creative and organisational talents.

## Performances

The printed programmes in the Brock archive have preserved the dates and venues for fourteen Jollities concerts, and information about twenty more can be found in the *Jewish Chronicle*, *East London Advertiser* and other newspapers. The resulting list of thirty-four performances between 1923 and 1928 highlights the range of concerts the Jollities presented (see Appendix 2).

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<sup>64</sup> Cesarani, 'A Funny Thing Happened', 8.

<sup>65</sup> Freedland, *Jacob's Gift*, 41; 'Barnet Mindel', *Jewish Chronicle* 9 May 1975, Obituaries, 15.

<sup>66</sup> Freedland, *Jacob's Gift*, 241.

<sup>67</sup> 'Census Returns of England and Wales, 1881', digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), Isaac Fortuin, RG11/443/111; The National Archives.

Consequent to the charity clause of the Education (Consolidation) Act 1921, every single one of the Juvenile Jollities' shows in this period was advertised as a charity concert. The appearance of great beneficence to children's charities, hospitals and community groups had a practical basis, as it ensured that Behenna's troupe complied with the prohibition of children's commercial performance.<sup>68</sup> The Jollities' entire mode of operation used the loophole created by this law, from the printing of their programmes (which always prominently featured the charity name) to the reliance on volunteer helpers and keen parents. The law made it possible for Behenna to take payment as a teacher and cover her costs, but not for any of her performers to be paid. Instead of performing for their own financial benefit, children were expected to perform for the emotional benefit of others.

I am not suggesting that Grace Behenna exploited the children in her troupe, or that their charitable aims were cynical, but the charity clause authorised very young children to return to the stage, and provided a narrative of 'occasional charity' to justify the law's own contradictions. Madame Behenna was one of the many teacher-managers of the 1920s who had to ask themselves how to interpret the term 'occasional'. A worried correspondent to the *Dancing Times* in 1927 reported that her local authority had particularly stringent views – 'The Borough Education Officer appears to think that no child may appear at a public entertainment under the age of 12' – and went on to outline her pupil's main forms of unpaid performance: a Fairy Pantomime; the Saturday Concerts in the Town Hall; individual pupils were lent for other concerts; and individuals pupils were provided to theatres.<sup>69</sup> It seems understandable that the Education Officer might interpret these performances as 'regular' rather than 'occasional'.

The *Dancing Times* – a voice of authority within the dance community – published an extensive response for the benefit of 'many teachers all over the country', reassuring its readers that:

The law is concise and very much to the point. In effect it says 'you must not employ a child under twelve for purposes of singing, playing or performing *for profit*' ... It goes on to say that the restriction is not applicable in the case of an occasional entertainment, the net proceeds of which are wholly applied for the benefit of a school or charitable object.<sup>70</sup>

The *Dancing Times* sounded a warning note for its readers:

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<sup>68</sup> Education Act 1918 and Education (Consolidation) Act 1921

<sup>69</sup> 'Children and Public Entertainments,' *Dancing Times* May 1927, 195.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

The exploitation of children is a matter which lends itself readily to abuse and consequent injury to the little ones – for it is the little ones with whom we are concerned, children under the age of twelve years.<sup>71</sup>

‘The little ones’ were portrayed as the most vulnerable, subject to abuse and injury. However, instead of proscribing their display, the 1921 law diverted the display of under-twelves into an apparently non-commercial system of ‘charitable’ performance. Behenna’s ‘little ones’ were booked frequently to appear across London from Bloomsbury to Walthamstow, and in venues as diverse as mental hospitals, swimming baths, theatres and the workhouse.

## Public concerts



Figure 49 Theatrical ephemera, including poster for The Juvenile Jollities, 12 April 1926<sup>72</sup>

The poster in Figure 49 advertises the Juvenile Jollities’ ‘Grand Variety Entertainment’ at Walthamstow Baths on Monday 12 April 1926, in aid of the Children’s Country Holiday Fund.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Children’s Circle.’

<sup>72</sup> ‘Lot 728 Collection of Theatre Posters,’ 2016, accessed 15 July 2020, <https://www.the-saleroom.com/en-gb/auction-catalogues/bishopandmiller/catalogue-id-bishop10021/lot-069acd2e-81a1-4378-a6ff-a5fc010e409a>.



Walthamstow was a rapidly growing town on London's fringes (now part of the London Borough of Waltham Forest), slightly further north-east than the Jollities girls' homes in Stoke Newington. The municipal baths building had been enlarged in 1923 and acted as the local theatre, hosting film screenings, public meetings and entertainments.<sup>73</sup>

Three ticket prices are listed: one, two or three shillings each, which represented a significant outlay – for comparison, a child's cinema ticket at the time typically cost only sixpence.<sup>74</sup> With these prices, the Jollities were hoping to attract a relatively prosperous audience. The Jollities' usual finishing time past 11.00pm also excluded manual workers from attending. One commentator on pre-war musical theatre explained how later concerts attracted 'a rather different grade ... they were men who have not to be up at four or five o'clock in the morning', i.e. they were not labourers, dock or factory workers.<sup>75</sup>

We may assume that the audiences for the Jollities' concerts at King George's Hall in fashionable Bloomsbury in central London (2 March 1925, 31 October 1925) were even more affluent. These events, and another at the grand Hackney Empire music hall (19 April 1925) were organised by Harry Moscow in aid of the Metropolitan Hospital Jewish Aid Society.<sup>76</sup> In February 1927, the Jollities provided 'the greater part of the programme' at a concert at the Rivoli in Whitechapel, in aid of the Jews' Hospital and Orphan Asylum.<sup>77</sup> The Rivoli, a 'huge and luxurious' picture palace, functioned as both theatre and cinema, with thrice-daily performances by the 'Rivoli Varieties' interspersed with silent movies, in a programme 'oriented to Ashkenazi tastes' that drew custom across the city from the West End.<sup>78</sup> The concert organisers may have welcomed children, but their true target was adults with some disposable income: as well as ticket sales, subscriptions were solicited to help raise the charity's annual target of £25,000.<sup>79</sup>

These benefit concerts for Jewish charities at upmarket venues were well-placed to attract wealthy philanthropists from the Anglo-Jewish elite. Describing the locations and social hierarchies of Jewish

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<sup>73</sup> 'Walthamstow: Local Government and Public Services,' in *A History of the County of Essex*, ed. W R Powell (Victoria County History, 1973). 'Walthamstow High Street Baths,' Walthamstow Memories, February 2014, accessed 15 July 2020, <http://www.walthamstowmemories.net>.

<sup>74</sup> Poulsen and Tabor, *Scenes from a Stepney Youth*, 91.

<sup>75</sup> Testimony by Thomas Skelmerdine, theatre architect, 1892 quoted in Russell, *Popular Music in England 1840-1914: A Social History*, 97.

<sup>76</sup> Programme of the Fourth Annual Concert, 19 April 1925. V&A Misc.165:6-1986; Programme of Grand Concert, 2 March 1925. V&A Misc.165:3-1986.

<sup>77</sup> 'Jews' Hospital and Orphan Asylum,' *Jewish Chronicle* 18 February 1927, 26.

<sup>78</sup> Gil Toffell, 'Cinema-Going From Below: The Jewish Film Audience in Interwar Britain,' *Participations* 8, no. 2 (2011): 532. The Rivoli is cited as the most upmarket of Whitechapel's many cinemas in Poulsen and Tabor, *Scenes from a Stepney Youth*.

<sup>79</sup> 'Jews' Hospital and Orphan Asylum,' 26.

leisure in interwar London, Gil Toffell concluded that 'only a handful of Jews born in the East End would ever gain entry to the social circles of West London'.<sup>80</sup> But as performing members of the Jollities, children born in the East End had access to spaces of entertainment and leisure that they could not access as audience members. The troupe's patrons who *did* have access, for example the well-connected Harry Moscow, could make introductions and open doors.

The Jollities was not the only group of performing children fundraising in the East End. A juvenile performance at Limehouse Town Hall in 1926 raised money for the Boys and Girls Life Brigade Fund and hoped to give 'the boys and girls a holiday camp this year'.<sup>81</sup> However, the Jollities were exceptional in the frequency of their concerts and their professionalism – as evidenced by their printed advertisements, reviews and programmes.

## Hospitals

In an alternative model of charitability, the Jollities also played concerts for the patients at hospitals of various kinds; rather than raising funds, these concerts were acts of direct charity, bringing entertainment to those considered in need. Between 1923 and 1928, the children visited the Mile End Hospital and Institution, Cane Hill Mental Hospital, Horton Mental Hospital, the Home for Aged Jews and the Home and Hospital for Jewish Incurables.<sup>82</sup> These venues were pieces in the 'patchwork' of care provision described by Susan Tananbaum, in which voluntary hospitals in London operated alongside the borough-provided workhouse and LCC-funded mental institutions.<sup>83</sup>

The only local venue on that list was the Mile End Hospital and Institution, a combined workhouse and poor law hospital where the Jollities performed on 10 May 1923 and 17 February 1925. Entertainments were exceedingly rare at the workhouse, in fact the Jollities' events in 1923 and 1925 are the only concerts of any kind mentioned in the institution's Minute Books.<sup>84</sup> On these two exceptional occasions, the Jollities had an audience of adults: '350 male and female inmates', the staff of workhouse and hospital, and twenty-five other local dignitaries including the Mayor of Stepney, councillors and aldermen, and members of the Board of Guardians.<sup>85</sup> Only two children were listed as audience members: Harold Schiska and Nat Goldstein, the sons of the organisers.

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<sup>80</sup> Gil Toffell, *Jews, Cinema and Public Life in Interwar Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018), 9.

<sup>81</sup> 'A Boys' Brigade Concert,' *East London Observer* 10 July 1926, 3.

<sup>82</sup> 'Concert at Mile End.,' Programme, *The Chocolates*, 21 November 1925. V&A Misc.165:11-1986; Programme, *The Chocolates*, 16 January 1926. V&A Misc.165:13-1986; 'Home for Aged Jews,' *Jewish Chronicle* 11 February 1927; 'Home and Hospital for Incurables,' *Jewish Chronicle* 13 January 1928.

<sup>83</sup> Susan L Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880-1939* (Routledge, 2015).

<sup>84</sup> Mile End Board of Guardians, Minute Book 82, StBG/ME/82, London Metropolitan Archives, 85.

<sup>85</sup> 'Concert at Mile End.'

About 24% of Mile End's patients were Jewish, and the Institution had a reputation for 'liberal' policies towards Jewish inmates, making provision for worship and diet.<sup>86</sup> So although it was not formally a religious institution, this particular workhouse had a place in Jewish East End networks. The Home for Aged Jews at Wandsworth Common in the south and the Home and Hospital for Jewish Incurables in Tottenham to the north were also rooted in the East End; both had been established in Hackney in the nineteenth century and moved away to larger premises in the twentieth, just as their Jewish patrons and patients were doing.<sup>87</sup> The Jollities' performances actively contributed to these institutions' continued relevance to the families of the East End and the next generation of Jewish children.

Much further from home was the concert at Horton Mental Hospital on 16 January 1926. Eight of the Jollities, including Eileen Brock, travelled to Epsom in Surrey to appear alongside Eugene Frances's group, The Chocolates.<sup>88</sup> Horton was a large, purpose-built institution overseen by Medical Superintendent John Robert Lord. In December 1925 (a month before the Jollities visited) there were 265 male and 1658 female patients, who came from all over London for specialist care 'in surroundings equal to those that obtain in the best general hospitals ... under the best conditions that can be devised for early recovery'.<sup>89</sup> Many were suffering with the effects of syphilis known as 'general paralysis of the insane', which was treated by inducing malaria using specially bred mosquitos (an innovative invention before penicillin).<sup>90</sup> In 1926, hospital inspectors

found the day rooms prettily decorated with flowers and plants and [they] were particularly pleased to notice that the wards for the more restive and turbulent patients were decorated in the same way and with the same care.<sup>91</sup>

Horton had a well-equipped concert hall, and a 'most excellent programme of entertainments on the Friday and Saturday of each week throughout the winter months'.<sup>92</sup> Dr Lord's fondness for children's performances dated back to Horton's days as a war hospital, when, in his own words

the entertainments and concerts of 1916 were noteworthy, because of the occasions on which children's parties were the principle contributors ... juvenile

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<sup>86</sup> Marks, *Model Mothers*, 221, 23.

<sup>87</sup> 'Home For Aged Jews,' *Lost Hospitals of London*, accessed 15 July 2020, <https://ezitis.myzen.co.uk/nightingale.html>; 'Jewish Home and Hospital for Incurables,' *Lost Hospitals of London*, accessed 15 July 2020, <https://ezitis.myzen.co.uk/jewishhospitalandhome.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Programme, 21 November 1925; Programme, 16 January 1926.

<sup>89</sup> Visitor's Book, 1902 - 192-, Horton Mental Hospital, London Metropolitan Archives, 19 December 1925.

<sup>90</sup> Douglas Bennett, 'Review: Asylum, Hospital, Haven – A History of Horton Hospital By R. Valentine,' *British Journal of Psychiatry* 171, no. 3 (1997).

<sup>91</sup> Visitor's Book: November 1926.

<sup>92</sup> Visitor's Book: 25 November 1926.

entertainments, costume dancing, and revues from children's dancing classes, too, were always a source of delight to the soldier.<sup>93</sup>

At both Mile End and Horton, Eileen Brock and other Juvenile Jollities entertained audiences of hundreds of adults, who qualified for this act of charity through their poverty or sickness. But we can imagine the atmosphere at Horton being quite different from the Mile End hospital. I wonder how much of the hospitals the Jollities children were able to see on their way to and from the concert halls, how much they understood about what these institutions were, and how they reacted to their encounter with interred patients, restive or not.

### **Clubs and associations**

Around half of the Jollities' thirty-four recorded performances in 1923–28 were for the membership clubs and societies which proliferated in the East End in the 1920s, as part of an intense, locally-centred cultural life. Clubs – along with schools, libraries, places of worship, concert halls and the cinema – strengthened bonds of family and friendship, and fostered allegiances based on politics, religion and occupation.<sup>94</sup> The Jollities concerts fitted into varied programmes of events for their members: at the Samaritan Social club, the Jollities appeared a week after a lecture on 'The Theatre and Broadcasting', and were followed by a dance at the Hotel Great Central.<sup>95</sup> At Berner Old Boys' Club, the Jollities were preceded by Miss G. E. Macpherson on 'Some personal experiences during the Russian Revolution'.<sup>96</sup>

It is rarely recorded whether the Jollities' club performances were for men, women or children. Their audiences were probably mixed, their concerts intended as family-friendly events for the members. It was rare for Behenna's troupe to be booked to play for only children, although in March 1927 they had an audience of 300 pupils of the Old Ford and North Bow Religious Classes, after the chief Rabbi of the British Empire had given an address.<sup>97</sup>

The majority of the Jollities' venues in this period were Jewish clubs, including the Samaritans' Social Club, the Jewish Institute, Excelsior Social and Literary Club, Netherlands Choral and Dramatic Club, Hutchison House Lads' Club, Stepney Jewish Lads' Club, the Mile End Supporting Society, the Jews

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<sup>93</sup> John Robert Lord, *The Story of the Horton (County of London) War Hospital: Epsom* (W Heinemann, 1920).

<sup>94</sup> Elaine Rosa Smith, 'East End Jews in Politics, 1918-1939: A Study in Class and Ethnicity' (PhD University of Leicester, 1990), 16.

<sup>95</sup> 'Samaritan Social Club,' *Jewish Chronicle* 22 February 1924.

<sup>96</sup> 'Berner Old Boys' Club,' *Jewish Chronicle* 25 February 1927. The same week as the Jollities, the Jewish Institute provided lectures on 'Matchmaking', 'Turkish Stories and Story Tellers' and 'The Economic and Hygienic values of good lighting in the Home, Office and Factory': 'The Jewish Institute,' 28 November 1924.

<sup>97</sup> 'Junior's Tea and Concert' in January 1926 'Hutchison House Lads' Club,' *Jewish Chronicle* 8 January 1926. 'Old Ford and North Bow Religion Classes,' *Jewish Chronicle* 11 March 1927.

Free School Old Boys' Club, the Berner Old Boys' Club and The Workers Circle Social and Literary Section.<sup>98</sup> Some were explicitly attached to synagogues, including the South Hackney Synagogue Social and Literary Society, the Old Ford and North Bow Religious Classes, the East London Synagogue Ladies' Guild and the Stamford Hill Ladies' Guild.

The concert which most underscores how integrated the Jollities were in Jewish social life is their appearance at Circle House on Tuesday 27 April 1926, the headquarters of the Workers Circle.<sup>99</sup> This organisation was established to 'strengthen secular Jewish working class life and culture', and their Great Alie Street address included a publishers, an insurance collective to fund unemployment benefits and funerals, a secular Sunday school, and free legal advice. By the late 1920s, Circle House was a centre of radicalism and anarchism rooted in Bundism (secular Jewish socialism).<sup>100</sup>



Figure 50 Ticket for the Juvenile Jollities concert at Circle House, 27 April 1926.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Harold Pollins, 'Netherlands Club,' *Shemot* 10, no. 1 (March 2002). The Samaritan's Social Club was probably named for ethnoreligious group (not the Samaritans charity established in 1950s). The Mile End Supporting Society's work was: 'reinforcing the relief work of the local authorities ... in the form of medicine, food, groceries and milk ... Above all, unleavened bread is supplied, no fewer than 12,000lb. of motzas being distributed last year [1922]'. 'Morris Sapir in East London,' *East London Observer* 8 September 1923, 2. Only two of the Jollities' hosts were not Jewish-run clubs: the LBS Social and Literary Club and the Ancient Order of Druids. This men's brotherhood, established to strengthen 'sentiments of sociability and ... masculinity', included children in a Junior branch, and provided events for couples and families. Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 140.

<sup>99</sup> Avril Emmanuel and Johann N Neem, *Democracy, Participation and Contestation: Civil Society, Governance and the Future of Liberal Democracy* (Routledge, 2014).

<sup>100</sup> David Rosenberg, 'London's Revolutionary Yiddishland,' *Verso Blog*, 2 December 2016, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2981-london-s-revolutionary-yiddishland>.

<sup>101</sup> MOC/BROC/1/5

One of the founders of the Workers Circle was Morris Mindel, the future father-in-law of Jollities performer Sylvia Mindel, and since he 'spent almost every night of the week at Circle House', he may have seen Sylvia perform there in 1926.<sup>102</sup> Who was watching alongside him? In his memoir, Charles Poulson (born 1911, of the same generation as the Jollities girls) described the Workers Circle regulars as 'elderly men in dark clothes, stiff starched shirt-collars and heavy black hats', who debated politics in a mixture of Yiddish, English, and gesticulation.<sup>103</sup> But the Circle had considerable numbers of younger members, and the Social and Literary Section which organised the Jollities show also arranged river trips and weekly concerts, 'to try and raise the cultural level of the members'.<sup>104</sup> The Jollities concert was part of a recruitment drive for the club: members were given free tickets to invite a non-member friend (Figure 50). The stage at Circle House was very small (as shown in Figure 51), so the twenty-nine Jollities who performed that night must have half-filled the auditorium themselves!

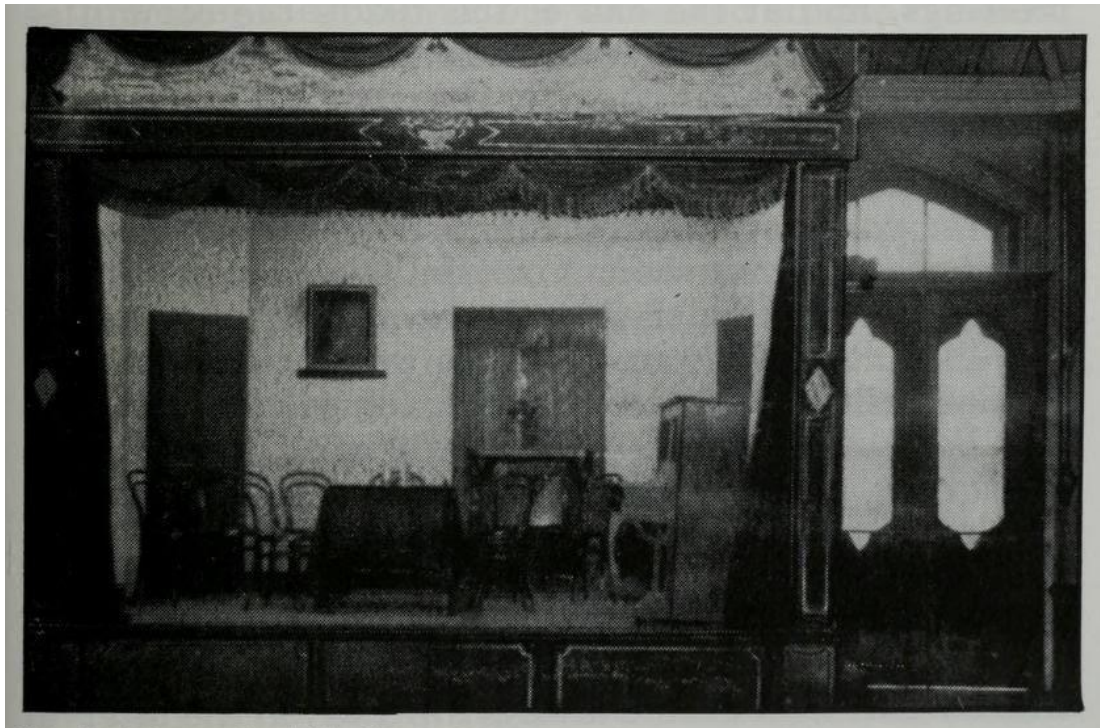


Figure 51 The stage at Circle House, Alie Street, Whitechapel.<sup>105</sup>

Remarkably, the Jollities' concert at Circle House took place the day after miners across the country ceased work, and the Trade Unions announced a General Strike to begin on 3 May 1926, a day which

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<sup>102</sup> Freedland, *Jacob's Gift*.

<sup>103</sup> Poulson and Tabor, *Scenes from a Stepney Youth*, 94.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Poulson and Tabor, *Scenes from a Stepney Youth*, 93.

was 'awaited like a prophesied End of the World'.<sup>106</sup> The Jollities were not the only dance troupe carrying on as usual under the weight of the strike. An account of another juvenile performance from early May 1926 made direct comment on the incongruity of watching a children's performance during a time of civil unrest, but the reviewer found some humanity in the irony:

The performers, ranging in age from four years to those just in their teens ... were too young to appreciate the industrial conflict, the signs and noise of which were evident a few yards from the hall, and it was most amusing to see how the young performers looked round the hall to see whether their proud fathers and mothers were taking notice of them. It was all very human and made one regret that the 'Merrie Month of May' should be overcast by the shadow of a general strike and the inevitable bitterness consequent on it.<sup>107</sup>

Rather than a straightforward sense of escapism from the social hardship outside, this quote suggests how children's performances might emphasise shared human qualities – of pride, amusement, youthful self-involvement – over the differences explicit in the political conflict.

Histories of the Jewish clubs often emphasise their role in the radical political activities of the East End, but this picture also needs to include the presence of children, indeed gentile girls like Eileen Brock, who gained access to these members' spaces through her membership of a different but complementary group – the Juvenile Jollities. Remembering the Jollities' performances in the run-up to the historical events of May 1926 is to recognise how 'very human' day-to-day life continued to be even at fraught times, including having fun and showing off.

## Assimilation

In June 1927, the Jollities performed at the East London Synagogue after the AGM of its Ladies' Guild. Afterwards, the Reverend Joseph Stern stood and officially 'thanked Madame Behenna and her artists', just as he had four years earlier at the Mile End Hospital and Institution.<sup>108</sup> Stern was a well-known and controversial figure in the East End.<sup>109</sup> Known as the 'Jewish Bishop of Stepney', he was described in about 1900 as 'much respected and his energy and devotion are great'.<sup>110</sup> From 1919, he promoted 'reconstruction', the paternalistic notion that wealthy Jews from the West End could contribute work and money to 'raise the spiritual standards of East End Jewry'.<sup>111</sup> By 1923 he

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<sup>106</sup> Graves and Hodge, *Long Weekend*, 163-4.

<sup>107</sup> 'Bright Entertainment,' *Croydon Advertiser and East Surrey Reporter* 8 May 1926, 5.

<sup>108</sup> 'East London Synagogue Ladies' Guild,' *Jewish Chronicle* 17 June 1927.

<sup>109</sup> Finestein, 'Joseph Frederick Stern.'

<sup>110</sup> Marc Michaels, *East London Synagogue: Outpost of Another World* (Kulmus, 2008), 46.

<sup>111</sup> Smith, 'Class, Ethnicity and Politics,' 358.

was both Minister of East London Synagogue and Chair of the Stepney Board of Guardians. Stern was, then, a well-connected and significant patron for the Jollities, who could bestow approval on the troupe from the Anglo-Jewish establishment. Stern's repeated presence raises questions about the ideological composition of the Jollities' audiences, and how ideas like reconstruction found a place at their concerts.

As Russian-Polish Jews arriving in the East End in the late 1800s, the Jollities' girls' parents and grandparents had been the focus and products of various assimilatory processes over several generations. The Fortuin girls' father Isaac went to the Jews Free School, a 'hot-house of assimilation' where Jewish children from the Whitechapel ghetto were taught *in* English and *to be* English.<sup>112</sup> Drawing on the Mindel family's experience, Jonathan Freedland describes the process of assimilation as,

not an ideology or a theory but a tacit, even unconscious process. Immigrants found themselves modifying their clothes, trimming their beards and eventually changing their names out of what they imagined was convenience.<sup>113</sup>

We can find examples of this among the Jollities members: five-year-olds Joyce and Pearl Kalisky were promoted with anglicised names as 'The Kay Twins' in the troupe's programme.<sup>114</sup> Despite the high proportion of Jewish children in the troupe and demonstrably close ties with Jewish organisations, the Jollities' performances were remarkably anglicised: they presented songs and poems in English, never Yiddish, and they concluded their concerts with 'God Save the King'. Acts of 'convenience' and compliance might be self-protective strategies. Joanna Bourke has shown how East End Jewish clubs were targets of the growing forces of anti-Semitism, from the Aliens Act 1919 which required Jewish 'aliens' to carry identification, to the activities of the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s.<sup>115</sup>

The only feature of the Jollities' performances that indicated the Jewishness of Behenna's troupe was their scheduling: out of thirty-four concerts, fifteen were on a Sunday night, and not a single one was on a Friday, thus in observance of the Shabbat (which extended from dusk on Friday to sunset on Saturday). The only concerts which involved work during the day on Saturday were those

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<sup>112</sup> 'Introduction' in Israel Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto* (Black Apollo Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>113</sup> Freedland, *Jacob's Gift*, 57.

<sup>114</sup> Collection of Concert Programmes, 1923-1928. V&A Misc.165-1986. '1939 England and Wales Register', digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), Joyce Kay; The National Archives. 'England & Wales, Birth Index: 1916-2005', digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), Joyce Kalinsky, Volume 1c, Page 9; General Register Office.

<sup>115</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Working Class Cultures in Britain, 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (Routledge, 2008), 160-3.



at Cane Hill and Horton Mental Hospitals (which started at 5.30pm and would have required considerable travelling); this may explain how the smaller group of eight girls were selected for those occasions, as they were probably not Jewish. If anything, the Jollities had a secular identity. The frequency of their Sunday night concerts certainly conflicted with Christian orthodoxy and put them in alignment with the National Sunday League, a secular organisation established in the mid-nineteenth century to promote edifying leisure and entertainment on Sundays for working-class audiences. The link between the Jollities and the League was direct: in the mid-1920s, if Percy Behenna was not playing with the Jollities on a Sunday evening, he appeared at the Hammersmith Palace in the League's concerts.<sup>116</sup>

Historiographies of the period can help to understand the Jollities' practices, and their place in the wider picture of Jewish life in interwar London. Two prominent (and contested) storylines could be summarised as the anti-Semitism of tolerance and the birth of the East Ender.<sup>117</sup> The first was established by Bill Williams' seminal study of Jewish Manchester. Williams described how the city's precarious acceptance of Jews was conditional on their conforming to English cultural and political norms. In this 'ideology of toleration', working-class and recently immigrated Jews were monitored and policed by Anglo-Jewish elites through a system of patronage and charity which encouraged the 'correct' behaviours by awarding the well-behaved and withholding from the 'unruly' or unassimilated.<sup>118</sup> Tananbaum has identified the same structure at work in London, particularly in the Jewish social clubs which she claims represented 'anglicisation's second front', and who patronised the Jollities so frequently.<sup>119</sup> The Anglo-Jewish establishment – typically living in West London – consciously promoted anglicisation of East End Jews, using compulsory education and charities to produce 'good little English children'.<sup>120</sup> The Boards of Guardians, Philanthropic Societies and the

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<sup>116</sup> 'N.S.L. The Palladium,' *The Stage* (13 August 1925): 19. Although their heyday was the late Victorian period, the League held concerts on Sundays until the outbreak of the Second World War. *Music and Victorian Liberalism: Composing the Liberal Subject*, ed. Sarah Collins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 58.

<sup>117</sup> I am restricting my discussion here to just two narratives which are most relevant to the Jollities in the 1920s, but there are of course multiple historiographical narratives of Jewish life in London between the wars, including the rise and fall of the Communist Party, the dissolution of the Jewish working class, and the battles against fascism in the 1930s. See Smith, 'Class, Ethnicity and Politics.'

<sup>118</sup> Antony Kushner, 'Bill Williams and the Jewish Historiography: Past, Present and Future,' *Melilah* 3 (2006); Williams, *The Making of Manchester Jewry, 1740-1875*; Bill Williams, 'The Anti-Semitism of Tolerance: Middle-class Manchester and the Jews, 1870–1900,' in *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Cultural Production and Social Policy in Manchester*, ed. Alan Kidd and Kenneth Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 77.

<sup>119</sup> Tananbaum, *Jewish Immigrants*; Susan L Tananbaum, 'Philanthropy and Identity: Gender and Ethnicity in London,' *Journal of Social History* (1997).

<sup>120</sup> Susan L Tananbaum, 'Making Good Little English Children: Infant Welfare and Anglicization Among Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880-1939,' *Immigrants & Minorities* 12, no. 2 (1993).

Supporting Societies who patronised the Jollities were the mechanisms through which this paternalism was enacted.

The second historiographical narrative is the birth of an 'East Ender' identity between the wars, as a geographical self-awareness which encompassed a wide spectrum of local cultures. I am not concerned here with debating the origin of that identity, however, the Jollities co-operation between Jewish and non-Jewish interests certainly aligns with Benjamin Lammers's claim that interwar changes in work, leisure and politics brought Jews and non-Jews into 'new sites of personal contact'.<sup>121</sup> The Jollities brought together Jewish and non-Jewish children and adults in surprising places: the Rivoli cinema, the Home for Aged Jews, even the Workers Circle. In Lammers's account, 'this expansion of horizons began in the schools of the London County Council' and continued in the cinemas of the 1930s.<sup>122</sup> Although he rightly gives children a significant role in forging an East End in which place overshadowed religion in individual identities, his story overlooks the way that children of the 1920s physically moved into new spaces: their widened horizons were not always defined by the cinema screen or teacher's blackboard. In the Jollities we can see that young East-Enders took part in works of cultural production and actively spread and mixed cultural norms and ideas, and did not just consume them.

### **Voice training**

It was not just the bodies of these young Londoners that occupied unexpected places, but their voices too. Unlike the pantomime fairies of the Edwardian stage, the children in the Jollities were not silent; they were vocal actors who sang and spoke aloud. The Jollities' performances included recitations and readings alongside songs and dancing. The programme for 31 October 1925 began with an item titled, 'The Babies Introduce Themselves', in which the troupe members spoke directly to the audience. A scrap of paper in the archive, inscribed in Grace Behenna's handwriting, preserves a rhyming couplet composed specifically for Eileen to recite: 'Good Evening Everybody – I am Eileen Brock – and if you do not like my voice I hope you'll like my frock' (Figure 52).<sup>123</sup> The audience also heard the spoken voices of the Jollities children in a group comedy sketch which finished the show, and three solos in between: Wendy Warman performing 'Haschish', Kitty Fortuin reciting 'Girls' and Nora Doran reciting 'Tis'nt Worth It'.<sup>124</sup> Eileen's tongue-in-cheek reference to the audience *not* liking her voice introduced the intriguing possibility that the audience might find aural *displeasure* in the

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<sup>121</sup> Lammers, 'Birth of the East Ender,' 337.

<sup>122</sup> Benjamin J Lammers, 'The Citizens of the Future: Educating the Children of the Jewish East End, c.1885-1939,' *Twentieth Century British History* 19, no. 4 (2008); Lammers, 'Birth of the East Ender,' 338.

<sup>123</sup> Programmes, V&A Misc.165-1985

<sup>124</sup> Programme of Grand Concert, 31 October 1925. V&A Misc.165:10-1986.

children's singing and recitation, but suggested how compensation might be found in the visual spectacle of their decorative costumes.

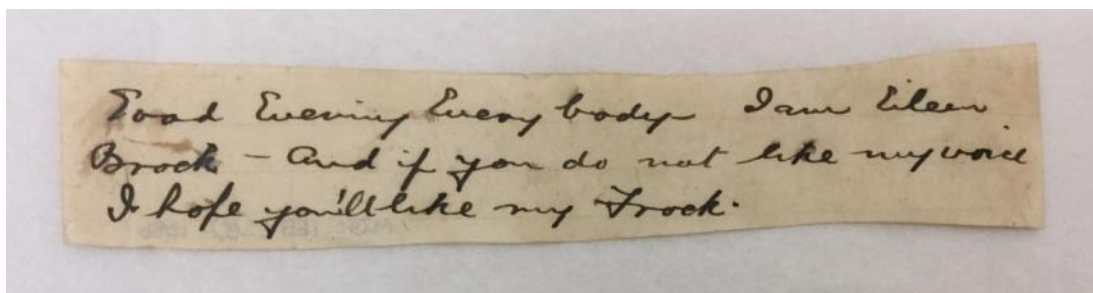


Figure 52 Handwritten script by Grace Behenna, 1925.<sup>125</sup>

The joke is wittier when we recall that Grace Behenna's specialism was training voices. As a teenager she performed alongside a children's singing group at a charity concert, and in the years before establishing the Jollities she was mentioned frequently in press notices as an 'elocutionist'.<sup>126</sup>

Eileen's parents also encouraged their daughter to develop her voice from a young age. Before his daughter's fourth birthday Will wrote to Amy, 'am glad Eileen sings and recites so well I was hoping she would'.<sup>127</sup> Behenna may have been helping the ten-year-old Eileen to further fulfil those hopes.

Theorists of the voice describe how its meanings overflow beyond the content of the words spoken or lyrics being sung. In *A Voice and Nothing More*, his study of the voice as a Lacanian 'partial object' akin to the gaze, Mladen Dolar located the voice in the gap between language and the body; it comes from within yet exists outside.<sup>128</sup> Although there are 'measurables', including intonation, volume and accent, voices are rarely quantified. Roland Barthes used the term 'grain' to describe this qualitative nature of the voice, the texture which marks one performer out from another. Barthes described grain as the 'encounter' found in every performance between a voice and language: 'It is ... the *diction* of the language'; i.e. how the language speaks.<sup>129</sup>

Including aspects of timbre, volume, pitch and inflection, the grain and accent of the Jollities' children's voices would have been meaningful for their audiences, revealing much about their origins and education. In short, their class. Remembering his childhood in 1930s Hoxton (an inner suburb of London of comparable poverty and density to Whitechapel), Brian Magee wrote that, 'class-consciousness was at its most acute about accents'.<sup>130</sup> This fact was not lost on Grace Behenna,

<sup>125</sup> Scrap of paper, V&A Misc.165:25-1986

<sup>126</sup> 'Concert at Kingsbury,' *Hendon and Finchley Times* (11 December 1908): 8.

<sup>127</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 27 January 1919

<sup>128</sup> Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (MIT press, 2006), 19.

<sup>129</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (Fontana, 1977), 181.

<sup>130</sup> Magee, *Clouds of Glory*, 222.

whose own distinctive diction impressed itself on the children in her troupe. Paul Williams, who attended Behenna's classes in the early 1950s and whose mother was Behenna's friend, always assumed that 'she was from a more affluent background from us'.<sup>131</sup> Barbara Windsor described her speaking 'with a posh voice through half an inch of make-up'.<sup>132</sup> Grace Behenna was neither affluent nor posh, but her voice – well-trained and sculpted as it was – led people to believe otherwise. There were two main constituencies for elocution training: children looking forward to a theatrical career in which voice training was a professional tool, and children aiming for secondary school scholarships. Sometimes, as in the case of Eileen Brock, these two motivations overlapped.

From the late nineteenth century until the 1930s, elocution lessons were delivered in elementary schools through the memorisation and recitation of poems. As Catherine Robson's *Heartbeats* makes clear, these activities were intended to have extrinsic and intrinsic benefits, training the voices of working-class children while also improving their minds, as they absorbed the high ideals of carefully chosen verses.<sup>133</sup> Though their aims were ostensibly benign, teachers' efforts to produce voices which pleased their middle-class tastes can be seen as coercion of working-class children. E. P. Thompson saw the regulation of voices as symptomatic of the rise of industrial capitalism, as 'pressures towards discipline and order extended from the factory ... into every aspect of life: leisure, personal relationships, speech, manners'.<sup>134</sup> Through mass schooling, the voice became a beyond-bodily mark of social class, a measure of refinement, civility and status. There was a market, then, for elocution lessons offered by 'institutions and individuals who deliberately blazoned their ability to facilitate class rise' to attract 'socially aspirant parents who could not afford full-time private education for their children'.<sup>135</sup> If they could not afford the education, they could at least achieve the voice. Many of the Jollities came from upwardly-mobile lower-middle-class families whose children aimed for scholarships at fee-paid secondary schools: precisely the clients for after-school voice improvement. Indeed, Robson sees after-school elocution classes as the stronghold of 'juvenile recitation ... in Britain long after the state's education system had discarded it'.<sup>136</sup>

For Eileen's generation, the new technology of radio promoted ever-increasing awareness of pronunciation, enunciation and diction. From its foundation in 1922, the BBC shaped how English was spoken and perceived, through the use of standardised 'BBC English' accents in both

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<sup>131</sup> Paul Williams, Email, 26 January 2018

<sup>132</sup> Nigella Lawson, 'There'll Be No Moaning from Our Bar,' *The Spectator* 28 September 1990, 35.

<sup>133</sup> Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats: Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>134</sup> E P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 2002 [1963]), 401.

<sup>135</sup> Robson, *Heart Beats*, 263.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

programmes and announcements.<sup>137</sup> In 1925, Director General John Reith officially brought in policies to promote ‘correct pronunciation’, i.e. non-localised accents, among its broadcasters.<sup>138</sup> Ironically, this upper-class public-school accent came to represent a standardised classlessness.<sup>139</sup>

According to Dwight Conquergood, elocution was ‘coextensive with sartorial codes, like dress it was a way of displaying social status and class background’.<sup>140</sup> This pairing of costume and accent is an interesting echo of Eileen’s introduction, in which voice and frock were paired as objects of enjoyment for her audience. To follow sartorial codes appropriately requires a certain level of self-conscious cultural knowledge, and the same can be said for voices. As a historian of performance and slavery, Conquergood’s analysis of elocution introduces the important dimension of race, which is often missing from British histories. Elocution, he wrote, was the ‘pre-eminent performance of whiteness’; those who spoke with white voices were more likely to be heard.<sup>141</sup> London elementary schoolteachers were accountable for the decline of the Yiddish language among second generation immigrants. Ruth Adler, growing up in Stepney in the 1920s, was told she must anglicise at home and school alike: ‘speak English, read English and *dream* in English’.<sup>142</sup> According to Jollities member Paul Williams, Behenna did focus specifically on characteristic speech patterns that marked the Jewish children in the troupe. He recalled

Madame Behenna correcting the way some of them tended to say ‘goingk’ and ‘sittingk’ etc, a habit probably picked up from their parents or grandparents who had usually come from Eastern Europe.<sup>143</sup>

Shaping the children’s voices – smoothing away the giveaway grains – was what Behenna was being paid for. This was the micro-level mechanisms of anglicisation, through word-by-word correction that erased the marks of Yiddish from Jewish children’s voices.

Elocution lessons for poor but talented children were explicitly mentioned during the debates on the regulation of stage children in the 1918 Education Bill. The Conservative M.P. Basil Peto suggested children ‘be taken to special surroundings where their elocution, their language, their accents ... can

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<sup>137</sup> Asa Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 222; David Burnley, *The History of the English Language: A Source Book* (Taylor & Francis, 2000), 316.

<sup>138</sup> Lynda Mugglestone, *Talking Proper: The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 273.

<sup>139</sup> Jürg R Schwyter, *Dictating to the Mob: The History of the BBC Advisory Committee on Spoken English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

<sup>140</sup> Dwight Conquergood, 'Rethinking Elocution: The Trope of the Talking Book and Other Figures of Speech,' *Text and Performance Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2000): 327.

<sup>141</sup> Conquergood, 'Rethinking Elocution,' 331.

<sup>142</sup> Copperman et al., *Generations of Memories: Voices of Jewish Women*, 13.

<sup>143</sup> Paul Williams, Email, 26 January 2018

be specially attended to'.<sup>144</sup> To Peto, 'special surroundings' meant separation from working-class parental influence. Education reformer Margaret McMillan offered 'special surroundings' in the form of a nursery school in South London. In *Education Through Imagination* (1923) she decried the 'rough, strained, ugly voices' of the Deptford children and described how she had introduced voice training.<sup>145</sup> McMillan's own voice (like Grace Behenna's) had been shaped by her stage training in the 1880s, and she drew connections between the sound of the voice and the inner world of the speaker: 'children reproduce the tones they hear ... [and] doubtless share in doing so the emotional life of the persons around them'.<sup>146</sup> So voice training was part of an holistic emotional and cultural education for the children in McMillan's Deptford school. A visitor in 1927 heard,

a few of the older children act a Shakespeare scene. This was a most wonderful experience. To listen to these little slum children expressing themselves in clear, good English ... was proof positive of what Margaret McMillan can do.<sup>147</sup>

The Jollities girls were not slum children, but for some the slums were in recent family memory. In her troupe, Behenna provided 'special surroundings' that included and welcomed parental involvement, and opened up new opportunities for the girls who cared to learn. Sylvia Mindel joined Behenna's troupe to perform recitations rather than dances. She had a 'love of English and reading which was encouraged by her mother', and was recommended to Behenna after impressing her school teachers in poetry performances.<sup>148</sup> In later life, Sylvia remembered this aspect of the classes above all else, even passing to her own daughter 'a medal she was presented with for her elocution of which she remained very proud'.<sup>149</sup> In the eyes of Sylvia's family, the voice-trained Jollities girls 'were going up in the world ... [they] got the ability to mix and speak and know what to say and when. It was an opportunity that was made available to them'.<sup>150</sup> For Sylvia Mindel, elocution training offered the immediate enjoyment of performance and poetry, as well as long-term opportunities for social 'improvement'.

Maureen Williams's mother (who spoke with an Irish accent herself) sent Maureen to Behenna for elocution lessons in the 1950s because

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<sup>144</sup> Debate on Clause 13 of the Education Bill.

<sup>145</sup> Voices were such a preoccupation to McMillan that Carolyn Steedman dedicates a whole chapter to them in her biography.

<sup>146</sup> Steedman, *Margaret McMillan*, 216-18.

<sup>147</sup> E E Hunter, 'Where the Slum Baby Thrives', *New Leader*, 21 October 1927, quoted in Steedman, *Margaret McMillan*, 215.

<sup>148</sup> Ruth Mindel, Interview, 4 May 2018.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

she didn't want me to talk like a cockney. And she knew, she was bright enough to know, a lot in those days depended on your accent, so I can put on the best cockney accent but I can also talk like the queen.<sup>151</sup>

Maureen's training with Grace Behenna gave her a range of voices like costumes that could be put on and taken off, but it is significant that Maureen describes her cockney accent as 'put on' as well as her posh one. Elocution lessons had implications far beyond the stage of the Jollities' concerts; they trained children to perform at all times.

## Conclusion

The fantasy slip of the charity clause in the Education Act 1921 effectively allowed dance teachers to display their youngest children, at any time, to large public audiences. This opportunity was embraced by Madame Grace Behenna and the Jollities' patrons, in their frequent and large-scale concerts which often charged for admission. Though the troupe and its managers' must have had commitment to helping the young, old and infirm, it was the legislative changes which made charitable activities an essential alibi for Jollities and groups like them.

The fantasy of 'occasional charity' had a strong middle-class bias: only children who *did not need to earn* could appear on the stage; they were not exploited, the story went, for they were well-brought-up young ladies who were choosing to be there, indeed they might even be *paying* to be there, for the good of others less fortunate than themselves. This fantasy was made explicit in the slogan of the Young Helpers League, which mobilised the 'children of the rich in the service of the sick and suffering poor', and for whom Behenna's troupe performed in March 1927.<sup>152</sup> But the children of the Jollities, however comfortably off, were hardly 'the rich', and the Young Helpers League's language of service across class ignored the fact that there was often a fine line between those who were dancing for the children's homes and those who were in them. Wendy Warman's uncle Nat Star was sent to the Jewish Hospital and Orphan Asylum when he was a child.<sup>153</sup> Children who lost a father in the war could easily end up in an orphanage if their mother had younger children to look after.<sup>154</sup>

Examination of programmes and newspapers has revealed that the Jollities troupe in the years 1923–27 were composed of lower-middle class girls of the inner-suburbs, from both Jewish and non-

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<sup>151</sup> Maureen Williams, Interview, 6 April 2018

<sup>152</sup> 'Thomas Barnardo,' The Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 1912, accessed 10 January 2018, <https://archive.org/details/pt1dictionaryofn02leesuoft>.

<sup>153</sup> 'Charles Nat Star, A Life in Music,' 2011, accessed 3 January 2018, <https://www.78rpmcommunity.com/beta/78rpmcataloger/charles-nat-star-a-life-in-music/>.

<sup>154</sup> Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood*, 193-5.

Jewish families. Many parents were involved in supporting the troupe, through making props and costumes, and booking and promoting shows. The troupe performed mostly in East End venues, against a background of anglicisation and suburbanisation of the Jewish community. They performed to both adults and children, but most frequently to adults, in concert halls, hospitals and clubs.

The Jollities children were aged between four and fourteen, such a wide gap that we cannot make generalisations about the levels of skill or autonomy of each child. But Madame Behenna created opportunities for fourteen-year-old girls to perform frequent solos, to choreograph pieces and to play as accompanists: all roles which gave responsibility and suggest active creative involvement. As well as singing and dancing, an important part of the Jollities' training was elocution, which was delivered by Madame Behenna herself. Voice training had long been part of preparation for the stage, but for children of aspirational immigrant families, it held the promise of social advancement. I have shown how some characteristics of the Jollities fit the historiographical narratives of anglicisation within London's Jewish community: a general secularisation, performative patriotism and the erasure of Yiddish from children's voices and vocabularies.

There are so few accounts written of children's troupes (and those that do exist are mostly concerned with Victorian children), that the story of the Juvenile Jollities has much to contribute to histories of interwar childhood and performance. By keeping a tight focus upon the Jollities troupe, my analysis has been rooted in the facts of their material lives – who was involved, where they performed, and what they did. But this chapter has opened the curtain a little to reveal the presence of stage children all over London, and indeed the country. Tantalising glimpses of the world of children's dance classes were offered by the *Dancing Times* and local newspapers, and in the following chapter I will return to these sources to ask why children's performance was so popular, and what fantasies of childhood were played out by children onstage.



## Chapter 5: Jollity and littleness

We have heard how Madame Behenna's troupe of singing, dancing children were able to keep hundreds of adults 'perfectly enthralled' for hours at a time.<sup>155</sup> This chapter will establish what the Juvenile Jollities troupe actually *did* in their concerts, what they sang, what they wore, how they danced. We will keep an eye on the backstage processes of costuming and choreography, as well as their front of house effects. Onstage, the Jollities created fantasies in the form of imagined identifications and shared ideals of childhood. So we will take a place hidden in the wings, where we can watch the mechanisms of fantasy at work.

The main source of information about the Jollities performances is a series of itemised programmes, produced from January 1925 to April 1926. Each one includes the titles of songs/dances alongside performers' names, for a total of 450 individual concert items in the sixteen-month period (see Appendix 3). Tabulating this data has enabled quantitative analysis which contextualises my conclusions throughout the chapter. Additionally, this data helps to overcome the problem faced by many music historians that 'one can never be certain that the pieces chosen for study... were actually performed'.<sup>156</sup> In this chapter, we get a clearer idea of when and where songs were performed, by whom, and how many times. I will emphasise how the Jollities' revues disseminated trends and crazes to their audiences, and I will consider how their status as children added layers of meanings to their performances.

One crucial artefact has underpinned my account of the Jollities' concerts – Grace Behenna's instruction sheet for the purchase and manufacture of Eileen Brock's costumes (Figure 53). This two-sided sheet, handwritten in red and black ink, lists seven programme items, and details the costumes to be worn for each one. In four cases, the costumes were to be made from scratch. The written descriptions ('... neck cut rather low V-shaped') have been paired with a small swatch of the desired fabric, which obscures the text and creates a three-dimensional collaged object. This document is the Rosetta Stone of the Jollities' performances: it decodes the meanings of costumes, programmes and sheet music in the archive alongside it; it tells us how many items Eileen was scheduled to perform and what they were; we can use it to match photographs of Eileen with specific songs; and the swatches allow the identification of surviving costumes and hint at the ones that are lost.

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<sup>155</sup> 'Concert at Mile End.'

<sup>156</sup> Russell, *Popular Music*, 111.



I use these archived documents to assemble the ‘recombinative elements’ which make meaning onstage: ‘movement, voice, costume, accessories, instrumentation and harmonies’.<sup>158</sup> Additionally, we must consider the intersectional identities of the audiences and the performers – identities of class, gender, age, location, race, religion, and so on – which multiplied meaning like overlapping coloured spotlights. Their participation in popular culture implicated the Jollities in ideologies and fantasies of race, class and nation which found expression through song and dance. I will show, for example, how the lyrics and costumes for songs like ‘Pickaninny Alley’, perpetuated racist stereotypes and repeated reductive cultural clichés.

The Jollities children performed songs written and arranged by adults for adults – and in some cases they even performed dressed as adults. Acknowledging this adult-centricity does not override the agency of the children themselves, but rather, it acknowledges the reality of their situation. As children, they had limited say in what they did, and what they wore while they did it.

I use reviews and write-ups of other children’s performances to further develop the previous chapter’s assertion that the ‘charity clause’ enabled an informal national industry for children’s performance. But in this chapter, I look more closely at the discourses around stage children to discover why audiences were drawn to these displays, and what specific attractions they saw in young children – responding to Jaqueline Rose’s demand that we question the persistence of ‘setting the child up as a spectacle, shining a light on it and giving it up to our gaze’.<sup>159</sup> What emerges is strong fantasy investment in children’s cleverness, perfection, and most of all, their *littleness*. The Jollities and other performing children overflowed with an excess of littleness, generated in collaboration by producers, performers and audiences. Miniaturisation has attracted theoretical attention within various fields, including literature and archaeology; after all, ‘the small stimulates very big thoughts’.<sup>160</sup> But it is rare for scholars to recognise the sentimentality resulting from the miniaturisation of *people* (rather than things).<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Tracy C. Davis, ‘“I Long for My Home in Kentuck”: Christy’s Minstrels in Mid-19th-Century Britain,’ *TDR* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 43.

<sup>159</sup> Rose, *Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, 29.

<sup>160</sup> Douglass Whitfield Bailey, *Prehistoric Figurines: Representation and Corporeality in the Neolithic* (Psychology Press, 2005), 30; Steven Millhauser, ‘The Fascination of the Miniature,’ *Grand Street* 2, no. 4 (1983); Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984); Jack Davy and Charlotte Dixon, eds., *Worlds in Miniature: Contemplating Miniaturisation in Global Material Culture* (UCL Press, 2019); Simon Garfield, *In Miniature: How Small Things Illuminate the World* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2018).

<sup>161</sup> Rare examples include, Gaby Wood, ‘The Smallest of All Persons Mentioned in the Records of Littleness,’ *London Review of Books* 19, no. 24 (1997); Gaby Wood, *Living Dolls: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life* (Faber, 2002); Lynne Vallone, *Big and Small: A Cultural History of Extraordinary Bodies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

After October 1925, each Jollities concert began with the whole troupe onstage, singing 'Here We Are Again'.<sup>162</sup> This First World War song was described by its publishers in 1914 as 'the British army's battle cry'; the strongly patriotic lyrics ask, 'when there's trouble brewing, when there's something doing, are we downhearted? No, let 'em all come!'.<sup>163</sup> But as the theme tune of the Jollities, these words took on new meanings. From the mouths of the assembled children, the song's call to arms refers to a corps of dancers rather than soldiers. Most of the children onstage had been born between 1914 and 1918: they were products of the conflict, not the lost generation taken by it. The refrain 'here we are, here we are, here we are again' suggests the repetitious character of theatrical performance, rather than the ongoing nature of international conflict. By appropriating 'Here We Are Again' as her troupe's rallying cry, Madame Behenna borrowed the buoyant, gung-ho spirit of 1914, and the somewhat nostalgic associations with plucky British soldiers, but delivered it as a light-hearted show-opener with sing-along potential.

The recent war had been 'one of the most miserable chapters in human history', leaving a legacy of grief, destruction, loss, death and despair.<sup>164</sup> The conflict was in the very recent memory of all the adults in the room, and Eileen would not have been the only one in the troupe to have lost a father. But it had also produced a generation of children for whom the world went on. After Eileen's father died, she was described as 'his legacy', and the reason for Amy to 'bear up' and carry on.<sup>165</sup>

And yet, it would be easy enough, writing about the Juvenile Jollities and their concerts, to avoid mentioning the First World War at all. In their songs and dances, the recent conflict hardly figures.<sup>166</sup> If the war is referenced, as in 'Here We Are Again', the meaning is transformed by its new context. Was the appeal of the children onstage that they were somehow innocent or ignorant of what had gone on so few years previously? As the troupe's name made clear, the Juvenile Jollities made the same promise as the Cottingley fairies: gladness and youth shining into dark shadows. Some of their songs spelled out the same message: 'Life and Love Seem Sweeter After the Storm,' (Jack Nelson, 1924); 'It Ain't Gonna Rain No More,' (Wendell Hall, 1923).<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Programme, 31 October 1925.

<sup>163</sup> Charles Knight and Kenneth Lyle, 'Here we are, Here we are, Here we are Again,' (Melbourne: Allan & Co., 1914).

<sup>164</sup> Winter, *The Experience of World War I*, 18.

<sup>165</sup> Ade Piercy to Amy Brock, 29 July 1921, author's archive.

<sup>166</sup> This accords with Maggie Gale's proposition that the war 'did not have an explicit representation' in theatre of the 1920s, but found implicit expression through dramatic themes rather than content. Clive Barker and Maggie B Gale, *British Theatre Between the Wars, 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>167</sup> Programme, 31 October 1925

## Format and content

The Jollities belonged to the 'cosily saucy' genre of revue which emerged during the straitened years of the First World War.<sup>168</sup> Fast-paced, funny and innovative revues were part of a new commercial leisure industry that also included popular music and social dance.<sup>169</sup> Unlike cumbersome traditional variety shows, which relied on one character after another delivering ten or fifteen minute 'turns', a revue was typically a miscellany of songs, sketches and dances, performed by a group of all-round performers who were able to turn their hand to ballet, opera, and slapstick.<sup>170</sup> Accordingly, the Juvenile Jollities shows of 1923–28 included recitations, song and dance scenas, acrobatics, sketches and original ballets.<sup>171</sup>

Revues refracted contemporary events through a lens of cultural satire and parody, and programmes were updated frequently to include the most recent hit songs and dance fashions. They shifted from satire to sentiment, madcap comedy to nostalgia, and audiences were expected to recognise the material being performed and respond to shifts in tone.<sup>172</sup> This all necessarily relied on a certain level of sophistication in audiences; rather than identifying revue within 'high' or 'low' culture, we might consider the genre as a dynamic reflection of *popular* culture, which relied on shared identities and meanings.

The Jollities' programmes included micro-crazes like the 'Oom-pah Trot' dance, fashions like Dixiephilia, and major cultural shifts like ballet dancing. The medley sing-a-long section of 'Old Songs' that the Jollities introduced in October 1925 was a perfect example of how revues re-presented old ideas in new ways. As will become clear throughout this chapter, they also absorbed and reproduced ideologies of their time: the gendered, innuendo-laden lyrics of popular song, and the racist stereotypes so rampant in variety theatre.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Laurence Senelick, 'Revue,' in *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre*, ed. Martin Banham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 917. Victorian Music Hall and Edwardian variety formats have tended to dominate the historical literature and popular imagination about London stage entertainment, as critiqued in both Roger Wilmut, *Kindly Leave the Stage! The Story of Variety 1919-1960* (Methuen, 1985), 13; Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, *British Music Hall: A Story in Pictures* (Gentry Books, 1974).

<sup>169</sup> Moore, 'Girl Crazy,' 88. For a history of revue see James Ross Moore, *Andre Charlot: The Genius of Intimate Musical Revue* (Macfarland & Co., 2005). The commercialisation of dance and music, and the relation to living standards, leisure time and wages is outlined in Baxendale, 'Popular Music.'; Nott, *Music for the People*; Russell, *Popular Music*.

<sup>170</sup> Len Platt, *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin, 1890-1939*, 173. Vicinus, 'Happy Times,' 358.

<sup>171</sup> 'Scena' is a term used in revue of this period to mean a song-and-dance episode. It was borrowed from Italian opera, where it meant a discrete dramatic episode for voice and accompaniment.

<sup>172</sup> Moore, 'Girl Crazy,' 94.

<sup>173</sup> D Huxley and D James, 'No Other Excuse: Race, Class and Gender in British Music Hall Comedic Performance 1914–1949,' *Comedy Studies* 3, no. 1 (2012).

The Jollities only diverged from the genre's conventions in one way: the length of their concerts far exceeded the usual format for professional adult revues. The leading West End producers Andre Charlot and C.B. Cochran typically included about twenty-five individual items on their programmes, whereas Behenna included between thirty-six and fifty-three individual songs, dances, recitations, or sketches in a single night.<sup>174</sup> The numbers are dazzling. We cannot know exactly why Behenna produced such large shows, but perhaps it was an attempt to showcase all of her pupils adequately, and provide enough entertainment to satisfy her audiences. Lengthy concerts were a feature of children's performance more generally; the *Dancing Times* from May 1927 reported on a 'well-varied' programme of thirty-five items and another 'extremely long' but 'happily well varied' concert of forty-three items.<sup>175</sup>

Not only were the Jollities' concerts long, they also changed significantly from week to week. Seven out of fifty items on the programme for 31 October 1925, for example, were only ever performed once; over a sixteen-month period, the troupe performed more than 170 *different* items.<sup>176</sup> The pieces which were performed most frequently were the 'original ballets' and 'original comedies', followed by the song and dance scenas, and then finally the songs. This pattern suggests, unsurprisingly, that the more work and originality invested in a piece, the more times it would be performed. Nevertheless, this constant change must have required considerable work from the Jollities' children and production team. There is no record of the troupe's rehearsal programme in the 1920s, but there are records of evening rehearsals twice a week in the late 1940s.<sup>177</sup> The archive contains two postcards sent by Behenna after Eileen had not turned up to rehearsals, asking why and requesting she return; it is no surprise that Behenna strictly enforced attendance, considering the size and complexity of the concerts she was producing.<sup>178</sup>

## Hit tunes

Three quarters of the Jollities' concert pieces were songs or song scenas.<sup>179</sup> The Jollities combined new music and old music: they included a sing-along section of music hall classics, but they mostly sang contemporary hits, accompanied by Percy Behenna's Jazz band. The 1920s was the first decade of the self-contained hit tune. Brian Magee remembered that in Hoxton around 1930, 'the popular songs really were popular: you would hear people singing and whistling them in the street; and

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<sup>174</sup> 'London Revues 1925-29,' *Over the Footlights*, 2011, 16 April 2019, [www.overthefootlights.co.uk/revues](http://www.overthefootlights.co.uk/revues).

<sup>175</sup> 'Provincial Notes,' 225.

<sup>176</sup> Collection of Concert Programmes, 1923-1928. And see Appendix 3

<sup>177</sup> Windsor and Flory, *Barbara: The Laughter and Tears of a Cockney Sparrow*, 14.

<sup>178</sup> Postcards, MOC/BROC/1/2

<sup>179</sup> 332 out of 450 total individual pieces.

children knew them as well as adults'.<sup>180</sup> This form of popular musical hit – an individual song a couple of minutes long comprised of verses and choruses – usually started in musical theatre, then transcended its original show to find wider audiences.<sup>181</sup>



Figure 54 Advertisement for The Lawrence Wright Music Co, *Dancing Times* December 1925

Live performance was key to promoting songs – whether over the radio or in person. As Magee explained, music spread aurally, heard live in the halls or on the streets. After 1922 the BBC started to broadcast revues and dance bands live from the theatres and hotels of the West End.<sup>182</sup> Publishers also promoted their latest hits through printed advertisements, and sales of sheet music remained strong in the 1920s as people reproduced the original song at home (usually on piano, though increasingly on ukulele).<sup>183</sup> Seven of the titles listed in a 1925 advert for the Lawrence Wright Music Co. (Figure 54), appeared in the Jollities repertoire: 'Bouquet', 'Shanghai', 'The Toy Drum Major', 'San Francisco', 'Nobody Knows What a Red Headed Mama Can Do', 'When My Sugar Walks Down the Street', and 'Tennessee'. The most topical hits were the most ephemeral; the Jollities'

<sup>180</sup> Magee, *Clouds of Glory*, 221.

<sup>181</sup> Platt, *Popular Musical Theatre in London and Berlin, 1890-1939*, 174.

<sup>182</sup> Baxendale, 'Popular Music,' 141. Moore, 'Girl Crazy,' 97.

<sup>183</sup> This is an extremely condensed version of the detailed picture given by Baxendale, 'Popular Music.'

repertoire included now-forgotten songs that referenced crazes for newspaper crosswords, the trend for chewing gum, and the fashion for ukuleles.<sup>184</sup>

In October 1925, Jollities girls Clarice and Stella Stone sang the hit song 'Tea for Two' (Vincent Youmans and Irving Caesar, 1925). This soon-to-be Jazz standard came from *No No Nanette*, a truly huge American success in London musical theatre 'which changed the face of the West End' for good.<sup>185</sup> Imported American shows featured the innovation of 'big songs ... linked to a sizeable dance routine', which groups like the Jollities sought to emulate on a smaller scale.<sup>186</sup>

Another American import was Jazz, still startlingly new in 1925, having only arrived in Britain in 1919 when the Dixieland Jazz Band appeared in a variety bill at the London Palladium.<sup>187</sup> In the Jollities' 1923 concerts, their accompanying band was called 'the Bijoux Orchestra', but by October 1925 they had re-branded to the 'Jazz Four', bringing the Jollities' group bang up to date.<sup>188</sup>

### Little children

The Jollities were far from alone in attracting adults interested in watching juvenile performances. Across the country, children's song-and-dance displays were part of the regular public entertainment on offer to audiences which extended far beyond the families of those onstage. A Cheshire newspaper reporter in 1924 was able to claim that, 'an entertainment in which the artists are children always attracts many people'.<sup>189</sup> Just one month's instalment of the *Dancing Times'* Provincial Notes section included the following accounts of children's concerts: At Miss Holdsworth's *thé dansant* in Birmingham,

the item 'Charleston Babies' given by five of the smallest pupils, was undoubtedly 'the hit' of the afternoon, and had to be repeated before public appreciation was appeased.

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<sup>184</sup> Collection of programmes, 'They Don't Have a Cross Word Now' (Will Haines and Julien Wright, 1925) 'Does the Spearmint Lose its Flavour (on the Bedpost Overnight)' (Billy Jones and Ernest Hare, 1924), 'Ukulele Baby' (Al Sherman and Marty Bloom, 1925) and 'Uker, Uker, Ukerlay' (composer unknown). On crosswords, see Graves and Hodge, *Long Weekend*, 131.

<sup>185</sup> Kurt Gänzl, *The British Musical Theatre: 1915-1984*, vol. 2 (Macmillan Press, 1986), 238.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>187</sup> 'Jazz Timeline: A Unique Genre is Recognised,' accessed 17 July 2020, <https://www.nationaljazzarchive.co.uk/timeline>.

<sup>188</sup> 'Concert at Mile End.'

<sup>189</sup> 'Children's Dancing Display,' *Cheshire Observer* 24 May 1924, 2.



At Miss Brown's in Liverpool, 'a special item was danced by children all under six, which was particularly appreciated'; and not to be outdone, the Margaret Einert School recital presented a hundred dancers in 'Birthday Jewels'. This 'delightful little fantasy' featured

each tiny tot reciting her appropriate month's verse ('November', aged four, causing much amusement by her original pronunciation of her flower, 'chrysanthemum').<sup>190</sup>

In these accounts, we can detect an inverse relationship between the size of the performer and the enthusiasm of the response: the smallest and youngest children provoked the greatest reactions. This over-the-top enjoyment reminds us of the surplus pleasure of *jouissance*, defined as an 'evocation and containment of pleasurable excess'.<sup>191</sup>

Time and again, newspaper reviewers described how audiences reacted to the youngest performers:

[Joan and Eric] contributed solo items which were much appreciated, but the one that found most favour was 'Trail of Leaves' by five year-old Betty Percheron, the baby of the school. Little Betty did her piece very prettily and so great was the enthusiasm with which it was received that Miss Clagne allowed the child to give an encore.<sup>192</sup>

It was not just any child who most delighted the audiences, but the smallest of the small. To repeat the *Dancing Times* editor, 'It is the little ones with whom we are concerned'.<sup>193</sup> This obsession with littleness played out in language, staging and costume.

Small physical size is an attribute of children, of course, but the littleness of the young performers described in these accounts is excessive, and matched by heightened emotional responses of mirth, hard-to-appease enthusiasm, and delight – often to a repetitious degree. The Cheshire reporter found it 'delightful to see the delight with which proud mothers watched their diminutive offspring ... in this delightful display'.<sup>194</sup> Another frequently used word was 'wonder', as when Madame Behenna promoted her 'troupe of wonder children'.<sup>195</sup> The most popular film of the 1920s was *The Kid* (1921), Charlie Chaplin's sentimental farce co-starring nine-year-old Jackie Coogan, described as the 'first child-wonder of the screen'.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> All from 'Provincial Notes,' 225-30.

<sup>191</sup> Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History*, 58

<sup>192</sup> 'A Children's Cabaret,' *Hendon and Finchley Times* 29 April 1927, 7.

<sup>193</sup> 'Children's Circle.'

<sup>194</sup> 'Children's Dancing Display.'

<sup>195</sup> Programme, 2 March 1925.

<sup>196</sup> Quoted in Graves and Hodge, *Long Weekend*, 141.

Another common reaction was *fascination*. In Thanet,

tiny solo dancers [with] fairylike feet fascinated a large company ... The tireless little dancers held the admiring attention of an enthusiastic gathering ... winning all hearts.<sup>197</sup>

The allusion to fairies is appropriate, for to be fascinated is to be enchanted, placed under a spell.<sup>198</sup> According to a Dundee correspondent, children's dance competitions 'drew crowded houses' and the audience's enthusiasm reached 'fever heat'.<sup>199</sup> These descriptions conjure images of hypnotised adults in raptures, clapping furiously (as they did to revive Tinkerbell). It is clear that, for some, watching child performers produced *pleasure, enjoyment, fascination, delight, amusement*, beyond just a technical appreciation of their choreography or expression. Recall how Amy Brock, who had been to innumerable professional theatre shows in her life, proclaimed after a juvenile performance of *Snow White*: 'I have never seen anything so good'.<sup>200</sup>

The small amount of pain inherent in true *jouissance* also comes through in the reports: the pain of childhood was its impermanence. One reviewer expressed this precisely: 'trouble is, like kittens, they will grow up!'<sup>201</sup> Childhood was something precious that was *lost* as adulthood approached and eventually took over, and inevitably the pleasure of watching children provoked nostalgia and yearning.<sup>202</sup> We recall Rose's description of desire *fixing* a child in time – the exaggerated smallness is part of the same urge, to resist the growth which comes with the passing of time.

We have already encountered visions of this cute, quaint childhood in chapters one to three: the illustrations of Mabel Lucie Attwell, Cicely Mary Barker's *Flower Fairies* and so on. To read the accounts above, we might believe that the children in these concerts were real-life embodiments of those idealised images. Dance teachers and managers – well attuned to the applause of their audiences – discovered that littleness was a subjective quality which could be affected onstage through a range of techniques, from the performers' names to their costumes and choreography.

Recall 'Little' Evelyn Behenna, the eternal child, and the description of 'Little Zona Foster ... the pretty little singer and dancer, who is only six years of age', which repeated the word 'little' twice in

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<sup>197</sup> 'Dainty Child Dancers,' *Thanet Advertiser* 15 March 1924, 5.

<sup>198</sup> 'fascination, n.'. OED Online. September 2019. Oxford University Press. (accessed November 27, 2019) <https://0-www-oed-com.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/view/Entry/68366>

<sup>199</sup> 'Letters,' *Dundee Evening Telegraph* 14 December 1925, 4.

<sup>200</sup> Amy Brock to Will Brock, 19 April 1921

<sup>201</sup> 'Child Dancers,' *Daily Herald* 30 June 1923, 1.

<sup>202</sup> Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 16. Steedman has also used the idea of littleness to explore human interiority, the development of psychoanalysis from cell theory, and even nationalism.

one sentence, a failure in basic journalistic style which showed how littleness was compounded without the writer seeming to notice.<sup>203</sup> Over half the Jollities children had diminutive nicknames: Little Norah Doran, Wee Jessie Coombes, Baby Enid Page, and so on, *ad nauseam*. The girls' stage names appeared in programmes, reviews and advertisements, establishing and reinforcing audience expectation that the girls would be *small*. The *Dancing Times* offers myriad striking synonyms, from Dinkie Chisman to Baby Love.<sup>204</sup> Groups, as well as individuals, chose sobriquets with a shrinking effect. Madame Victor's 1921 advertisement included troupes called 'babes', 'baby classics', 'mites', and 'kute kids' as well as 'Wee Charlie' (Figure 55).<sup>205</sup> The Dainty Dots and Military Mites were renowned travelling troupes (the transformation of military 'might' into 'mites' is telling) and the high-minded members of the modern movement were not above the practice, as Isadora Duncan's 'Isadorables' attest.



Figure 55 'Madame Victor's Celebrated Juveniles' advertisement, *The Stage*, 13 January 1921

The performed identities overlapped, but were not directly contiguous with, their actual physical size or biological age. Behenna's Wee Wendy Warman kept her alliterative stage name for over three years, suggesting more in common with Peter Pan, who never grew up, than her namesake Wendy, the substitute mother of Neverland.<sup>206</sup>

*Mise-en-scene* and arrangement of the children's bodies through choreography also produced effects of scale and exaggerated their littleness. In her memoir, dance teacher Margaret Morris described (unintentionally) how she produced an excess of littleness through careful staging:

<sup>203</sup> 'Bandsmen,' 15.

<sup>204</sup> 'Provincial Notes,' *Dancing Times* (October 1925): 203.

<sup>205</sup> 'Madame Victor's Celebrated Juveniles.'

<sup>206</sup> The fantasies of Peter Pan, of arrested development and sexualised innocence, are examined in Rose, *Impossibility of Children's Fiction*; Chapman, 'Riddle of Peter Pan.'; Marah Gubar, *Peter Pan as Children's Theatre: The Issue of Audience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

‘Eccossaisen’ was one of the first dances I arranged in 1911, for my troupe of ‘Dancing Children’ ... for the best effect this dance should undoubtedly be done by young children, the first rather tall, gradually decreasing in size, the last being as small as possible ... In my first troupe I had a very small boy, I suppose he must have been ten (the licensing age of that period) he was very undersized, but with nicely rounded limbs. His hair was cropped very short, so we gave him a curly wig of which he was very proud, and in his short Greek tunic onstage he looked about five! His little solo always got a round of applause.<sup>207</sup>

Interwar dance teachers were so effective at producing littleness that some observers suspected something more sinister. The Duchess of Atholl – an M.P. who took a strong interest in what she saw as the plight of stage children in the 1920s – claimed that she ‘noticed what seemed to me indications of children having been doped in order to keep them small, because when a girl gets too big she becomes unsuitable for a childish troupe’.<sup>208</sup> The claim echoed the sad Victorian tale of ‘infant phenomenon’ Miss Ninetta Crummles from *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839). In Charles Dickens’ novel, Miss Crummles’ short stature and ‘aged countenance’ had been achieved through ‘an unlimited allowance of gin-and-water from infancy, to prevent her growing tall’.<sup>209</sup> The girl’s father claimed she was ten years old, and had done for at least five years running. The Duchess’s fears of ‘doping’ updated the tragedy of Miss Crummles for the twentieth century by replacing gin with drugs, but her suspicions had a Dickensian ring to them. Whether true or not, the accusations indicated the success of the theatrical managers in keeping their performers *appearing* small – unnaturally so.

Children were not the only things to be venerated for their littleness in the 1920s. A dolls’ house specially made for Queen Mary attracted thousands of visitors when it was displayed at the Empire Exhibition of 1924 and the Ideal Home Exhibition of 1925.<sup>210</sup> ‘There is a great beauty in *smallness*’, wrote A. C. Benson in a catalogue to accompany the house.<sup>211</sup> Miniaturisation, he explained, made it

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<sup>207</sup> Morris, *Creation in Dance and Life*, 109.

<sup>208</sup> Duchess of Atholl, Debate on the Children's Bill, (Hansard, 12 February 1932).

<sup>209</sup> Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dover Thrift Editions, (Courier Dover Publications, 2018), 268. Dickens creates his own language of littleness. Vivienne Richmond identified Jennie Wren in *Our Mutual Friend* as the ‘matryoshka of littleness – not only small, but disabled, and a dolls’ dressmaker’ (personal communication). Davin points out ‘the word ‘little’ recurs constantly’ in Dickens’ descriptions of Charley Neckett in *Bleak House*, an orphan who looks after her younger siblings. In that context, the word little is used to emphasise the child’s pathetic heroism, not her petite perfection. Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, 161.

<sup>210</sup> Clifford Musgrave, *Queen Mary’s Dolls House* (Pitkin Pictorials, 1992), 2.

<sup>211</sup> Completed in 1924, Queen Mary’s dolls’ house was designed and curated by architect Edwin Lutyens. He brought together the leading artists, writers, brands and technologies of its day. Revealed to the public at the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, the house attracted over 1.6 million visitors. I believe the interwar craze for dolls’ houses was part of the same desire for interiorisation, littleness and a reclamation of childhood, that fuelled much of the popularity of children’s’ performance.

possible to see both more and less at the same time. Whole rooms, houses, could be seen at one glance, while at the same time erasing the blemishes and flaws that are visible at full scale.<sup>212</sup> Benson's analysis suggests an explanation for the popularity of children and little things in general. To gaze upon a miniature (whether a house or a child), was to see the world with fewer flaws. In the aftermath of a 'Great' war, larger and more destructive than any seen before, whose enormity had revealed the failings of humanity, would it not make sense to seek littleness?

The novelist Steven Millhauser has explicitly contrasted the 'terror' of the gigantic against the 'enchantments of the miniature'; even though their smallness 'shocks us into attention', very little things are reassuring and full of promise 'without dread'.<sup>213</sup> For the generation who had experienced the dread of war, the scale of the single human life had been distorted by the enormity of the conflict and their experience. Under bombing raids, women like Amy Brock had feared for their lives in their own homes, borne the enormity of the dangers, and confronted their own absolute vulnerability. As Walter Benjamin recalled, after the war, 'nothing was the same except the clouds and ... the tiny, fragile human body'.<sup>214</sup> But children's troupes offered a rebuttal to the body's frailties and vulnerabilities. Onstage, tiny bodies were strong, pliable, quick and perfect. And the smaller they were, the fewer flaws could be seen.

### **Marching to the drum**

In the Jollities' presentation of 'The Toy Drum Major', the children were even further miniaturised as clockwork toys.<sup>215</sup> Claimed to be 'the most "talked of" number ever published', this was a popular song-and-dance number for various groups and performers – adults as well as children.<sup>216</sup> Its lyrics described a freshly painted row of toy soldiers with guns displayed, marching 'unafraid ... along through Toy Town onto victory'.<sup>217</sup> The song's descriptions of painted-on bravery and children marching into war were potentially satirical, but we will never know if the Jollities presented it that way.

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<sup>212</sup> Arthur Christopher Benson, Lawrence Weaver, and Edward Verrall Lucas, *The Book of the Queen's Dolls' House*, vol. 1 (London: Methuen, 1924).

<sup>213</sup> Millhauser, 'The Fascination of the Miniature,' 130-32.

<sup>214</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty,' in *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael William Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005 [1933]), 732.

<sup>215</sup> Jean Rederick and Horatio Nicholls, 'The Toy Drum Major,' (Lawrence Wright Music Co, 1925).

<sup>216</sup> 'Panto Producers Unanimously Agree,' *The Era* 25 November 1925.

<sup>217</sup> 'The Toy Drum Major,' 2015 [1925], accessed 17 July 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WF-dFzTLBgM>.

The song's marching rhythm and clockwork characters lent themselves to a synchronised dance routine, and a brightly-coloured military-inspired costume. Grace Behenna required Eileen to wear:

White Sateen skirt trimmed at bottom [with] 3 rows scarlet Russia Braid ...  
Scarlet coat military collar fairly tight fitting Scarlet Pill box hat with black chin  
strap.<sup>218</sup>

A series of dancers in brightly coloured costumes, marching in time, was a typical spectacle of modern theatre, and a common feature of adult revue. This innovation is commonly credited to John Tiller, who trained his 'Tiller Girls' to dance with the 'discipline of the machine'.<sup>219</sup> The impression of exact, mechanical precision in the lines of professional dancers was accentuated by carefully designed, identical costumes.<sup>220</sup> Coincidentally – or perhaps not – the name of the Juvenile Jollities had echoes of Tiller's first well-drilled juvenile quartet, '*Les Jolies Petites*'.<sup>221</sup>

How synchronised were the children trained by Behenna and her dance mistress Madge Martin? Could amateur dressmakers working in isolation use Behenna's somewhat vague instructions to create matching costumes for a series of dancers? Even with patterns from Henry Spokes's drapers, Behenna's description left a lot of room for interpretation by individual dressmakers: the length of the skirt was not specified, nor was the distance between the braid trims.

The December 1925 edition of the *Dancing Times* included a photograph of a dance group from Derby, performing 'The Toy Drum Major' (Figure 56). Eight girls are rather haphazardly arranged in four pairs. The kneeling children, dressed as soldiers, wear matching hats but their jackets vary in the choice of piping, cuffs and collars. Apart from an odd pair of shoes and one strange sash, the seated girls are more or less matching. We might presume that Grace Behenna's crowd-sourced approach to dressmaking resulted in similar variations; or maybe the regularity and professional scale of the Jollities' performances produced military precision. Audiences' perceptions and expectations of synchronisation are also dependent on context. Viewers of the Jollities' 1925 shows may have seen the well-drilled chorus lines of the West End revues, however they were not yet familiar with the extraordinary spectacles of synchronicity which would later be displayed in the big-budget

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<sup>218</sup> Costume list, 1925.

<sup>219</sup> Gilbert Seldes quoted in Koritz, *Culture Makers*, 73.

<sup>220</sup> According to Barbieri, the Tillers' costumes turned young women into 'anonymous, uniformed workers'. Donatella Barbieri, *Costume in Performance: Materiality, Culture, and the Body* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 51. For more about the Tiller Girls, automation and the assembly line's encroachment into culture see: Felicia M McCarren, *Dancing Machines: Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2003); Jane Goodall, 'Transferred Agencies: Performance and the Fear of Automatism', *Theatre Journal* 49, no. 4 (1997).

<sup>221</sup> Doremy Vernon, *Tiller's Girls* (Robson Books Ltd, 1998); Celia Marshik, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Modernist Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), xv.

Hollywood musicals of 1930s cinema. These films would profoundly influence audiences' expectations of live theatrical dance.<sup>222</sup>



Figure 56 'The Toy Drum Major performed by pupils of the Millicent Simmonds School, Derby'<sup>223</sup>

Whether they matched perfectly or not, the Jollities' costumes contributed significantly to their appeal. The poster for their April 1926 concert in Walthamstow boasted 'over 150 beautiful costumes worn in the production'.<sup>224</sup> There were twenty-four children performing that night, which works out as an average of 6.25 costumes per child. This is more modest than the claim made in the Jollities' 1923 review that 'several of the little artistes made a change of dress no less than twenty times', but it is still a considerable number.<sup>225</sup>

Frequent costume changes were such an expected feature of juvenile performances that the idea was satirised in Noel Streatfeild's *The Whicharts* (1931). It is 1929 in the story and the middle child, Tania, is employed as one of a dozen girls in 'Pansy's Peaches', a juvenile backing troupe to a popular singer. While Tania thought the dances were terrible,

... what bored her were the clothes. They changed an incredible number of times in the short while their turn was on ... when she sang about Dixie and coal-black mummies, you put on an early Victorian frock or dressed up in yellow

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<sup>222</sup> 'Popular forms of ballet or music-hall dancing changed simultaneously into modern dance and into the stuff of film, at first sharing an audience and later ... diverging'. McCarren, *Dancing Machines*, 30.

<sup>223</sup> *Dancing Times* (December 1925)

<sup>224</sup> Auction, 'Lot 728 Collection of Theatre Posters.'

<sup>225</sup> 'Concert at Mile End.'

swans-down as a chicken. But when she sang about grandmamma's days, or the spring, then was the moment when you appeared as a coon, or in Hawaiian get up. It was all most confusing.<sup>226</sup>

As well as lampooning the chaotic mismatch of song with costume, Streatfeild highlights the repertoire of such a troupe, including racist Dixie stereotypes and nostalgic Victoriana, both of which were also features of the Jollities' performances.

### **Race on the stage**

As the above quote from *The Whicharts* demonstrates, the nineteenth-century convention of the 'coon song' was still popular in the 1920s, and often formed part of children's repertoire.<sup>227</sup> British popular entertainment has been described as 'endemically racist', and pejorative terms to describe people of colour were widespread, as were racially-charged songs.<sup>228</sup> The Juvenile Jollities were not an exception.

'Pickaninny Alley', was a 'song and dance scena' in the Jollities' programme which took fantasies of childhood and mixed them with some long-held racist stereotypes. In American slang, 'pickaninny' was a derogative term for a dark-skinned child. The word came from Portuguese, as a diminutive of *pequeno* (meaning small). As the smallest of the small, the word 'pickaninny' provides another example of the excess of littleness which pervaded ideas of childhood. But rather than the fairylike ideal of white childhood, the pickaninny character was an 'subhuman black juvenile', composed only of physical appetites.<sup>229</sup> Pickaninnies were ubiquitous in America, but also appeared very frequently in British childhood culture: In *Peter Pan* the Native American tribe led by Tiger Lily is the 'pickaninny tribe', whose name had connotations of littleness, otherness and wildness.<sup>230</sup> *Princess Marie-José's Children's Book* (a fundraising effort for babies behind the line in Flanders, published 1916) included 'Pickaninny', a tale by Mrs Erskine about a 'half-human, half-grotesque character' – a description that reveals the attitudes behind the word.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Streatfeild, *The Whicharts*, 142.

<sup>227</sup> The racist stereotype persisted through the interwar period; Shirley Temple films *The Littlest Colonel* (1935) and *The Littlest Rascal* (1936) included pickaninny characters, as did the masthead of the *Beano* comic when it launched in 1938.

<sup>228</sup> Huxley and James, 'No Other Excuse,' 25.

<sup>229</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 35.

<sup>230</sup> Bernstein demonstrates that American pickaninnies were depicted as 'insensate', i.e. invulnerable to pain. This 'masked the exploitative and even violent aspects of industrialisation' which relied on the continued pain of black children while white children were 'protected' and rescued'. *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>231</sup> *Princess Marie-José's Children's Book*, ed. Vestiaire Marie-José (Cassell & Company, 1916).



The Jollities' version of 'Pickaninny Alley' is preserved on a lyric sheet in Amy Brock's handwriting. It describes a day in the life of a group of black children on a plantation in the American South, and is worth quoting in full to illuminate the ideologies at work:

Every little pick is pally / and they have a wonderful time / every morning at nine  
/ they come a streaming with faces beaming / round the [wrummy?] pool they  
rally / in the water they all dally / till they hear the dinner bell / and when their  
tummy's full / then for dessert they pull / some juicy grapes right from the vine /  
Then away they sneak play hide and go sneak / til the stars are in the sky / and  
then they're called back to their rickety shack / how you hate to say goodbye /  
Every Sammy, Sue and Sally in their section is pally / Has a smile that's simply  
divine / Down in Pickaninny Alley / It's like paradise all of the time.<sup>232</sup>

In the song's fantasy version of the American south, complete with picturesque 'rickety shack', young children are described living in leisured ignorant bliss, thinking of nothing but food and play. As Robin Bernstein makes clear, this was an old trope: 'from advertisements and book illustrations to sheet music and stage shows, images of happy African Americans ... justified and naturalized slavery and sharecropping'.<sup>233</sup> The commercial sheet music for 'Down in Pickaninny Alley' (as the song was officially titled), featured a picture of the two white male composers in evening dress, against a background of cotton plants, driving home the supposed plantation setting and the white viewpoint of the lyrics.

The song exemplified a wave of enthusiasm for 'Dixie' and Southern plantation settings between the wars, which continued the nineteenth-century craze for Minstrel shows. 'Dixiephilia' was fuelled by imported jazz bands and revues, especially the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and the smash-hit revue *Dover Street to Dixie* (1923), which featured African-American star Florence Mills.<sup>234</sup> The Jollities embraced the craze: 'Alabamy Bound', 'Carolina Sweetheart', 'Charleston Baby', 'Heading for Louisville', 'I Want to See My Tennessee', 'Kentucky Dixie Way', 'Listen in Virginia', and 'Savannah' all appeared in their programmes in 1925 and 1926.<sup>235</sup> In spring 1926, premier African-American producer Will Garland presented his revue *Colored Lights* in London, including the break-out hit song 'Hottentot Totsy'. On 12 April 1926, Garland's troupe appeared at the London Music Hall in Shoreditch, and on the very same evening, the Jollities included 'Hottentot Totsy' in their concert at

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<sup>232</sup> Transcription of manuscript, V&A Misc.165:23-1986

<sup>233</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, 55.

<sup>234</sup> Brian Ward, 'Music, Musical Theater, and the Imagined South in Interwar Britain,' *The Journal of Southern History* 80, no. 1 (2014): 41.

<sup>235</sup> See Appendix for dates of performance. These songs were mostly written by white British songwriters hoping for a fashionable hit.

Walthamstow Baths.<sup>236</sup> The simultaneity of these performances demonstrates how up-to-date the Jollities were, and how willing they were to appropriate the songs of black performers.

Brian Ward argues that Dixie appealed to British audiences as a faraway fantasy space.<sup>237</sup> In this constructed vision of the South, traditional hierarchies of race and class were stable and fixed, and the landscape of the plantation provided an idyllic pastoral backdrop: 'Pickaninny Alley' is described as 'paradise'. The British 'Dixiephiles' of the 1920s, just like the black-face impersonators of the 1890s, 'alluded to a distant culture', in which the realities of slavery were forgotten or ignored.<sup>238</sup> Often the British versions of Dixie were apparently sympathetic, albeit paternalistic; 'Pickaninny Alley' refers to 'simply devine' smiles. But in actuality the song's characters were represented as barely human, with no inner life beyond the primitive drive to eat. This dehumanising of black children accompanied the idealisation of white childhood – a fantasy which had real, harmful ramifications in the lives of people of colour.<sup>239</sup>

Figure 57 shows Eileen in costume for 'Pickaninny Alley'. She is wearing a shorts-suit of red-striped cotton with a big red bow on the front, and she is holding a ukulele. Behenna's choice of bold stripes was a striking reference to the typical costumes of African-American minstrels (Figure 58), which were parodied by blackface impersonators (Figure 59).<sup>240</sup> Apart from the short sleeves and short legs, Eileen's costume was almost identical to the minstrels', even down to the collared V-neck. The ukulele, too, provides a direct counterpart to the banjo held by the men in the two photographs.

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<sup>236</sup> Rainer E. Lotz, *Black People: Entertainers of African Descent in Europe and Germany* (Bonn: Birgit Lotz Verlag, 1997), 206.

<sup>237</sup> Ward, 'Imagined South.'

<sup>238</sup> Davis, 'Christy's Minstrels,' 45.

<sup>239</sup> Bernstein, *Racial Innocence*, passim, but particularly 54-55, 64-7; Donna Varga and Rhoda Zuk, 'Golliwogs and Teddy Bears: Embodied Racism in Children's Popular Culture,' *The Journal of Popular Culture* 46, no. 3 (2013).

<sup>240</sup> Davis has re-asserted parallels with the medieval term 'minstrel', meaning a performing outsider. In the nineteenth century, minstrelsy was located among those groups or nationalities characterised as uncivilised or barbaric – Celtic and Tyrolese as well as African-American. This raises the prospect that children (as a marginalised group) were also minstrelized.



Figure 57 Eileen in costume for Pickaninny Alley, about October 1925<sup>241</sup>



Figure 58 'Neglected Genius', portrait of unidentified minstrel performer.<sup>242</sup>

Figure 59 'John White Banjo', unidentified blackface musician, c.1890<sup>243</sup>

<sup>241</sup> Photograph, V&A Misc.131-1986

<sup>242</sup> The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2014.37.29.6

<sup>243</sup> 'Blackface Minstrel John White with Banjo,' accessed 17 July 2020, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blackface\\_minstrel\\_John\\_White\\_with\\_Banjo\\_c1890.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blackface_minstrel_John_White_with_Banjo_c1890.png).

The striped outfit of African-American musicians was a physical legacy of slavery, with associations of servitude and incarceration. In the early industrialised world, stripes became the uniform for servants, prisoners and slaves; a bright, highly visible stripe was a way to bar and enclose the body of its wearer.<sup>244</sup> A red stripe, in particular, was associated with criminality.<sup>245</sup> But it is also curiously evocative of the flag of the United States.

In twentieth-century Britain, a stereotyped minstrel was popularised as a 'golliwog', a racist character adjacent to the Pickaninny. Figure 60 shows an Edwardian golliwog character wearing striped trousers which have taken on elements of a butler uniform – a particularly British form of striped servitude.<sup>246</sup> Pickering has argued that British recognitions of black people and 'the cultural practices associated with them' were crystallized by the 1920s; the persistence of the striped uniform supports this.<sup>247</sup> So even though Eileen and her Jollities colleagues did not use blackface, the striped outfit chosen by Madame Behenna demonstrates that dominant racist discourses were woven into the fabric of their concerts.<sup>248</sup>



Figure 60 *A Rainy Day Story*, Raphael Tuck & Sons, 1909.

The 'higher class' dance community were not above perpetuating hideous stereotypes of race. In December 1925, Edouard Espinosa, the renowned teacher and founder of the Association of

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<sup>244</sup> Michel Pastoureaux, *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes and Striped Fabric* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>245</sup> Juliet Ash, *Dress Behind Bars: Prison Clothing as Criminality* (I B Tauris, 2009), 38.

<sup>246</sup> Varga and Zuk, 'Embodied Racism,' 658.

<sup>247</sup> Pickering, *Blackface Minstrelsy in Britain*, 2-3.

<sup>248</sup> The Metropolitan Police Minstrels, who shared a choreographer with the Jollities, did use blackface and there are records of an all-girl juvenile blackface minstrel troupe continuing up to 1929 in the USA. Lynne Vallone, 'The Place of Girls in the Traditions of Minstrelsy and Recitation,' *International Research in Children's Literature* 10, no. 1 (2017): 54.

Teachers of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain (AOD), published an article in the *Dancing Times* giving 'hints on character dancing' for children preparing for the exams. His list of characters and their associated movements included pernicious racial stereotypes, including 'Plantation Nigger – lazy, with slithery, slovenly ... type steps', and 'the "Dressed to Kill" Nigger – smart music, movements jerky and conceited'.<sup>249</sup> These two 'character dancing' roles dehumanised people of colour, as slaves or dangerous sexual predators. And these descriptions were presented by an authoritative individual, to child readers of the *Dancing Times* who faced examination on their performance of these roles, and were therefore likely to exaggerate them further. Clearly, the discourses of dance education promoted racist ideas, and expected children to repeat and perform racist dances in order to succeed.

The Jollities also absorbed and repeated stereotypes of the East. On 31 October 1925, the Jollities premiered 'Shadowland', which was described as an 'Eastern Song Scena'.<sup>250</sup> Typically for an orientalist fantasy, it is unclear whether 'Eastern' refers to the Far East or the Middle East.<sup>251</sup> A vague other-worldliness was sufficient for the song's publishers, who described 'Shadowland' as 'one of the prettiest and most *ear-haunting* songs of the season'.<sup>252</sup>

Another 'Eastern' fantasy appeared in 'The Bloke that Wrote the Sheik', which was sung in the Jollities' concerts from October 1925 to April 1926 – an unusually long run that attests to its popularity. The hit song referred to two extremely successful popular culture texts of previous years: the worldwide-blockbuster film *The Sheik* starring Rudolf Valentino (dir. George Melford, 1923), and the book it was based on, a bestselling desert romance novel by Edith Maude Hull (not a bloke), published in 1919. Both book and film told the story of a young modern middle-class white Englishwoman who travels alone to the Arabian desert, where she is kidnapped by a Sheik. In the book she is explicitly raped, but the film shows her willing participation in a violent seduction.

Following the book and the film, the Sheik came to represent a new image of masculinity. He had walked straight out of the pantomime versions of the Arabian Nights, with all the accompanying stereotypes of barbarism, but depicted by Italian actor Rudolf Valentino he inspired 'hysterical' reactions and became an icon of the 'passionately conquering male'.<sup>253</sup> To some, this fantasy of

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<sup>249</sup> Edouard Espinosa, 'Fifty-One Hints on Character Dancing,' *Dancing Times* (December 1925): 284.

<sup>250</sup> Programme, 31 October 1925. From February to June 1925, the Jollities had performed a 'Japanese Song Scena', and there are photographs of Eileen wearing a kimono with a paper parasol; it is not clear if these are the same scenas.

<sup>251</sup> Helen Rajabi, 'The Idea of Race in Interwar Britain: Religion, Entertainment and Childhood Experiences' (PhD The University of Manchester, 2013).

<sup>252</sup> My italics. 'Shadowland,' *The Era* 30 May 1925, 22.

<sup>253</sup> Graves and Hodge, *Long Weekend*, 105.

masculinity was the antidote to the youthful androgyny which had become fashionable by the mid-1920s.<sup>254</sup>

*The Sheik's* heady mixture of 'sex and sadism' spawned countless imitators, satires and inter-textual references throughout the 1920s, including the songs 'While the Sahara Sleeps' (performed by the Jollities in February 1927) and 'The Bloke that Wrote the Sheik' as performed by Jollities member Little Enid Page.<sup>255</sup> The latter's lyrics referred directly to the sexual violence of the source material, though displaced to the East End of London and given a comedic tone:

... how she loved him,  
Though he knocked her about, and o'lor,  
My 'arry he tries to make love like the Sheik,  
And that's why I'm feeling so sore.<sup>256</sup>

Dangerous sexuality was such a strong feature of the Eastern stereotype, that Espinosa, in the same *Dancing Times* article quoted above, proclaimed that 'Eastern dances' were 'not suitable for children' at all, due to their 'embodiment of some story of love, passion, death, revenge etc.'<sup>257</sup> Grace Behenna did not share his view that children should only be permitted to explore light, positive themes and emotions. Did these ethically dubious 'Eastern' scenes have a role to play in introducing darker, more complex themes to the Jollities oeuvre and into the experiences of the children who played them? The racist rape fantasies of the original novel were toned down in the film, and further domesticated in the music hall song, but we are left wondering how eight-year-old Enid Page performed these lines, and how the audience received them.<sup>258</sup>

The exaggerated cockney accent of 'The Bloke that Wrote the Sheik' was a feature of the 'coster' genre of working-class burlesques, usually performed by middle-class singers in music hall and revue – most famously the 1890s star Albert Chevalier, who made 'the coster dressed in pearly buttons the epitome of the cockney'.<sup>259</sup> *The Stage* described young actress Betty Morgan giving a 'delightful coster impression' during 'The Bloke that Wrote the Sheik', drawing attention to the double identities of self and character held simultaneously onstage.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in The Twenties* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), 89.

<sup>255</sup> Michael Diamond, *Lesser Breeds: Racial Attitudes in Popular British Culture 1890-1940* (Anthem Press, 2006), 90-91.

<sup>256</sup> Bob Valentine and J A Tunbridge, 'The Bloke that Wrote the Sheik,' (1923).

<sup>257</sup> Espinosa, 'Fifty-One Hints on Character Dancing.'

<sup>258</sup> Diamond, *Lesser Breeds*, 91.

<sup>259</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol. 3 (New York: Routledge, 1989), 68.

<sup>260</sup> 'The New York Follies,' *The Stage* 7 August 1924, 13.

The term 'double-voicing', describes how singers take the position of other identities – which might include class, race, gender, age – as well their own, while performing a song. For example, while singing 'Hottentot Totsy', a song written by an African-American musician from the point of view of a Black protagonist, the White children of the Jollities would have been double-voicing.<sup>261</sup> The publishers of 'The Bloke that Wrote the Sheik' encouraged adding gender performativity into the mix, promoting the song as a 'low comedy number' perfect for pantomime dames.<sup>262</sup> And for those watching the Jollities, the performance of age had to be considered too; Enid Page was a middle-class child, singing as an adult cockney woman, about the sexual advances of a man emulating an Italian film star in the role of a Middle Eastern Sheik (who turns out to be an English aristocrat after all). She had been trained to perform the cockney accent that Behenna's elocution lessons sought to remove from the Jollities' 'natural' voices. Decoding these exhausting inter-textual references and potential layers of performativity (of race, age, class and gender) would have demanded cultural sophistication in any audience.

### **East End identity**

The Jollities also enacted romantic fantasies which were much closer to home. Although 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep' is now considered a timeless East End standard, when Eileen performed it in October 1925 it was a new song, debuted that year in the pantomime *Dick Whittington*.<sup>263</sup> The song describes how, as a child, the singer hung around the notorious slum Paradise Row in Bethnal Green. Spending days there, playing in the streets and sitting on the doorsteps, he fell in love with a girl called Nelly.

The song's description of slum children on the streets evokes the 'street arabs and urchins' who populated London's streets in the days before compulsory education, and in popular imagination had since transformed into the 'pitiful waif'.<sup>264</sup> 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep' took the character of the slum child, who would have been familiar (in reputation if not reality) to the Jollities' parents and grandparents, and glossed it with the sheen of nostalgia for a lost past and a first love. In the hands of this children's troupe, memories of childhood poverty were transformed into the 'good old days'. Behenna gave the following instructions for a freshly-made-ragged costume that suitably sentimentalised East End history:

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<sup>261</sup> Davis, 'Christy's Minstrels,' 47.

<sup>262</sup> 'Feldmanism,' *The Era* 15 August 1923, 20.

<sup>263</sup> George Stevens, 'On Mother Kelly's Doorstep,' (J Albert & Son, 1925).

<sup>264</sup> Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, 164.

Brown Casement-cloth Dress plain no sleeves. Emerald Green three cornered shoulder shawl of sateen knotted in front. Emerald Green Tam O'Shanter and Emerald Green 2 patches on dress. White socks old black shoes with hole in right shoe at big toe.<sup>265</sup>

Though usually associated with curtains, casement cloth was a hardwearing, inexpensive cotton fabric, and therefore an affordable choice for stage costumes. The dress that Amy made can be seen in Figure 61. It is a simple, boxy design with a slightly gathered skirt. It only has one patch, despite Behenna specifying two. The skirt has been pieced together in a number of sections, which would have made it even more economical; however, multiple pieces would have been more time-consuming to cut and sew.<sup>266</sup> In another act of thrift, Amy used the back pages of the *Sunday People* newspaper to stiffen the hat, helpfully including the date of 18 October 1925, thirteen days before the song was first performed in concert.<sup>267</sup> The only closures on the dress are two snap-fasteners at the neckline. Without fiddly buttons (this predates the availability of zips or Velcro), Eileen would have been able to pull the dress on and off over her head herself, speeding up the costume change.

Roland Barthes asserted that stage costume 'was not there only to be seen, it was also there to be read, it communicated ideas, information, or sentiments'.<sup>268</sup> The sentiments communicated by the Jollities' performance of 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep' were the romance of the old East End and nostalgia for a certain kind of innocent childhood poverty. The emerald green indicated the Irish ancestry of the fictional 'Mother Kelly', and her real-life equivalents in Bethnal Green. The specified hole in the shoe referred directly to the lyrics of the song: 'She'd got a little ... hole in her shoe ... where her toe peeped through'. To suppose how costume, choreography and lyrics may have worked together, we can imagine Eileen and her fellow Jollities pointing their right toes at the right moment, indicating towards their distressed footwear.

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<sup>265</sup> Costume list, 1925.

<sup>266</sup> Mary Brooks Picken, *A Dictionary of Costume and Fashion: Historic and Modern* (Courier Corporation, 1999), 55.

<sup>267</sup> The benefits of close study of costume artefacts, and a methodological framework which provided a starting point for my approach in the archive, are laid out in Taylor, *Dress History*, 3-63.

<sup>268</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Diseases of Costume,' in *Critical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 43.





**Figure 61 Dress worn for 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep', made by Amy Brock, 1925.<sup>269</sup>**

The simplicity of Eileen's costume is emphasized in comparison to the dress worn by Jollities member Maureen Williams to perform the same song in the early 1950s (Figure 62). Over two decades, a simple garment with one or two small patches evolved into an elaborate, embellished costume. Maureen's one-shouldered dress is trimmed with a checked flounce, which matches the proliferation of patches across the circle skirt (which used much more fabric and therefore cost more), worn over a petticoat. The shape of the skirt reflects the change in fashionable silhouettes between the 1920s and 1950s, but also turns the costume into a more conventional dance dress. Like the song itself, by the 1950s the dress for 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep' had become an exaggerated, theatrical reference to the old East End. The feature which remained the same was the crowning Tam O'Shanter (though we do not know if Maureen's mother stiffened it with that week's newspapers).

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<sup>269</sup> Dress, V&A Misc.152:1-1986



Figure 62 Maureen Williams in costume for 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep', c.1952<sup>270</sup>

## Old songs

After October 1925, the Jollities introduced a new section into their concerts, ironically called 'Our Veterans of Variety', being a series of 'famous old songs'. The selection referenced some of the most famous performers of the 1890s: 'Daddy Wouldn't Buy me a Bow Wow' (1892) was the biggest hit of the glittering career of Vesta Victoria, the highest-earning music hall star of her day.<sup>271</sup> 'Lily of Laguna' (1898) was performed by notable black-face singer G. H. Elliot. 'The New Perjama Hat' (1898) was first performed by coster-comedian Gus Elen. 'My Old Dutch' was a sentimental love song associated with Albert Chevalier. The sequence finished with 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay', whose most famous performer was Lottie Collins.

These were big hits of a previous era, which would have been familiar to the Jollities' parents, but probably also to the children themselves, as they remained in common circulation alongside more modern tunes. The Jollities' restaging of the 'old songs' was part of a nostalgic trend for the glories

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<sup>270</sup> Maureen Williams, personal collection.

<sup>271</sup> Carol Morley, 'The Most Artistic Lady Artist on Earth: Vesta Victoria,' in *Women in the Arts in the Belle Epoque*, ed. Paul Fryer (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012), 186.

of the past. Starting in 1921, the annual Royal Variety Performances brought old stars of the 1890s back to prominence.<sup>272</sup> And although modern revue and musical theatre dominated London stages, in 1929 the Palladium reverted to music hall for a few seasons, bringing back 'Veteran Stars of Variety'.<sup>273</sup> Around 1930, Bryan Magee went to see music hall staged at Hoxton Hall: 'I went to many shows there, from as early as I can remember, and it was there that I learnt the old music hall songs'.<sup>274</sup> The Hall was managed by the Quakers, and the audiences received temperance lectures in the intervals. The songs that were rejuvenated in the 1920s were not the racy music hall songs of Marie Lloyd (most notoriously, 'Come into the Garden Maud'), but relatively tame and well-loved popular tunes, reflecting the general domestication of the variety genre in the intervening decades.<sup>275</sup> We can imagine the Jollities emulating some of the music hall atmosphere for their nostalgic medley, encouraging the audience to sing along.

The Jollities' 'old songs' concluded with the nonsensical, high-kicking fun of 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay', an energetic finale that rewarded both the child performers and their audience for several hours of concentrated attention. In 1931, George Bernard Shaw looked back on Lottie Collins's 1891 version, which set the standard for all others: wearing red tights and a foaming white petticoat, Collins repeated the refrain, with 'three low kicks on *Ta-ra-ra* and its high kick on *boom*', until the audience were in a frenzy.<sup>276</sup> Another account suggested the typical adult performer of 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay' dressed as a 'dear little girl' with the 'inanity of sweetness', and wore

a blond wig with curls falling artlessly over her shoulders ... She dressed as a child of twelve, with a sash that conveyed the idea of being dressed for Sunday-school.<sup>277</sup>

The appeal of the dance came from this performance of knowing innocence. However, Melissa Bellanta has challenged the common assumption that the song's 'titillating effects on men' were the only reason for its popularity:

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<sup>272</sup> Mander and Mitchenson, *British Music Hall*, 39. In 1925 the London Pavilion, one of the most successful West End variety theatres, presented *On With the Dance* (written by Noel Coward) which included the song-and-dance item 'The Club: Moulin Rouge 1888-1890', with costumes inspired by Toulouse-Lautrec. Ellacott, 'London Revues 1925-29.'

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Magee, *Clouds of Glory*, 73.

<sup>275</sup> Mander and Mitchenson, *British Music Hall*, 30.

<sup>276</sup> George Bernard Shaw, *Music in London: 1890-1894*, vol. 2 (New York: William H Wise, 1931), 95.

<sup>277</sup> Troy Kinney and Margaret West Kinney, *The Dance: its Place in Art and Life* (Norwood: Plimpton Press, 1914), 231.

What tends to be glossed over in this commentary is that the act's raucous physicality also commended it to boisterous girls. Trying to kick the moon on the 'boom' in the chorus was plain adrenalin-pumping fun.<sup>278</sup>

We can imagine the Jollities girls spending the last of their evening's energy on this finale.

### Miniature adults

In the music hall tradition, there were many women who dressed as children, using ringlets and lisping voices as signifiers of youth and innocence that added comedy to their saucy lyrics. Marie Lloyd and Vesta Victoria both played on this wide-eyed faux naivety in their acts.<sup>279</sup>

It was also common for children to emulate adults. A generation before the Jollities, child-star Gracie Fields found her popularity as a 'singer of "sob stuff" ... the attraction being grown-up songs, rendered by a small girl'.<sup>280</sup> The Jollities children sought to tap into the same appeal by including costumes and lyrical content that imitated or lampooned adult conventions.

On 31 October 1925, to perform her solo 'Cosmopolitan Courtships', ten-year-old Eileen wore a 'deep pink velveteen evening dress, a copy of adult dress'.<sup>281</sup> The dress had coral pink godets, trimmed with sequins and feathers, and its dropped waist emulated fashionable women's styles of the mid-1920s. Putting children in adult-style clothes was a frequently-used technique of miniaturisation. At a children's performance in Manchester, 'particular pleasure' was given by 'Joy Burgess and Hazel Hanson ... the latter costumed in the smartest little gentleman's evening dress!'<sup>282</sup>

How did the excess of littleness incorporate adult themes? The lyrics of 'Cosmopolitan Courtships' described the multiple love affairs of 'a simply charming girl who's just become an heiress'. Written in 1915, during the First World War, the song appropriately included suitors from the Triple Entente: Britain, France and Russia.

From London or from gay Paree they always swarm around her ...  
From Sweden to Siberia – her charm is all the fashion  
and there's a Russian soldier man for whom she has a passion.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Melissa Bellanta, 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay': Lottie Collins' Act and the Not-So-Modern Girl,' *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 37, no. 1 (2010): 8.

<sup>279</sup> Lee Jackson, *Palaces for Pleasure: From Music Halls to the Seaside to Football, How the Victorians Invented Mass Entertainment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 88.

<sup>280</sup> E H Short, *Sixty Years of Theatre* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951), 340.

<sup>281</sup> V&A catalogue, Misc.120-1986

<sup>282</sup> 'Provincial Notes,' 225-30.

<sup>283</sup> Transcribed by Amy Brock, MOC/BROC/1/7

The song ends with the Russian 'Ivanovitch' making his claim. In the decade between the song being written and Eileen's performance of it, the global political situation had transformed, and Russia had gone from a wartime ally to a Communist state, via the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Behenna and her collaborators' choice to include the song suggests either that the specifics of the lyrics were not of importance to them, or that they embraced the new significations. In 1926, 'a passion' between a Russian soldier and a British heiress may have indicated strong Communist sympathies. Was Behenna giving coded acknowledgment to the Russian Jews of the East End whose relatives, husbands, or selves had fought on the Bolshevik side?<sup>284</sup> The Jollities' lack of overt political leanings in any other form makes it more likely that the song's appeal lay in its exaggerated French and Russian accents, perhaps with a hint of nostalgia for the old order and the saucy humour.

The term 'cosmopolitan' in 'Cosmopolitan Courtships' also had some specific fantasy resonances. In the early twentieth century, the word came to indicate a distinctly modern form of transnational urban life, associated with women's bodies and sexual freedoms. The wealthy, desirable heiress in Eileen's song encapsulated those somewhat bohemian aspirations. According to Judith Walkowitz, real-life Edwardian cosmopolitanism was epitomised by experimental 'barefoot' dancer Maud Allan, whose act combined modern North American physical fitness with the eroticism of the East, and displayed her athletic body in fantastical costumes.<sup>285</sup> Allan's unconventional performances 'incited fantasies of escape and pleasure, while simultaneously provoking anxieties of dislocation and unease'. This unease tipped into outrage at the end of the First World War, and Allan became a target for the conservative forces of the British press, along with her bohemian aristocratic circle. Allan's formerly attractive qualities of internationalism and exoticism had become marks of the 'debased condition of deracination, hybridity, displacement, and racial degeneration – all the dangers of the unplaced' which frightened the bourgeoisie in the aftermath of war. Walkowitz presents the story of Maud Allan as a tale of domestication: the First World War curtailed the expansive, worldly potential of cosmopolitan women, and the transnational urban leisure economy which gave them success.<sup>286</sup> In the mainstream at least, fantasies of nostalgia and stability overcame the fantasies of barefoot freedom.

And yet. Here are the Jollities in the mid-1920s, still singing the fantasies of pan-European love among the upper classes. These excessively little girls in homemade costumes were absolutely

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<sup>284</sup> Sally Alexander claims that 'many' Russian men returned to fight at the end of the First World War, leaving their families in London. Alexander, 'Memory-Talk.'

<sup>285</sup> Judith R Walkowitz, 'The "Vision of Salome": Cosmopolitanism and Erotic Dancing in Central London, 1908–1918,' *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 2 (2003): 338-40.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 340, 374-6.

domestic – they embodied conservative ideas of nostalgia, whiteness and innocence. But they sang about sexually liberated upper-middle-class women whose desire crossed borders and linked ‘Sweden to Siberia’. To the Jollities’ performers and audiences, cosmopolitanism still had a fantasy allure. They were not in the theatres of the West End, but on the stages of the East End – a locus of international culture, trade, and migration, where Maud Allan’s form of exotic international sexuality still had currency.

Elements of adult sexuality played throughout the Jollities’ programmes, from the rough wooing of the ‘Bloke who Wrote The Sheik’ to the more coy ‘Oh Darling Do Say Yes’, which included the lines, ‘Every time we kiss and squeeze / Makes me groggy at the knees’. Another of Eileen’s solo performances, ‘When my Sugar Walks Down the Street’ featured the couplet, ‘He’s so affectionate and I’ll say this / That when he kisses me I sure stay kissed!’<sup>287</sup> These songs used the first person, to describe the singer’s experience of romantic love, putting the Jollities child in the position of the love-making adult presupposed by the song. If, as Lynne Vallone has stated, ‘the judging of female conduct ... is always in play when girls are on the stage’, how did the Jollities’ audiences judge the behaviour described in these songs?<sup>288</sup> Did Behenna reject the *fin-de-siècle* idealisation of the middle-class child as innocent and irresponsible? Or were the Jollities children considered so innocent that their ignorance in the face of innuendo was part of their appeal?

The fact that ten-year-old Eileen wore a mini-adult evening dress costume and sang adult-themed lyrics brings to mind two existing interpretive theories. The first is to see Eileen (and the other Jollities girls who performed similarly) as practitioners of ‘age transvestitism’, whose dress and behaviour challenged the audience’s preconceptions about age-appropriateness.<sup>289</sup> Marah Gubar coined this term to describe how Victorian stage children in adult dress, acting explicitly drunken or romantic roles, were ‘stubbornly strange’ figures who ‘trouble[d] the adult-child binary’.<sup>290</sup> For Gubar, this strangeness played out at the level of desire, and she suggests that the precocity of the stage children’s talents represented a parallel sexual precocity; seeking to understand the appeal of these child-adults, her evidence comes from entranced ‘child-lovers’ of the audience, including Walt Whitman and Charles Dodgson.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> ‘When My Sugar Walks Down the Street’ (Gene Austin, Jimmy McHugh and Irving Mills, 1924), ‘Oh Darling Do Say Yes’ (Lew Jerome, Al Milne and Gene Silver, 1925).

<sup>288</sup> Vallone, ‘The Place of Girls in the Traditions of Minstrelsy and Recitation,’ 45.

<sup>289</sup> Marah Gubar, ‘Who Watched The Children’s Pinafore? Age Transvestitism on the Nineteenth-Century Stage,’ *Victorian Studies* 54, no. 3 (2012): 411.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

The strange sexuality of a precocious child, old before her years, may have had conscious or unconscious appeal to some in the Jollities' audiences. There is, however, a problem with taking the highly eloquent, widely published views of nineteenth-century literary men (who were, by definition, exceptional) and attributing them to people who came to the Jollities' concerts decades later, especially without recorded evidence of comparable reactions to the Jollities girls' precocity.

It is important, also, to trouble the adult-child binary which the theory of age transvestitism takes for granted, in the assertion of its transgression. I have already described how, by the 1920s, although the definitions of childhood were multiple, the upper age limit of childhood had risen to include adolescence and even teenage years. As childhood lengthened, the possibility of dividing clearly between 'children' and 'adults' became more problematic, and new categories of 'young person' and 'adolescent' introduced a spectrum of maturity, rather than a binary. Ten-year-old Eileen may have shared a legal category with fourteen- and four-year-olds, but their experience and understanding would have been worlds apart. As established in the previous chapter, the Jollities were not just a group of identical 'children', but a group of girls (and three boys) that spanned a ten year age difference, and thus encompassed a range of developmental stages, abilities, and levels of knowingness. To demonstrate this, imagine how different it would seem for a four-year-old to wear a diamante evening gown, compared to a fourteen-year-old. Our perception of what is appropriate or inappropriate, comedic or precocious, depends on the socially defined limits and gradations of childhood and what we expect girls of different ages to do and wear. The Jollities' audiences of the 1920s probably had the same range of reactions to Eileen and her colleagues.

Which brings us to the second interpretation, that wearing women's clothing is a 'dress performance of femininity' for girls.<sup>292</sup> Anabella Pollen used this phrase to describe how twenty-first century girls aged three to eight engage with mass-produced dressing-up costumes. Pollen drew on Judith Butler's early writings on the performativity of gender, which claimed that gender traits were acquired through repetitive performance.<sup>293</sup> Rather than emanating from an interior core or substance, what it means to be feminine is inscribed onto the surface of the body through acts, gestures and desire. The reference to performance in Butler's theories was not meant to be taken literally, as in stage performance; Butler was making the distinction between innate gender identity and outward gender identification and embodiment through repetition in everyday life. Nevertheless, Pollen's use of dressing-up costume helpfully demonstrates how costume is part of

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<sup>292</sup> Anabella Pollen, 'Performing Spectacular Girlhood: Mass-Produced Dressing-Up Costumes and the Commodification of Imagination,' *Textile History* 42, no. 2 (2011): 174.

<sup>293</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge, 1990).

the embodied performance of daily life, and how children's dress in particular teaches the wearer a set of gestures and behaviours.<sup>294</sup> A child singing flirtatious songs while wearing a little evening dress was practicing walking the troubling tightrope of femininity: innocent yet available, pretty but modest, natural yet well-trained. This is another example of the double-voicing that allowed two identities to exist simultaneously, just as a child reciting a fairy poem was instructed to *be* the fairy, and the Jollities' voice training taught them that all speech was performance.

### **Artlessness**

The question of whether stage children were 'knowing' or 'innocent' recurs throughout the historiography.<sup>295</sup> The word 'knowingness' is used in histories of music hall and revue to describe the unspoken, meta-textual understandings between performer and audience which ignited the innuendoes and produced the effect of bawdy comedy.<sup>296</sup> It was a shared knowledge. But 'knowingness' in child performers was often a criticism. Precocity, artfulness or too much self-awareness was a turn-off for audiences, perhaps because it disrupted the ideal of little malleable children evoked in politics and practice.<sup>297</sup>

Desiring that children be 'unknowing' introduces an inequality of knowledge between the adult audience member and the child performers, between watcher and watched, those who understood the meaning produced and those who did not. Steedman has suggested that

the unknowingness of the female child could best be maintained if her presence was able to signal the process of growth and physiological maturity in which she was implicated, but without overt recognition of it.<sup>298</sup>

In other words, the perception of girls' innocence relied on the disavowal of growth and maturity, while simultaneously signalling that the child was in the process of growing up. Children were both frozen in time (through the production of an excess of littleness as described above) while also full of potential. The 'saucy' lyrics of the Jollities' songs, sung from the point of view of an unknowing child, offered precisely this fantasy of knowing-innocence, in which the child herself was 'implicated'. The audience could have it both ways.

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<sup>294</sup> Pollen, 'Spectacular Girlhood,' 173. But the children of the Jollities were not dressing up only to play. They were part of a structured, rehearsed concert show, and what they did while they wore these costumes was carefully planned and pre-defined.

<sup>295</sup> In particular, Gubar, 'Drama of Precocity.:'; Casteras, 'Winged Fantasies.'

<sup>296</sup> Peter Bailey, 'Conspiracies of Meaning: Music-Hall and the Knowingness of Popular Culture,' *Past & Present*, no. 144 (1994): 146.

<sup>297</sup> Chapman, 'Riddle of Peter Pan.'

<sup>298</sup> Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*, 147.



Although they were not encouraged to be knowing, children were paradoxically praised for being 'clever'. *The Stage* provided an example from 1924: 'a clever troupe of children dance cleverly'.<sup>299</sup> The related word 'perfect' also recurs frequently. At Miss Deacon's performance in Liverpool, 'a real hit was scored by Bunty Meredith, aged four, who, carrying her doll in her arms, danced it to sleep with perfect time and grace'.<sup>300</sup> In Brighton, 'Little Albert Edmonds and Kitty Taperill ... gave a fascinating demonstration of the Charleston – technically correct and perfect'.<sup>301</sup> The paradox of technical accomplishment and fantasy artlessness could be resolved by attributing the hard work to the teacher, not the children themselves. This was the case when Madame Grace Behenna was praised for her 'untiring efforts in training her band of pupils to such finished perfection'.<sup>302</sup>

An illuminating parallel to performing children can be found in Daisy Ashford, who wrote a novel called *The Young Visitors* [sic] when she was nine years old in 1890. The book was not published until 1919, when it became immediately successful, being reprinted many times, and dramatized for the stage and for film.<sup>303</sup> Ashford catered to the post-war desire for clever little girls which the Jollities also served. Ashford's adult readers tended to see her writings as a miniature, toy-like version of the 'real' thing, just as audiences for juvenile dancers described seeing miniature adults. Critics who credited the book with genuine insight and originality, were more likely to attribute it to her family friend, J. M. Barrie.<sup>304</sup>

Ashford's lack of experience meant that she sometimes used words she did not understand, jumbled syntax or repurposed language. But this does not invalidate her genuinely humorous satirical and farcical depiction of upper-middle class courtship. As Katherine Carlson explains:

We can read Ashford as an unintentional parodist without eroding her authorial agency because we are not unfairly laughing at her inevitable stylistic immaturity, but rather finding amusement in the cracks her work innocently reveals in adult-defined literary constructions.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> 'Mme Walker's Clever Local Juvenile Troupe,' *The Stage* 8 November 1923, 4; 'Concert and Entertainment Notes,' *The Stage* 7 February 1924, 5.

<sup>300</sup> 'Provincial Notes,' 225-30.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> 'Concert at Mile End.' Jacqueline Rose has also identified the word 'perfect' as a 'giveaway' that fantasy is at work. Jacqueline Rose, *Mothers: An Essay on Love and Cruelty* (Faber & Faber, 2018), 101.

<sup>303</sup> Lorna Sage, Germaine Greer, and Elaine Showalter, *The Cambridge Guide to Women's Writing in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>304</sup> Carlson, 'Artful Artlessness,' 71.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 61-4.

Similarly, the Jollities' performances may have 'innocently' shone new light on sentimental songs, and humorously exposed the silliness of others.

In 1921 Constance Spender asked, 'should children only read poetry they can understand? ... the really unimaginative child is no happier; while the imaginative suffer much.' Children's enjoyment went beyond mere *sense*, she argued, and evoked Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 'what it says I don't know, but it sings a loud song'.<sup>306</sup> The level of understanding within the Jollities troupe must have varied between its members, but what is certain is that by taking part in the troupe, they had the opportunity to sing loud in new places, encounter new ideas and develop their own knowingness. It would be highly marginalising to assume that, because the Jollities children may not have completely understood the suggestiveness of 'Who Takes Care of the Caretaker's Daughter?' (a bawdy song performed 31 October 1925), that they did not have comic timing, and were able to make the audience laugh with, rather than at, them.<sup>307</sup>

It was the adult audience who invested most heavily in the ideals of perfect little innocent artless artistes. A very long concert review appeared in the *Chester Observer* in April 1925, which provided a panegyric upon performing children. The article brought together fantasies of littleness, youth, artlessness, beauty and grace, providing a perfect summary of all the themes of this chapter, and so I will quote it at length. 'The audience', wrote the enthusiastic reviewer, assembled at Chester Town Hall, where they

escaped for almost three hours from the prosaic, workaday world, and were transported to a land of romance, where graceful movement, tuneful music and colourful and beautiful dresses were blended in a harmony which charmed the senses.

The dancers, all of whom were young, were, with the exception of two of their number, members of the 'gentler sex.' Their natural beauty, allied to grace and ease of carriage made a strong appeal to the audience, as did also the artlessness of some of the very young artists, who in one or two items succeeded in 'bringing down the house.' Several of the items were of considerable artistic merit. It was a performance such as made the young people who witnessed it rejoice in their youth, while the older people present must, for the nonce, have felt young once again ...

His Worship [the mayor] remarked that he did not think there was anything more interesting and pleasing than the dancing of children; they were so

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<sup>306</sup> Spender, 'Poetry and the Child,' 382.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

unaffected. The professional dancers one saw often seemed too self-conscious, but the dancing of children was most delightful.<sup>308</sup>

## Conclusion

The Juvenile Jollities' concerts were large-scale, labour-intensive productions that incorporated a huge range of popular entertainment. True to the spirit of the revue genre, Behenna's troupe took topical crazes and sentimental classics and combined them into a cheerful programme designed to brighten and entertain. Participation in the Jollities meant learning, repeating and rehearsing an ever-changing repertoire of songs and dances, as the programmes responded to current fashions. These programmes prove that children actively participated in popular culture and contributed to the performance landscape of London.

Some of the ideas from wider culture that found their way into the Jollities repertoire included racist stereotypes, which have been described as 'Dixiephilia' and 'Orientalism'. Whether conscious of it or not, Eileen and her fellow dancers repeated these reductive tropes through their costume, lyrics and instrumentation. 'Pickaninny Alley' and 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep' both romanticised deprivation – of the plantation and the urban slum – and betrayed a conservatism which may have been escapist or consolatory.

The mix of conservatism and modernity in the Jollities' shows was a feature of interwar theatre more generally. Ramsay Burt has described this as a 'fascination with otherness', which existed within dominant ideologies of acculturation and assimilation.<sup>309</sup> An example of this paradox might be the voice training of the Jollities children, who practiced their received pronunciation while learning to sing in fake cockney accents. Homi K. Bhabha describes the nation as a narrative told and retold through social and cultural life (like a fairytale, perhaps). The fantasies of this narrative include,

the *heimlich* pleasure of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste; ... the sensibility of sexuality.<sup>310</sup>

All these fantasy narratives were played out, and played with, in the Jollities' concerts. Their songs, scenas and recitations heightened Otherness with melodrama and domesticated it with comedy.

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<sup>308</sup> 'Delightful Dancing Display,' *Cheshire Observer* 25 April 1925, 5. It is worth noting that the word 'nonce' here means 'for the time being'; only after 1971 has the word been associated with sex offenders. 'nonce, n.2'. OED Online. December 2019. Oxford University Press. <https://o-www-oed-com.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/view/Entry/127828> (accessed 4 January 2020).

<sup>309</sup> Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, 'Race' and Nation in Early Modern Dance* (Routledge, 1998), 15.

<sup>310</sup> *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (Routledge, 1990), 2.

They pushed at the edges of sexual sensibilities with cheeky humour, but it was ultimately unthreatening. And to conclude each concert, they resolved all conflict with a uniting singalong of the national anthem. We are left with more questions than answers about how the Jollities' East End audiences understood or responded to the ideas of race, nationality and gender that the children voiced onstage. There must have been many ways of finding sentiment, humour and offence in their productions.

The Jollities were just one group among many who brought children's performance to an eager, fascinated audience. Following the First World War, the increased availability of children onstage (thanks to the charity clause) gave adults more opportunities to see the 'artless' and 'charming' displays of very young children – and they were embraced with a feverous fascination. My analysis of the accounts of these performances reveals a preoccupation with littleness that spilled over into excess: a clear mark of fantasy. This fantasy was the product of practical, material techniques of staging and costume, as well as canny marketing and language.

Littleness was the key to opening up other related fantasies, hopes for the future and nostalgia for the past. Victorian and Romantic ideals resurfaced, in particular the child as an uncorrupted, unified being. Friedrich Schiller's claim that 'childhood is the only unmutated nature that we still encounter in the cultivated part of humanity' had new resonance following the First World War.<sup>311</sup> Culture and civilisation had produced a war which had mutilated whole countries, economies, and the bodies of millions of men. The children onstage were seemingly untouched by all that; physically perfect, cheerful and energetic.

People were exhausted by the war, Walter Benjamin wrote in the 1920s, and they wanted to escape; they were tired of being awake, and were seeking 'simple but magnificent' dreams 'to make up for the sadness and discouragement of the day'.<sup>312</sup> Magnificence is a term like glamour, which appeals beyond the usual range of emotions and indicates the presence of an aura. Benjamin identified Mickey Mouse as the ultimate figure of wish-fulfilment, but dancing children could also be sufficiently simple and magnificent.

The lyrics, poetry and prose of the Jollities' performances sometimes complicated and contradicted this fantasy discourse, by introducing ideas of sexual knowledge and cosmopolitanism. Through their performance of adult lyrics in adult costume, the Jollities offered some parts of their audience a paradoxical fantasy of knowing innocence. Gubar has drawn the wider conclusion that 'childhood

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<sup>311</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *Essays*, ed. Walter Hinderer and Daniel O Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 1988), 195.

<sup>312</sup> Benjamin, 'Experience and Poverty,' 744.

itself is a performance', in which children play out the scripts offered to them by adults; but she hopefully suggests that they might also 'collectively forge new ones'.<sup>313</sup> The next chapter of this thesis thinks more about children forging their own scripts, and considers the desires and motivations of Eileen and her dance partners. What freedom might they have found in the scripts offered to them?

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<sup>313</sup> Marah Gubar, 'Introduction: Children and Theatre,' *The Lion and the Unicorn* 36, no. 2 (2012).

## Chapter 6: Making it big

What motivated the Jollities girls through the long hours of rehearsals and their exhausting concerts? Were they driven by their own passions, like Posy in *Ballet Shoes*, who 'would enjoy it because it was dancing, and did not care a bit if there was an audience or not'?<sup>314</sup> Or were they obedient like Tania Whichart? 'On the stage as she had always known it, you were told to dance, and dance you jolly well did, until you were told to stop'.<sup>315</sup>

Theatre-school director Italia Conti insisted that 'to the child its performance onstage is not a *task*, not *work*, but recreation and play', but the Jollities girls worked hard.<sup>316</sup> Some girls might have been driven by ambition and competitiveness. An audience member at a 1925 dance competition noticed 'clever kiddies whose *whole heart and soul* was centred on winning a silver medal or money prize'.<sup>317</sup> Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips has written of children's 'astonishing capacity for pleasure [and] unwilling relish of sensuous experience'.<sup>318</sup> Some sense of that childish joy came through in the previous chapter's evocation of 'boisterous girls' trying to 'kick the moon' in the chorus of 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay'.<sup>319</sup> The Jollities were not merely a band of pupils trained to finished perfection, as their reviewers sometimes depicted them. Rather, they were a group of children and adolescents who had their own desires and motives to take to the stage.

How might we discover these desires? There are no first-hand accounts from the Jollities girls themselves; many of the troupe members are untraceable, and even Eileen Brock left dresses, programmes and photographs in place of her own words. This is a typical challenge for historians of girls' dance – as Alexandra Carter found in her investigation of nineteenth-century ballet girls, 'their silence is deep, and in many instances, their experiences have to be surmised or inferred'.<sup>320</sup> In this chapter, I return to programmes, sheet music and costumes to foreground the children's experience of performing, singing and wearing them. My inferences are informed by concepts of fantasy already outlined in this thesis, and insights from feminist psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, which illuminate the place of the Jollities troupe in the lives of its young members.

In the mid-1920s, Eileen was approaching adolescence as a bereaved only child, and finding her way as a member of a hardworking juvenile troupe. One of her solo performances offers a potent

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<sup>314</sup> Streatfeild, *Ballet Shoes*, np.

<sup>315</sup> Streatfeild, *The Whicharts*, np.

<sup>316</sup> Oates, Theatrical Children Licenses Committee Report.

<sup>317</sup> 'Letters.'

<sup>318</sup> Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery* (Faber and Faber, 1998), 21.

<sup>319</sup> As claimed in 'Concert at Mile End'; Bellanta, 'Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay.'

<sup>320</sup> Carter, 'Blonde, Bewigged.'

example of how individual performers might relate to their scripted material. 'Dream Daddy' was a sentimental song about a child longing for a father – parallels with Eileen's own situation are obvious. Just as her mother Amy had taken cultural scripts from fairytales and pantomime and made them personal, I suggest how Eileen may have appropriated popular song lyrics to express her own feelings or experiences. And by welcoming more speculative analysis, and bringing together echoes and resonances from other sources, I will offer some reflections on the mother-daughter duo of Amy and Eileen which encompass identification and frustration. This relationship was central to both their lives, yet remains enigmatic to us a century later.

The Jollities girls grew up in a decade devoted to dance, when girls and young women were prominent participants both onstage and on dance floors. Dance offered opportunity for physical display and creative expression as well as unprecedented leisure and sociability.<sup>321</sup> Sociologist Angela McRobbie has argued,

for women and girls, dance has always offered a channel, albeit a limited one, for bodily self-expression and control; it has also been a source of pleasure and sensuality. Even though it has often been directed towards men, the spectacle of women dancing has been linked unambiguously with female pleasure.<sup>322</sup>

As Sally Alexander has described, girls of the 1920s were articulating their wants and desire across discourses of fashion, fiction, labour and leisure – including dance. Their lives may not have been completely transformed compared to their mothers', but their generation, encouraged by advertising and cinema, were able to imagine and occasionally enact transformations: 'the dream was there'.<sup>323</sup>

This new freedom of expression inevitably collided with forces of conservative morality and increasing regulation. Interwar dancers' bodies became a site of conflict, as attempts were made to control what movements were allowed and which were unacceptable. Social historians of dance including Carter, Nott, Garafola, and Davis have examined contested movements and choreography, but thus far children's bodies have been overlooked.<sup>324</sup> This chapter will examine the ideological struggles over what was considered appropriate and inappropriate for children in the 1920s, in the context of a growing industry for dance lessons. The fantasy of the ballerina *en pointe*, which inspired so many girls, was a point of contention in the new arena of professional and standardised

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<sup>321</sup> Koritz, *Culture Makers*; Hartman, *Wayward Lives*.

<sup>322</sup> Angela McRobbie, 'Dance and Social Fantasy,' in *Gender and Generation* (Springer, 1984), 132-3.

<sup>323</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a Woman*, 205.

<sup>324</sup> Alexandra Carter, *Dance and Dancers in the Victorian and Edwardian Music Hall Ballet* (Ashgate, 2005); Davis, 'Christy's Minstrels'; Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes*; Nott, *Music for the People*.

dance classes. It emerges that the Jollities bucked the trend: Grace Behenna was far more permissive than the ascendant dance authorities about what her troupe of girls were allowed and encouraged to do.

### **Ambition and motivation**

The 1920s dance boom offered a possible career for lower-middle and working-class girls.<sup>325</sup> As ballroom partners, chorus girls or even principal dancers, they had a chance to achieve financial independence. So the Jollities girls were likely to be interested in 'making it big', even if their adult managers and audiences wanted to keep them small. Was stardom a realistic ambition? Perhaps if they made it big while they were still small. A 1924 report declared it 'curious' that very few child performers continued to work on the stage beyond age fourteen: 'the demand for them appears to lay largely in the charm of the child. Their littleness is in all probability their value'.<sup>326</sup> There were some real-life success stories to inspire the most determined. I have already mentioned how Gracie Fields got her break as part of a juvenile troupe, and Soe Soe Bendon, who was onstage with the Jollities in April 1926, achieved some success as a film actress by age ten, appearing in four British films in 1932.<sup>327</sup>

Girls' aspirations were encouraged by fictional fantasies including the silent movie hit *The Kid* (1921). The film showed a working-class girl rise to stardom on the stage, and become rich enough to reclaim the illegitimate son she had needed to give up. Streatfeild's two ballet novels *The Whicharts* (1931) and *Ballet Shoes* (1936) offered accounts of work in pantomime, chorus and touring theatre that demonstrated the complex relationship between artistic self-expression, enjoyment, and economic independence. Not all of Streatfeild's characters are equally enchanted by the glamour of performance, but they recognise the need to earn money. Within their non-traditional families (in each book, three adopted girls live with their unmarried guardian in a boarding house) the children are encouraged to learn 'so that they can explore opportunities for economic independence'.<sup>328</sup>

The provisions of the charity clause meant that rewards for young dancers were more likely to be emotional than financial. Hermione Gingold, an Edwardian child star, described in her memoir how

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<sup>325</sup> Vicinus, 'Happy Times.'

<sup>326</sup> 'Panto Pixies,' 5.

<sup>327</sup> Programme of Grand Variety Concert, 27 April 1926. V&A Misc.165:15-1986. The films were *Hobsons Choice*, *Hindle Wakes*, *Lord Babs* and *The Blue Danube: a Rhapsody* (all 1932). 'Soe Soe Bendon,' accessed 19 July 2020, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2bccaa62b6>.

<sup>328</sup> Roberta Seelinger Trites, 'Examining Streatfeild Through a Feminist Lens,' *The Lion and the Unicorn* 21, no. 2 (April 1997): 305. McRobbie points out that hard work, not 'luck, breeding or privilege', is the route to success in Streatfeild's books. Angela McRobbie, 'Dance Narratives and Fantasies of Achievement,' in *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (Macmillan, 1991).



the audience's intoxicating applause 'went to my head like champagne'.<sup>329</sup> Sadly, feelings of elation could be easily undercut by thoughtless criticism. Recalled in her East End memoir *Hot Bread and Chips*, scholarship-girl Liz Flint invited her flighty, glamorous older sister Doll to her end-of-term school production.<sup>330</sup> After watching Liz perform, Doll shook and shook with laughter at the 'ridiculousness' of it all, leaving her sister, who had been transported to another plane with enjoyment, distraught: 'I was ready to cry that *my heaven* had not been hers as well'.<sup>331</sup>

Onstage, a girl might find warmth and love which was unforthcoming in her family, and the affection of the audience could provide emotional compensation for the hard work of performance. Sadie Male (born 1920) described the almost physical sensation:

... it was like the audience giving you a great big hug. You could control the audience, you could make them laugh and make them cry.<sup>332</sup>

In a culture where children were widely expected to be seen and not heard, and where girls came at the very bottom of the family hierarchy, the sense of power and agency for those few minutes must have been extraordinary.

Other children's ambitions may have been spurred by their mothers or fathers. Alexander has described how, across generations of Londoners, the 'ancestral voices' of parents and grandparents 'imprinted themselves in the child's mind, kindling desire and ambition'; in the case of the Jollities girls, this ambition drove them to rehearse and perform.<sup>333</sup> Eileen Brock's parents were both keen performers who embraced opportunities to dress up, sing and dance. Their commitment to the pantomime season, as we have seen, lasted through their decade of courtship and the hardship of the war years. From toddlerhood, Eileen was imprinted with the enjoyment of performance. Continuing to sing and dance after her father's death, it is likely that Eileen (and her mother) held onto the hopes Will had expressed in his 1919 letter: 'am glad Eileen sings and recites so well I was hoping she would'.<sup>334</sup>

Eileen may also have identified with Will more directly. In the last months of Will's life in Basra, he had dedicated himself to concert party rehearsals and performances.<sup>335</sup> In the Jollities, Eileen was

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<sup>329</sup> Gingold and Eyre, *How to Grow Old Disgracefully*, 31.

<sup>330</sup> Flint, *Hot Bread and Chips*, 142.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>332</sup> Colclough, 'Child Performers,' 80.

<sup>333</sup> Alexander, 'Memory-Talk,' 244.

<sup>334</sup> Will Brock to Amy Brock, 27 January 1921

<sup>335</sup> Every letter in the last few months of Will's life refers to the concert party's rehearsals, costumes, choosing songs, finding venues and so on.

doing the same. In his condolence letter to Amy, Albert Ewans asserted that Will 'was the only man here I think who was willing to go anywhere to sing for hospital patients or anyone else'.<sup>336</sup> Years later, as a member of the Jollities, Eileen travelled far out of London to perform at Cane Hill and Horton Mental Hospitals, directly emulating one of her father's posthumously recorded virtues.

### **Dream daddy**

The song 'Dream Daddy' was Eileen's solo performance from January to June 1925. It was one of the most frequently performed items in the Jollities' repertoire, listed six times in the thirteen programmes – no other song was performed more often. The title of 'Dream Daddy' alone suggests the song's fantasy potential for a girl whose father had died three and a half years before, and our knowledge of Eileen's life story means we are able to surmise more personal interpretations for this popular song. But the song is about dreaming not only of a daddy, but of a wide world, which the radio and its stories brought into the home. The song is about being transported by a voice, by media, by fantasy.

The lyrics of 'Dream Daddy' are written from the point of view of a child who listens to the radio each evening to hear an unknown man. So beloved is he, that he also enters the child's dreams, and so is called 'dream daddy'. The original American version of the song 'Dream Daddy' was dedicated to Harry Ehrard, a radio announcer on Philadelphia's WDAR radio station who achieved fame from 1922 with bedtime stories for children.<sup>337</sup> The British version, however, removed all references to any actual man.<sup>338</sup> The following lyrics are transcribed from Eileen's copy of the sheet music:

Verse 1:

When evening shadows start in a'falling,  
Over the radio I hear you calling,  
Tho' I don't know your name,  
Still I love you just the same,  
I dream of you too, (5)  
So I must call you

Chorus:

Dream daddy, dream daddy,

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<sup>336</sup> Albert Ewans to Amy Brock, 15 September 1921

<sup>337</sup> Alan Boris, *Philadelphia Radio* (Pennsylvania: Arcadia Press, 2011), 20.

<sup>338</sup> There were three slightly different versions of the song. The American and Australian versions of the song were dedicated to Harry E Ehrhart and A S Cochrane, respectively. In Britain, however, the BBC's 'Children's Hour' programme had rotating hosts known as aunts and uncles, hence the lyrics were changed to emphasise anonymity: 'Tho' I don't know your name' (line 3). Louis Herscher and George Keefer, 'Dream Daddy,' (New York: J. Morris Music Co, Broadway, 1923).

Wonderful daddy of mine,  
 Ev'ry night after I've said my pray'rs,  
 Your tender voice drives away all my cares, (10)  
 Dream daddy, dream daddy,  
 When the stars begin to shine.  
 That's when I lay away my books and toys,  
 And listen in with all the girlies and boys,  
 Dream daddy, dream daddy, (15)  
 Wonderful daddy of mine.

Verse 2:

All thru' the day I'm pining to hear you,  
 You're far away I just wish I were near you,  
 All of your stories sweet,  
 Make my life so complete, (20)  
 Even in my dreams,  
 You're with me it seems.<sup>339</sup>

Through this rhyming and repetitious set of lyrics, the fantasy of 'Dream Daddy' builds into a sentimental scene, full of desire. The song presents us with a little girl longing; through the radio, she hears the 'tender voice' (10) of an unknown man, and through his stories, her 'pinning' (17) is assuaged.

Herscher and Keefer's composition was a point in a constellation of musical dream texts circulating in the aftermath of the war. As shown in chapter two, popular dream beliefs found visual expression in mass-produced postcards and fine art, but they were also explored in popular music, song and dance. The Jollities' concerts included the songs 'My Daddy's Dreamtime Lullaby' (January 1926), 'Why Don't My Dreams Come True' (April 1926) and 'Fairy Dreamboat' (October and November 1925). Many other children's troupes included dream references in their repertoire, including Mrs Albert Booth's pupils in Chester, whose 'pretty ballet' titled 'The Dream' depicted a child's toys coming to life.<sup>340</sup> Dreams were often entwined with the pervasive fantasies of fairies and littleness, as in a children's poem from 1925: 'Sing a song of Silver Fairies / Fluttering o'er the beds / Dropping little Silver Dreams / In little golden heads'.<sup>341</sup>

The song has obvious connections with the *Dreaming of Daddy* postcard considered in chapter two, and it repeats many of the same themes: separation from a beloved father, and the possibility of reunion in dreams. There is a connection here too, between the bedroom as a place of dreams, and

<sup>339</sup> Score, V&A Misc.103:2-1986

<sup>340</sup> 'Children's Concert,' *Chester Observer* 24 May 1924, 2.

<sup>341</sup> 'Dreams,' *Nottingham Evening Post* 9 September 1925, 3.

bedtime as a site of stories, which might be performed by an ideal father. During the war, a book called *Daddy's Bedtime Fairy Stories* (Mary Bonner Graham, 1916) was perhaps intended to compensate for the absence of the actual father.<sup>342</sup> In both Eileen's song and postcard, dreams function as wish-fulfillments and compensations for a child, whose love for an absent man found expression in her inner, unconscious life.

Eileen's relationship with Will was one of continued separation, in which the fantasy images of her father as 'daddy in khaki' would have been more familiar, probably, than the actual man (in part evidenced by her mistaking her uncle for her father). 'Dream Daddy' expresses how feelings of desire and consolation can attach themselves to distant and partial figures, and how fantasy could fill in the gaps. The song is a poignant portrayal of the experience of mourning: Eileen's dead father is both absent and unreachable, yet present through memory and evoked through fantasy.

Annotations on the archived score show that Eileen's performance repeated the ten-line chorus five times in total (rather than the two times given in the sheet music).<sup>343</sup> This meant the phrase 'dream daddy' was sung a staggering thirty times in each performance, and the line 'wonderful daddy of mine' was repeated ten times in total and concluded the song, acting as a cadence and reinforcing the possessive 'of mine' as the point of summation.

The song's sense of longing and promise of reunion was additionally poignant when voiced by a child who had lost her father on active service, and bereavement would have been an experience Eileen shared with her audience. Ten per cent of serving men in their thirties (the same generation as Will Brock) were killed.<sup>344</sup> It is likely that the additional layers of meaning accruing from the young singer's personal circumstances were understood best by, and perhaps intended for, the adult members of the audience – women like Amy Brock who had to bring up their children alone. How surprising would it be if a widowed mother fantasised about an ideal father to read their children bedtime stories? Was this how Amy Brock imagined her daughter connecting with her (previously absent, now dead) father?

But Eileen's solo song was a product not of war but of its aftermath, and it responded to the innovations of the 1920s. 'Dream Daddy' introduced the new motif of the radio into the discourse of

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<sup>342</sup> This book opens with an evocation of the fairy realm: 'I wonder if you know, children, that there are certain lovely little fairies living around us all the time...?'. Mary Bonner, *Daddies' Bedtime Fairy Stories* (New York and London: Stokes, 1916), 15.

<sup>343</sup> At the beginning of the song is written: '1 verse 2 chorus 2nd verse 3 chorus'. This cryptic note is clarified by the additional annotation at the start of the chorus: '1st time 2 times, 2nd time 3 times'.

<sup>344</sup> Jay Winter, 'Britain's Lost Generation of the First World War,' *Population Studies* 31, no. 3 (1977).

dreams, as a mediating technology which bridged the real and the dream world. The BBC had been founded in 1922, the year before this song was written, and it although the cost of home radios in the first few years was prohibitive for most, their appearance in songs such as this demonstrates how quickly they entered popular culture and collective fantasies.<sup>345</sup> 'Dream Daddy' was promoted with the line, 'the children's favourite radio song', and it described a new form of experience – of listening in to the radio. In those earliest days, radio's novelty factor (which added new images and terms to the stock references of popular songwriters) was enhanced by its potential to inspire new emotional experiences, such as building a relationship with an anonymous or faraway voice. The song demonstrated that you did not need to own a wireless to be fascinated by radio's fantasy potential.

'Dream Daddy' is a particularly evocative fantasy, and its strength comes from how the lyrics describe the experience of listening. Bringing fantasies of fatherhood and radio together, 'Dream Daddy' describes in an almost textbook manner the *acousmatic voice* theorised by Michel Chion and Mladen Dolar. This is defined most simply as a voice whose origin we do not know and cannot see, but which produces powerful effects in the listener. Theories of the acousmatic voice emphasise its production of fantasy and desire: a voice without a physical presence, 'causes us to dream of the harmony of the whole', just as the child in the song dreams of the man whose voice she can hear.<sup>346</sup> Radio voices from far away, transmitted invisibly through the air, were acousmatic by nature.<sup>347</sup> The invisible source of the acousmatic voice gives it significant power, which is strongly felt by the listener. How appropriate then that the child in the song identifies the acousmatic voice as a father-figure, with associations of authority. Or even a divinity, whose voice enters 'Ev'ry night after I've said my pray'rs' (9), and whose presence continues 'even in my dreams' (21). The acousmatic voice is a 'spirit without a body', though it brings a sense of physical closeness; this experience of *visitation* is described in the song's concluding line 'you're with me it seems'.<sup>348</sup>

The phenomenon of the acousmatic voice is an acoustic parallel to the visual effects of the Tinkerbell illusion, in which an unseen light is reflected upon the stage; a projected voice produces an equivalent response, rich with imaginative fantasies. We imagine what the person looks like, what

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<sup>345</sup> Maggie Andrews, *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity* (Continuum, 2012), 7. Briggs, *The BBC: The First Fifty Years*, 4.

<sup>346</sup> Chion, *Voice*, 125.

<sup>347</sup> The partial quality of the radio voice is suggested too in the arresting term 'listen in' (14). In the parlance of the day, radio audiences 'listened in' to the broadcasts, as if every person with a wireless was participating in a communal eavesdrop, straining to overhear what was being said in another room. Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 21-24.

<sup>348</sup> Dolar, *Voice*, 60.

they are doing, how they feel about us, and so on. As soon as it is heard, the listener has ‘always-already’ encircled the acousmatic voice with fantasy and desire.<sup>349</sup> ‘I don’t know your name’, the child says in the song, ‘Still I love you just the same’ (3-4). The name ‘dream daddy’ is an invention of the child, in fact, who makes up this label to describe the beloved origin of the paternal voice – the father-figure is a misrecognised fantasy akin to Tinkerbell the fairy.

Radio’s ability to communicate across great distances had obsessed late-Victorian experimenters, as part of a group of concepts including the telephone, telegraph, and telepathy. These technologies (though the last was never perfected) pushed the limits of human perception and complicated ideas of presence and absence. In the 1920s, it was only a short leap from the radio and other wireless technologies to supernatural phenomena and occult beliefs. As Marina Warner has described, ‘hearing better, further, deeper, more, opened up intimations of yet more elusive and inapprehensible phenomena’.<sup>350</sup> Like fairies and dreams, radio offered possibilities of communication after death.

The associations with death were made more explicit in Herscher and Keefer’s second dream song ‘My Daddy’s Dreamtime Lullaby’, which the Jollities performed in January 1926.<sup>351</sup> This song had the same bedtime setting as ‘Dream Daddy’, but the emotional tone was more mournful:

Before I go to sleep  
You seem to creep  
Down from the sky  
And once my prayers are said  
I tumble into bed  
While mother sheds a tear for daddy dear on high

Though other girls and boys  
Are happy with their toys  
When I hear dream daddy  
I dream daddy’s voice  
Somehow I don’t know why  
But something makes me cry.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> ‘Lacan was later to isolate the gaze and the voice as the two paramount embodiments of object petit a’. Dolar, *Voice*, 39.

<sup>350</sup> Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 225.

<sup>351</sup> Mothers also featured in bereaved-child-radio songs, for example, ‘I Wish There Was a Wireless to Heaven (Then Mama Would Not Seem so Far Away)’ (Joe Manuel and Willy White)

<sup>352</sup> Author’s transcription from recording. Louis Herscher, George Keefer, and Fred Douglas, ‘My Daddy’s Dreamtime Lullaby,’ (Regal, July 1925).

The recordings of this song made by adult men were sentimental enough (it was released as a record by the Coon-Sanders Original Nighthawk Orchestra in the USA and Fred Douglas in the UK), but these lyrics had extra emotional significance when sung by actual war babies, whose fathers were dead and whose mothers were in the audience.



**Figure 63 Costume for 'Dream Daddy', made by Amy Brock, 1925.<sup>353</sup>**

The fantasy element of Eileen's performance was invited and enhanced by the costume she wore to perform 'Dream Daddy'. Shaped like a classical ballet dress, with a fitted pink satin bodice and (now dirty) cream tutu skirt, the dress is a picture of prettiness (Figure 63). The bodice has a structural lining of thick cotton drill, which may have been adapted from a previous garment. Over this, a simple straight piece of pink satin has been hand-sewn, and pink silk ribbons attached as shoulder straps. The attached skirt section has multiple layers of net, and is decorated with hanging pink ribbons, finished with small silk roses. The result is a pretty dress, very girlish and delicate looking, with associations of ballet and an ethereal quality which suits the romantic and dreamy content of the song. Eileen could have performed 'Dream Daddy' in a more theatrical way, wearing pyjamas or a nightdress (as she did for other Jollities songs). Instead, the dress is removed from everyday life and represents a fantasy of a dreaming girl, pretty in pink. The satin bodice, applied floral decoration

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<sup>353</sup> Score, V&A Misc.103:2-1986

and layers of net in the skirt of this dress are all similar to the fairy dress Amy made with such devoted care when Eileen was much younger, and Will was still alive (discussed in chapter three). The larger, pinker dress was a material echo of an earlier garment, but this time Eileen's performance of idealised daughterhood was much wider than her father, friends and family. She was able to perform her love on a public stage.

### **Material mother**

We have seen how Amy's desires, concerns and ambitions were inscribed onto Eileen's body through the making of costumes and the taking of photographs, and Eileen's participation in the Jollities gave Amy opportunities to share her own present talents, and past achievements. She played the piano at rehearsals and provided sheet music, but most of all, she shaped her daughter's appearance by providing beautiful costumes. Some were made to Grace Behenna's specifications (for 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep', for example), but others were retrieved from Amy's collection of old costumes she had kept over the years.

In 1925, ten-year-old Eileen was photographed dressed in a Pierrot costume for the Jollities' opening chorus (Figure 64, top). Amy made this outfit around 1909, sixteen years earlier, as one of a set of five for her nieces and their friends, and was photographed in a mysterious tableau, taking a central place in front of the camera. For the photograph of Eileen, however, Amy moved behind the camera to take a directorial role (just as she had in previous photographs of her daughter). In 1925, Amy dressed her daughter in a costume that pre-dated her birth, just as she did with the Red Riding Hood cloak we encountered in chapter one. Amy had carefully stored little girls' costumes from the pre-war years until she could transmit and re-inscribe the traditions and desires of her own generation. Using an old costume saved Amy the expense and labour of making a new one, and also had the intangible effect of bringing Eileen into the family lineage of performers, which included her cousins and parents. In both 1909 and 1925 the children held their fingers up, in a movement somewhere between shushing and gently admonishing; the opaque gesture conjures the Pierrot's roots in the Italian *commedia dell'arte* and mimed harlequinades of nineteenth-century British pantomimes.<sup>354</sup> Did Amy direct Eileen to repeat the movements of the children sixteen years before? The two photographs record a physical, material echo, produced by Amy as the reflective surface which perpetuated resemblances between generations of young girls.

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<sup>354</sup> The Pierrot's distinctive white outfit with ruff and pom-poms was a persistent and recognisable feature of Edwardian entertainments. In 1917 Amy and Eileen watched a Pierrot troupe in Clissold Park, and they were a common sight in parks and seaside resorts throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Robert F Storey, *Pierrot: A Critical History of a Mask* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4, 67.





Figure 64 Top: Eileen wearing Pierrot costume, 1925  
Bottom: Amy Piercy with three nieces and two unidentified girls, c. 1909.<sup>355</sup>

<sup>355</sup> Photograph, V&A Misc.117A-1986.

How frustrating it is that we do not know more about Amy's involvement in the Jollities. There was so much potential in children's troupes for women like Amy to find creative communities. Did they find new identities as designers, producers and directors that went beyond their roles as mothers and widows? Were the costumes a way for Amy to find continuity with herself before her marriage, before the war, before her bereavement?

In Martha Vicinus's interviews with women who had danced onstage between the wars, she learned that 'most mothers were anxious to see their daughters on the stage. In many cases the mothers were thwarted performers themselves... so a talented daughter was usually encouraged'.<sup>356</sup> Rather than characterise Amy as a pushy stage mother over-identifying with her daughter – a stereotype with a strong scent of misogyny about it – we might surmise that Eileen and Amy shared some ambitions and fantasies about performance. In her ethnographic study of children dancing at home and on stage, Valerie Walkerdine emphasised the importance of parental fantasies and generational identification, describing how a mother's fantasy provided 'a focus, an already-existent dream', which opened up a space for her daughter to pursue her own ambitions and talents.<sup>357</sup>

Psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray has drawn attention to the complicated interweaving identifications between mothers and daughters.<sup>358</sup> She described how the relationship with the mother is pre-verbal; it is founded on a physical connection between female bodies, and finds its expression through movement, touch, rhythm, intonation, gesture and melody (from the rocking of the mother's arms to the peculiar rhythm of the way she pronounces her child's name).<sup>359</sup> It is mothers, on the whole, who train their daughter's bodies. I am not the first to see in this description a direct connection to the gestural language and experience of dance.<sup>360</sup>

## Dance

In the popular imagination, dancing young women labelled as 'flappers' are symbols of the 1920s: young, thin and sparkling. Lucy Bland, Koritz and others have confirmed the importance of dance to self-consciously 'modern' women who 'represented female youthfulness and the future'.<sup>361</sup> Indeed, the determinedly single 'jazz-mad' girl was already a cliché in the 1920s; *The Daily Express*

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<sup>356</sup> Vicinus, 'Happy Times,' 359.

<sup>357</sup> Walkerdine, *Daddy's Girl*, 147-54.

<sup>358</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. G C Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>359</sup> Roni Natov, *The Poetics of Childhood* (Routledge, 2003), 74.

<sup>360</sup> Eluned Summers Bremner, 'Reading Irigaray, Dancing,' *Hypatia* 15, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>361</sup> Lucy Bland, *Modern Women on Trial: Sexual Transgression in the Age of the Flapper* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Allison Abra, *Dancing in the English Style: Consumption, Americanisation and National Identity in Britain, 1918-50* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

complained that she shunned suitors and 'lived only to dance'.<sup>362</sup> The Jollities girls were too young to frequent the dance halls and hotel bars that usually feature in descriptions of interwar leisure, where new expressive dances like the foxtrot displaced old styles like the waltz; but Eileen and her colleagues participated nevertheless in the 'spectacular' dance boom of the early 1920s.<sup>363</sup>

The Jollities girls presented a rich variety of fashionable and popular dances. Typically for the time, they included 'social, national and folk dancing as well as exercises and gymnastics with a more aesthetic element'.<sup>364</sup> They switched between Classical operatic styles and 'the various dance crazes' which became a feature of the 1920s.<sup>365</sup> They showcased a Tarantella (an Italian folk dance usually performed with tambourines) and a Mexican Tango (there is no indication how this differed from a conventional Argentine Tango). Some evenings included more ephemeral novelty dances, like the 'Hinkey Dee' and the 'Oom-pah Trot', both performed January to March 1925, the latter being popularised by Fred and Adele Astaire during their London residency in 1923–24.<sup>366</sup>



Figure 65 Sadie Male (b1920) onstage with the Military Mites, c 1932<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> George E Pearson, 'The Dream Girl – And the Awakening,' *Daily Express* 16 February 1920, 6.

<sup>363</sup> Baxendale posits that dance was rivalled only by cinema in terms of popularity between the wars. Baxendale, 'Popular Music,' 145.

<sup>364</sup> Carter and O'Shea, *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, 4.

<sup>365</sup> Baxendale, 'Popular Music,' 89.

<sup>366</sup> Katherine Riley, *The Astaires: Fred and Adele* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 93.

<sup>367</sup> Dyan Colclough, Email, 21 January 2018.

The Jollities' repertoire also included dramatic and daring acrobatic displays, which were par for the course in juvenile performances. In *The Whicharts*, when the girls' guardian first visits the dance school, the sight of the 'hardworking' girls left her

speechless with amazement. All the children seemed to be made of India rubber. The way they somersaulted, and cartwheeled, and threw each other about ... She turned to Madame, 'It's all very nice, wonderful in fact. But my children are quite ordinary little people. None of them could ever, ever do any of the things these children do'.<sup>368</sup>

Rose is assured, of course, that with practice they will. Another fictional example is provided in Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Links* (1924). The opening chapter introduces a 'modern girl' who describes herself as an 'actress': 'I've been on the boards since I was a kid of six – tumbling'.<sup>369</sup> Now aged seventeen, she has developed a more mature turn: 'song and dance, and a bit of patter, and a dash of the old business thrown in ... it hits them every time. There's to be money in it'.<sup>370</sup> This worldly-wise, entrepreneurial young woman could be any of the Jollities girls in a few years' time.

A photograph of the Manchester-based 'Military Mites' troupe captured a typical juvenile acrobatic routine of the interwar years, with eight or ten girls performing gymnastic feats to music (Figure 65). Despite the hard work of acrobatic training, Mites member Sadie was buoyed by the 'emotional incentive' of fame and recognition; at school the teachers and pupils 'made you feel special, like a star'.<sup>371</sup> She was so keen to tour with the troupe that she forged her father's signature on the paperwork.<sup>372</sup> A flexible girl could distinguish herself. During dance lessons in Edinburgh, Marie Duthie (born 1923) was 'mucking about ... [doing] a lot of back bends and that sort of thing, the splits and so on', and her teacher saw her and choreographed a piece to show off Marie's abilities.<sup>373</sup>

Not everybody enjoyed the tumbling physicality of this style; the *Dancing Times* (always a source of withering comment on popular entertainment), was pleased to note in 1927 that 'the musical comedies and revues are slowly but surely discarding acrobatic work for that of a higher class'.<sup>374</sup> Grace Behenna was not so keen to drop these spectacular demonstrations of her pupils' flexibility.

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<sup>368</sup> Streatfeild, *The Whicharts*, 45.

<sup>369</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Murder on the Links* (Project Gutenberg, 2019), 7, <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/58866>.

<sup>370</sup> Christie, *The Murder on the Links*, 8.

<sup>371</sup> Colclough, 'Child Performers,' 79, 85.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>373</sup> Janice Parker, *An Audience With* (Edinburgh: WhiteWater Publishing, 2018), 7.

<sup>374</sup> 'Children and Public Entertainments,' 139.

## Ballet

Above all others, the dance associated with little girls is ballet. The years of Eileen's childhood were a singularly significant time for the popularity and visibility of ballet, and in 1925 she found herself caught up in the live conflicts which were shaping the future of the dance form. For three years, from the age of seven, Eileen attended the classes of a Miss Williams, but aged ten she left and moved to Madame Behenna's troupe. In adulthood she recalled the reason for this: 'Miss Williams would not permit pointe-work in a girl so young', but Eileen 'had a natural ability to stand *en pointe* and felt frustrated by this ruling'.<sup>375</sup> This statement of frustration gives a rare insight into Eileen's emotional experience and speaks to her own motivations separate from her mother or father.

The precarious and strangely graceful pose of a dancer *en pointe* is the metonymic image of ballet, and Eileen was typical in her desire to achieve it. In her memoir, the writer Gwendoline Freeman (born 1908) recalled a classmate starting ballet lessons. The girl, with the Jollities-ready name Pet Page,

brought a photograph of herself to school, and there she was, with a frilly skirt, standing on the very tip of her toes. We simply could not imagine how she did this. My sister wore out a pair of shoes trying in vain.<sup>376</sup>

The little dancer able to rise onto her toes had a special, desirable quality which other girls emulated. In 1924 the dance historians Cecil Sharpe and Adolf Oppé defined 'toe-dancing' as 'perhaps the most extreme instance of the virtuosity achieved by the ballet-dancers of the last century'.<sup>377</sup> By accomplishing this, Eileen distinguished herself as a dancer with real potential; no wonder she was frustrated when her talents were constrained and thwarted.

The techniques and shoes required for toe-dancing were not restricted by age (as they are in twenty-first century ballet classes), but by skill and training.<sup>378</sup> In professional performances of the late 1800s, only soloists and prima ballerinas went onto the very tips of their toes – so the movement bestowed status. As Carter explains, 'the corps did not go on pointe nor did they have any aerial movement; their vocabulary was earthbound and mundane'.<sup>379</sup> It was usually middle- and upper-

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<sup>375</sup> V&A Catalogue, Misc.139-1986

<sup>376</sup> Freeman, *A Zeppelin in My Childhood*, 76.

<sup>377</sup> Cecil James Sharp and Adolf Paul Oppé, *The Dance: An Historical Survey of Dancing in Europe* (Halton & Truscott Smith, 1924), 47.

<sup>378</sup> Age twelve is often the threshold nowadays (no surprise), though it is widely contested. Emma Sandall, 'How Young is too Young for Pointe Work?', *Dance Magazine*, 21 December 2018 (accessed 3 August 2020) <https://www.dancemagazine.com/pointe-shoes-2622511309>

<sup>379</sup> Carter, 'Blonde, Bewigged,' 38.

class girls who had paid for the luxury of specialist lessons who were able to take the principal toe-dancing roles.<sup>380</sup>

In Edwardian England, music halls and pantomimes were the premier venues for ballet and choreographed dancing; until 1915 the large stages of the Alhambra and the Empire 'Palaces of Variety' in the West End presented nightly ballets featuring hundreds of dancers in spectacular arrangements.<sup>381</sup> Before the war the technical rigour and spectacle of Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* and its star Anna Pavlova had inspired a generation of 'balletomanes'.<sup>382</sup> But in 1920 The Association of Teachers of Operatic Dancing of Great Britain (AOD) formed, determined to elevate the status of English ballet out of the Halls and into the opera houses, and to control the distribution of skills and gestures. As established in previous chapters, dance education was central to its endeavours.

The seventy-fifth anniversary publication of the Royal Academy of Dancing (the former AOD) included a story of the famous dancer Marie Rambert visiting an English dance school during the First World War, and being shocked to see 'little girls of three or four put into hard, real ballet shoes and running about on their points with contorted legs'.<sup>383</sup> Given the force of a conversion narrative, this story was used to justify the AOD's determination to stop premature pointe-work and from 1924, establish a national dance curriculum with standardised examinations. Teachers like Miss Williams, who curtailed Eileen's ambitions, started enforcing new ideas about what was and was not appropriate at what age. All of a sudden, the desires and abilities of individual children like Eileen found themselves in conflict with the new forms of examination, authority and validity that were being disseminated by the ballet establishment. Not all teachers or dancers complied. One Thanet dance teacher called Miss Colliass was praised in a local newspaper for her 'amazing gift of converting tiny tots into toe dancers almost before they are old enough to be expected to walk'.<sup>384</sup>

The AOD's examinations were intended to provide dance teachers with 'an incentive to work upon the correct lines', and were explicitly described as a way to assess daughters' progress by the father who in 'absolutely every instance ... has to put his hand in his pocket and pay'.<sup>385</sup> We can see in these motivations how bourgeois ideas had found their way into dance education and performance, particularly as they concerned gender roles in the family, measurable progress and value for money.

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>382</sup> Karen Eliot, *Albion's Dance: British Ballet During the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 114.

<sup>383</sup> Marie Rambert, quoted in Parker, *The First Seventy Five Years*, 2.

<sup>384</sup> 'Fairy Feet,' *Thanet Advertiser* 15 March 1924, 5.

<sup>385</sup> 'All About the Children's Exams,' 300-2.

Children like Eileen, who had no father to pay the tuition fees, were not part of the AOD's imagined clientele. Nevertheless, the exams were popular: in the first year there were 1128 candidates, in the second year 1320.<sup>386</sup>

The October 1925 edition of the *Dancing Times* reminded teachers that examination dances must only include steps from the syllabus, and any precocity or ambition would be punished: 'should steps confined to a higher grade be shown, marks will be lost'.<sup>387</sup> For any child or teacher who thought pointe-work might be reached eventually, the magazine reinforced in 1926: 'there is no pointe work in any grade, and children should wear unblocked shoes'.<sup>388</sup> The rules around pointe-work were one way that children's bodies, ambitions and fantasies were under scrutiny, and access to the status of 'ballerina' was restricted, policed, and commodified through a very long series of expensive lessons.<sup>389</sup>

Before Eileen left Miss Williams' class, she appeared in the *Four Seasons*, and in the commemorative photograph, she stood defiantly on the tips of her toes (Figure 66). This suggests a rebellious determination to appear in photographs as the ballet dancer she wanted to be, even if Miss Williams forbade her from dancing that way. Eileen (presumably with the support of her mother) soon exercised her limited power by leaving the classes and finding a new teacher. Perhaps Amy and Eileen considered the Bodleian House Academy (already cited in chapter four), which maintained the older class-based barriers by charging nearly twice as much for toe-dancing lessons.

They chose Grace Behenna, who rewarded and showcased Eileen's 'natural ability' in single and group toe dances. In October 1925 – the same month as the *Dancing Times* guidelines above – their programme included four ballets: 'Bouquet', 'The Fairy Dreamboat', Doris Lederman dancing a *Pas Suel* (ballet solo), and an untitled 'original ballet by the company featuring Wendy Warman as a Nymph ... Enid Page as Cupid' specially choreographed by Madge Martin.<sup>390</sup> Eileen's hard work to defy the regulations and prove her potential was ingrained into the fabric of her blocked ballet shoes (Figure 67).

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> 'Provincial Notes,' 203.

<sup>388</sup> 'All About the Children's Exams,' 302.

<sup>389</sup> There is no evidence that that pointe-work was prohibited out of concern for the health of children's feet or bones. *Dancing Times* instead foregrounds aesthetic concerns, around taste and class.

<sup>390</sup> Programme, 31 October 1925.



Figure 66 Eileen in costume as 'Violet' from Miss Williams's ballet of the 'Four Seasons'.<sup>391</sup>



Figure 67 Eileen's blocked practice ballet shoes, made of canvas with leather soles, 1925.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Photograph, V&A Misc.139-1986

<sup>392</sup> Ballet shoes, V&A Misc.124:3,4-1986



## Glamour

When young girls choose music to dance to, Valerie Walkerdine asserted, they 'use pop songs because they are glamorous and exciting'.<sup>393</sup> The Jollities girls had plenty of opportunities for excitement in the ever-changing repertoire of popular songs selected for the troupe's concerts. Once again, the word glamour associated with young girls signals the fairies' powers of shape-shifting enchantment and fascination.

In her memoir of middle-class childhood around 1900, the social reformer Leah Manning suggested how the fascinating power of music could compel the listener to dance. As a young girl, she followed an organ grinder away from her 'nice respectable neighbourhood' of Stoke Newington, into 'the jungle of little back streets where children played all day on the pavement'.<sup>394</sup> Temporarily letting go of her respectability, Leah took off her boots and danced wildly with whirling girls 'in tattered petticoats and tangled curls'.<sup>395</sup> This story of momentary freedom and transgression reads like a parable of middle-class girlhood straining at its limitations, and in the memoir it ends predictably enough with Leah's boots being stolen. We can imagine Leah's neighbour and contemporary, the young Amy Piercy, being similarly captivated by the travelling music man and drawn into new experiences and new acquaintances. As we have seen, a generation later, the 'respectable' girls of Stoke Newington travelled into the narrow streets of Whitechapel to dance as members of the Jollities troupe. They followed Madame Behenna instead of the organ grinder, but might they have felt a similar flutter of transgression when they inhabited the roles of tattered street urchins during 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep'?

The connection between dance and desire was recognised by dancer and teacher Mary Wigman, who was credited with 'entirely new conceptions of artistic dancing'. In 1927 Wigman wrote an article for the *Dancing Times* in which she described the 'compelling impulse' to dance felt by 'girls of today'.<sup>396</sup> She claimed that dancing girls, including ballerinas, chorus girls and nightclub dancers, formed 'a restless, eager throng who seek to appease their longing in dancing' and wanted 'escape from care and trouble'.<sup>397</sup> Escape, it seems, appealed to both audiences and performers.

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<sup>393</sup> Walkerdine, *Daddy's Girl*, 154.

<sup>394</sup> Leah Manning, *A Life For Education* (Victor Gollancz, 1970), 21.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>396</sup> Mary Wigman, 'The Dance and Modern Woman,' *Dancing Times* (November 1927): 162. For fascinating examination of Mary Wigman and the idea of interiority in interwar dance, which lay beyond the bounds of this study, see Elizabeth Dempster, 'Women Writing the Body: Let's Watch a Little How She Dances,' in *Routledge Dance Studies Reader* (Routledge, 1988), 223.

<sup>397</sup> Wigman, 'The Dance and Modern Woman,' 163.

In dancing we find a literal, physical enactment of Irigaray's description of the child's unconscious, in which 'the little girl plays out her situation and reproduces around and within her an energetic circular movement that protects her from abandonment, attack, depression, loss of self'.<sup>398</sup> It is a compelling thought that the spinning and twirling dances of young girls produces an equivalent feeling of self-protection. Upon adolescence, there is a change. When the dancer Margaret Morris reached the deeply significant age of twelve she 'grew out' of children's roles, and experienced a 'need to withdraw into myself; in the theatre I entered a world of fantasy that released me from a day-to-day existence'.<sup>399</sup> That last phrase captures the contradictory experience – as described by Morris – of retreating from the body by appearing on the stage. Irigaray wrote of adolescent girls experiencing a 'break from the mother, the second cutting of the umbilicus, which frees growing girls into an inward retreat: into their rooms, into their minds, into and away from their bodies'.<sup>400</sup> The circular movement of the unconscious may draw the girl centripetally inwards, despite the performer's appearance of extroversion. Dance and adolescence reflect each other as realms of fantasy and performance. In the experience of both, the body oscillates between defying control and offering exquisite expression.

To an outsider, the vision of a self-absorbed, self-sufficient dancing girl might be unsettling. Plenty of morality tales punish girls for finding freedom in dancing or for their vanity in enjoying it, from the Grimms' *Twelve Dancing Princesses* (1812) to *The Red Shoes* (Hans Christian Andersen, 1845). In Andersen's dark tragedy, an orphan named Karen is enslaved by her dancing shoes, as punishment for taking self-regard and enjoying 'frivolous pleasures'; she dances until exhausted, and even cutting off her feet does not bring Karen peace. A new edition published in 1928 included a dramatic illustration of Karen literally dancing on the graves of her forebears (Figure 68). The crosses around her bear a strong resemblance to the wooden grave markers used in the First World War cemeteries; is the girl meant to represent the aftermath generation dancing compulsively among the ruins of war? Eileen's generation did seize the opportunity to dance, and as established in the previous chapter, their talented displays were as fascinating and captivating for the adults around them as they were for the girls themselves.

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<sup>398</sup> Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 97-98.

<sup>399</sup> Morris, *Creation in Dance and Life*, 13.

<sup>400</sup> Mavor, *Becoming*, 28.



Figure 68 Karen Dancing in the Graveyard, wood-engraving by Willi Harwerth, 1928<sup>401</sup>

## Costumes

Eileen wore red shoes to dance her heart out in the Jollities' original ballet 'Bouquet'. She played the part of a carnation, with a costume of:

Scarlet petal dress trimmed [with] Scarlet Carnations. Scarlet Carnations on hair.  
Scarlet floral sunshade - Scarlet Toe shoes and socks.<sup>402</sup>

Although the dress is sadly very deteriorated, it does survive well enough to show us how this brief was interpreted (Figure 69). Long petal shapes of scarlet chiffon were layered over a tunic of artificial silk, and a narrow band of horizontally pleated chiffon formed a bodice, with narrow red ribbon straps. Bright red paper carnations were sewn on the front. On the stage, this costume would have moved and felt a world apart from the stiff brown dress worn for 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep', described in the previous chapter. The layers of chiffon and artificial silk would have floated and fluttered upon Eileen's dancing body as she moved, like the dancing fairies 'dressed in lovely, flimsy red frocks' described in one wartime storybook.<sup>403</sup>

Eileen's chest, arms and legs were all bare. This would have been a stark contrast to how girls appeared out on the street. The war years had seen some loosening of stays and a reduction in the amount of underclothing for fashionable adult women and girls, but most working-class schoolgirls

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<sup>401</sup> Hans Andersen, *The Red Shoes, With Coloured Wood-Engravings by Willi Harwerth* (Bristol: Douglas Cleverdon, 1928).

<sup>402</sup> Costume list, 1925.

<sup>403</sup> Bonner, *Daddies' Bedtime Fairy Stories*, 25.

wore multiple petticoats and vests, outside drawers, thick knickers and combinations layered under their dresses.<sup>404</sup> The carnation costume was a mark of the Jollities' modernity, and of changing attitudes to dance: unstructured silk costumes with thin straps had been pioneered by dancers of the modern movement like Isadora Duncan, who appeared nude to her Edwardian audience when she shunned boned bodices and danced in silk draperies and bare feet.<sup>405</sup>



Figure 69 'Carnation' dress worn in the song and dance scena 'Bouquet', 1925<sup>406</sup>

Eileen was saturated in a strong, powerful hue in the carnation outfit. Scarlet – rather than simply 'red' – was also the specific shade that Behenna selected for the 'Toy Drum Major'. Behenna may have chosen it for the same reason as playwright Constance Smedley called one of her red-dressed characters 'Cheerful Scarlet' to represent a forceful positivity – after all, happiness was the Jollities' objective.<sup>407</sup> Eileen's red dress is the single, now shrivelled, flower remaining from the verdant bouquet which opened the second half of the Jollities' concert. The red carnation would have danced among the blues, yellows and pinks of Eileen's fellow dancers in a spectacle of colour and movement. In the Victorian language of flowers, which ascribed semi-codified meanings to particular

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<sup>404</sup> Eve Macaulay, 'Some Notes on the Attitude of Children to Dress,' *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 9, no. 2 (1929): 156. Eileen's wardrobe was certainly middle-class. She wore a liberty bodice (a fleecy undergarment which replaced stiff corsets for women and girls) and Amy chose or made fashionable children's clothes in bright prints and loose styles (sometimes bought at West End store Selfridges by Aunty Maude).

<sup>405</sup> Barbieri, *Costume in Performance*, 123.

<sup>406</sup> Dress, V&A Misc.108-1996

<sup>407</sup> Constance Smedley, 'Scientific Caroline', in Syrett, *Dream Garden*.

blooms, a bouquet conveyed ‘a cluster of feelings but not a syntactical statement’.<sup>408</sup> In the same way, a group of dancers in different costumes could perform and experience a cluster of meanings and fantasies.

The flower-themed ballet may have taken inspiration from Cicely Mary Barker’s *Flower Fairies*, which were first published in a book in 1923 (after appearing first as a series of postcards in 1917). The fairy-children in Barker’s books were clothed in the dissected parts of plants and flowers: buds became bonnets and, as in Eileen’s dress, petals were pieced as skirts (Figure 70).<sup>409</sup>



Figure 70 'The Daffodil Fairy', Cicely Mary Barker, 1923<sup>410</sup>

Readers of the *Flower Fairies* books were encouraged to ‘recognise and feel a kinship with flowers and plants’, and see ‘themselves as part of, rather than distinct from, the natural world and as a reflection of the same beauty and individuality’.<sup>411</sup> Eileen’s carnation dress – in its wafting, shining

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<sup>408</sup> Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012).

<sup>409</sup> Barker, *The Complete Book of the Flower Fairies*, 82-85. This was not Barker’s innovation; similar costumes appeared in numerous fairy books, for example Walter Crane, *Flora’s Feast: A Masque of Flowers* (Cassell and Co., 1889); Marion Carnac and Marion Dunlop, *Fairies, Elves and Flower Babies* (Duckworth & Co., 1899).

<sup>410</sup> Cicely Mary Barker, *Flower Fairies of the Spring* (Blackie & Son).

<sup>411</sup> Carole Scott, ‘Clothed in Nature or Nature Clothed: Dress as Metaphor in the Illustrations of Beatrix Potter and CM Barker,’ *Children’s Literature* 22, no. 1 (1994): 81.

brilliance of texture and colour – suggests how dancers’ costumes might in fact inspire them to perform a role or embody some other idea or being, whether flower or creature or abstract concept. Again, performance was identification, and we can add ‘flower’ to adult and fairy in the list of fantasies that Eileen inhabited.

And we can add ‘boy’, since the Jollities’ girls had opportunities to play with gender and sexual difference in their performances. In the 29 June 1925 concert, Eileen danced ‘as a boy’ in a *pas de deux* with Doris Lederman, which involved dressing as a boy, and taking the lead part (coded male) in the romantic couple dance. Behenna’s decision to include cross-gender performances harked back to Victorian and Edwardian traditions. In nineteenth century ballet, it was common for both male and female roles in a *pas de deux* to be played by women dancers, and women in the chorus took on roles including ‘sailor boys, hussars and toreadors’. Garafola argues that this practice, known as travesty dancing, fell out of fashion in the early 1900s, thanks to the increasing number of male professional dancers, which she attributes to the improved status of ballet and the influential masculinity of the *Ballet Russes*.<sup>412</sup> In the 1890s, there were a good number of young women music hall performers who specialised in ‘male impersonation’, including Vesta Tilley, Fanny Robina, Millie Hylton and Bessie Bonehill. Double-voicing was central to their act – these women performed under their own (female) names, and sang songs explicitly sending up expectations of gender, for example Robina’s ‘King of the Boys’.<sup>413</sup> And in pantomime, ‘principal boys’ were played by women, whether through intentional disruption of gender norms, or the belief that women were ‘better equipped to play boys than boys themselves’.<sup>414</sup> At the bottom of the professional theatrical hierarchy, the roles of all children onstage were often taken by girls well into the twentieth century: the brother and sister in *Babes in the Wood*, and the lost boys in *Peter Pan* were played by girls up to 1928.<sup>415</sup>

This practice gave girls opportunities to play a wider range of characters and roles than if they were constrained by their gender. In a complementary observation from literature studies, Susan Honeyman has documented examples of girls passing as boys, from Joan of Arc to numerous cabin mates in pirate adventure novels, and argues for the potentially ‘liberatory’ effects on girl readers.<sup>416</sup> Wearing ‘costume could be liberatory too. Costume historian Aoife Monk has described how

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<sup>412</sup> Lynn Garafola, ‘The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet,’ *Dance Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1985): 96.

<sup>413</sup> Mander and Mitchenson, *British Music Hall*, plates 102-17.

<sup>414</sup> Penny Summerfield, ‘Patriotism and Empire: Music-Hall Entertainment, 1870-1914,’ in *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (1986): 38.

<sup>415</sup> Rose, *Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, 151.

<sup>416</sup> Susan Honeyman, ‘Trans(cending)gender through Childhood,’ in *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, ed. Anna Mae Duane (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2013), 172-4.



'dressing up' has an effect on an actor's performance; inevitably clothing will incorporate wider social relations beyond the theatre, and creates multiple meanings within those relations.<sup>417</sup> The costume that Eileen wore 'as a boy' put her in a new relation to the girls around her onstage, and also to the members of the audience. Her black and white outfit also revealed some assumptions about what it meant to dress 'as a boy', and by extension, to be a boy: in complete contrast to the carnation dress, it is monochrome, comfortable and practical (Figure 71).<sup>418</sup>



Figure 71 Costume worn by Eileen 'as a boy' in a *pas de deux*, 1925<sup>419</sup>

The blouse was made of ivory washing-silk, lined with cheesecloth. Washing-silk was often used for children's blouses in the 1920s; it was described by one writer as 'soft, like a gentleman's handkerchief'.<sup>420</sup> The black shorts were made of soft woollen fabric, with artificial silk panels at the sides. So despite the initially austere appearance, care and attention were given to construction. The

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<sup>417</sup> Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 11.

<sup>418</sup> For analysis of real boys' clothes, which is beyond the scope of this study, see Rose, *Making, Selling and Wearing Boys' Clothes in Late-Victorian England*.

<sup>419</sup> Costume, V&A Misc.122:2-1986

<sup>420</sup> Millicent Cook, *How to Dress on £15 a Year as a Lady. By a Lady*. (Frederick Warne, 1873).

silky fabrics would have felt luxurious, and appeared luminous, on the stage. How might 'dressing up' in this outfit have *felt* to Eileen? Was Eileen's performance different – more confident? Less decorative?

As well as dancing as romantic male leads, the Jollities girls sang from this perspective in many of their songs, from 'When My Sugar Walks Down the Street', to 'Red Headed Mama' and 'Mother Kelly's Doorstep', as well as the old songs 'Lily of Laguna' and 'My Old Dutch'. Just as membership of the troupe took them into unfamiliar physical spaces, as performers they were able to inhabit diverse roles and play with their gender. The same evening that Eileen danced 'as a boy' in a *pas de deux*, Queenie Oakes performed the role of 'the boy' in an original ballet. As the Jollities' programmes, and innumerable photos in the pages of the *Dancing Times* attest, cross-gender dressing continued in children's dance and theatre after it waned in adult ballet.

Sally Alexander reminds us that dressing up is not limited to the theatre, but was (is) an everyday activity for young women, especially when they graduate from girls' to women's clothes: squeezed into bodices and synthetic frocks, a girl 'felt herself someone new and different'.<sup>421</sup> On the street, 'dress not only marked the transition from child into adult, it also carried the visual weight of sexual difference, and held too the promise of daydreams and drama'.<sup>422</sup> Onstage, children could accelerate that transition, wearing women's clothes before adolescence and performing as cosmopolitan seductresses, as we saw with Eileen's long velveteen evening dress (discussed in chapter five).

The texture (as well as the appearance) of the Jollities' costumes contributed to their place in daydreams, drama and fantasy. The bright scarlet carnation dress, with its chiffon pieces, gave Eileen an opportunity for sensual enjoyment of colour and fabrics.<sup>423</sup> A small but very bright light on interwar girls' knowledge and appreciation of fabric and clothing comes from a psychological survey about children's clothes conducted in 1929. Eve Macaulay (a graduate of the Child Study courses at University College) asked girls aged six to fifteen (roughly parallel with the Jollities troupe) about clothes: what did they like to wear, what did they dislike, and what would they wear to a party? As well as favouring 'bright colours', the children's responses revealed a detailed knowledge of

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<sup>421</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a Woman*, 215.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> In an interesting approach to costume through thing theory, Marshik argues that garments become things when they modify an individual's attention, sexuality, gender identity or sense of self. Celia Marshik, *At the Mercy of Their Clothes: Modernism, the Middlebrow, and British Garment Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 12.



different types of fabric, and a preference for apparently 'highly unsuitable garments'.<sup>424</sup> Ten percent of girls spoke of

georgette, satin, velvet and silk, as the material they would most like to wear, and some entered into elaborate descriptions of flounces and frills, low necks and short sleeves, elaborate jewellery.<sup>425</sup>

Perhaps it was the girls' awareness of the textural qualities of materials, and the associated physical enjoyment, which Macaulay found 'unsuitable'. She noted that the more elaborate descriptions were given by children from poor homes and orphanages, and concluded that 'these children are living some kind of phantasy life' and were 'evidently ... retarded'.<sup>426</sup> We might propose that these children, in fact, were demonstrating their understanding of the transformative potential of clothing, and the enjoyment and satisfaction that could be found from even *imagining* the feel of flounces and frills, and their symbolic claims to maturity, wealth and opportunity. I am reminded of Kimmins's claim that the dream acts as a fairy godmother, and gave children what they desired, just as Cinderella's godmother transformed her rags into a ballgown. One girl mused, that given the right clothes, 'I should be like a lady, which I long to be'.<sup>427</sup>

There is a recognition in this girl's desire that becoming a woman takes work.<sup>428</sup> Colours, fabrics, jewellery and necklines were the start of a never-ending list of improvable qualities and attributes which constituted the 'masquerade of femininity'. Irigaray saw the masquerade as a compromise position rather than purely an act of supplication; women give themselves through objectification, but they also 'recuperate some element of desire' for themselves, through the acts of dressing up and performance.<sup>429</sup>

The Jollities costumes gave spectacular enjoyment to their audiences, while offering performers precisely the frills, short sleeves and silky feelings which materialised desire for the surveyed girls. As well as the velveteen, Eileen's Jollities wardrobe included the chiffon and art silk of the carnation dress and the sateen of the 'Toy Drum Major' costume. These luxurious and inviting fabrics were

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<sup>424</sup> Macaulay, 'Some Notes on the Attitude of Children to Dress,' 154.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid. There are clear parallels with Kimmins's findings: that children living in poverty had vivid and expressive inner lives that revealed their 'uncanny' abilities as well as their very real material deprivations. Macaulay's dismissive conclusion here confirms how Kimmins was unusually generous to the children in his study, compared to others working in the psychological fields.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 136.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid. The term masquerade alludes to the ground-breaking discussion of performative compliance and femininity by Joan Riviere, 'Womanliness as Masquerade,' *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1928).

made more accessible in their artificial forms (the giveaway 'een' could hardly have detracted from the children's enjoyment in wearing them). There is such a close fit between the surveyed schoolgirls' fantasies and the costumes of the Jollities that we must consider that they fed each other: stage costumes inspired fantasies, which in turn encouraged participation and performance, thus begetting further glamorous fantasies and a perpetuation of the masquerade.

## Conclusion

The dance boom of the 1920s was widely supposed, at the time, to be a reaction to the deprivations of war. For young women, the appeal of dancing bubbled from its ebullience, its embrace of life, and the opportunities for enjoyment and frivolity among friends in the dance halls. The ballerinas' elevation *en pointe* had a special place in the interwar imagination, especially for young girls. Yet 1920s dance education increasingly examined and regulated children's bodies, and the AOD propagated class-based ideologies which created a hierarchy of genres, governing what girls could do with their feet. Children's access to the glamour and drama of toe-dancing was restricted and eventually prohibited. But we saw how Eileen defied her teacher to pose on her toes, and eventually found a troupe that gave her freedom to dance how she wanted.

Before she joined the Jollities, Eileen was no stranger to dressing up, but in the troupe she was able to branch out from fairytale figures and dress as a flower, a Pierrot, a toy soldier, an adult woman, even a boy. It was rare for girls to wear anything other than dresses in the 1920s; but in the Jollities girls wore shorts and even trousers. The imaginative, fantasy enlargement of possible roles was matched by a geographic expansion: they gained access to spaces beyond the usual childhood sphere of 'the family, street, and school', and came into contact with the wider world.<sup>430</sup>

Consider how children, as performers, had power to move their audiences, seize their attention and provoke fascination and delight. Valerie Walkerdine memorably described the effect of a prize-winning fairy costume on her father: 'I won, and won him over'.<sup>431</sup> The warmth and affection that came from adult audiences motivated and intoxicated the children onstage. We have also seen how individual songs might have deeper, personal resonance for child performers. 'Dream Daddy' evoked Eileen's status as a bereaved daughter by highlighting the loss of a father and the compensations to be found in fantasy. In the Pierrot costume, Eileen connected with her mother and cousins, continuing the family traditions of performing and stepping into their place by wearing their clothes. Cultural texts, from 'Dream Daddy' to *The Red Shoes* recognised the desires of children, and

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<sup>430</sup> Alexander, *Becoming a Woman*, 212.

<sup>431</sup> Walkerdine, *Daddy's Girl*, 181.

suggested how the voice and the body might provide access to experiences beyond rationality, whether through a visitation or a curse.

I had much difficulty deciding whether to call this chapter 'Dream daddy' or 'Making it big'. The problem, I realised, came from the two-way tension between Eileen's past and her future. She was a young child, who had lost her father and was an object of pathos in a staged display of littleness. The figure of a fantasy father is an appropriate one for her childhood, in which Will was mostly absent and probably idealised. And yet I was unwilling to define a chapter about girls' experience with a title referring to an absent male. Eileen was also an ambitious girl who sought opportunities to perform, to show off, and to grow up. To borrow a word from both Alexander and Mavor, she was dynamically *becoming* a woman, as were all the girls onstage with her, keen to make it big.

As members of the troupe, Eileen and the other Jollities expanded their experience of girlhood. They flirted with adult sexuality, controlled the reactions of the adult audience, and experimented with the masquerade of age and gender. In their performances, the Jollities girls rehearsed adult sexual desire and experimented with what it meant to be a desirable and attractive adult woman. The stage performances, in this sense, were a formalised and public iteration of the process by which all children learn some version of what adult sexuality means. These fantasies, which are so difficult to access and so often overlooked, may have found freedom in the structure of the Jollities' programme. Grace Behenna gave the Jollities girls specific opportunities that were not available elsewhere: to learn and recite poetry, to perform somersaults, and to dance on the very tips of their toes.

## Conclusion

This thesis investigated the fantasy roles available to children during and after the First World War, and asked how these fantasies informed practices of children's performance. I used a set of specific images and documents, from the archive and life story of Eileen Brock, as waypoints to navigate through these questions. Along the way, we could observe how, in the aftermath of a brutal, grinding and all-encompassing conflict, children and childhood embodied cultural fantasies of hope and investment in a brighter future.

Eileen's personal story is not a dramatic one of rebellion or an inspirational one about achievement. Her appearance in family photographs, and her place in an amateur variety troupe led by an unknown woman, situates her firmly at the side of the stage of history, in the 'domain of the trifling' described by Gyanendra Pandey.<sup>1</sup> Pandey argued that women make it into official archives and histories by being 'bad' or 'mad', and that their everyday work is invisible or considered insignificant, and therefore goes unrecorded. The Jollities are a case in point; however trifling, they were the focus of great effort, creativity and investment for hundreds of people over four decades – especially women and children. And hardly a trace remains of them.

To recover acts of performance and creativity, by the Jollities and others, I had to leave official archives and turn to the event listings of local papers, dispersed single issues of dance magazines, and social media posts.<sup>2</sup> Much of this has been enabled by the accessibility of searchable online repositories. For example, eBay provides a worldwide crowd-sourced database of postcards, often photographed front *and* back (which formal museum databases often fail to do) to show postmarks and written messages, and searchable by keyword: fairy, war, daddy, and so on. Long 'neglected' as historical sources, postcards are gaining prominence, though still often receive scant visual analysis.<sup>3</sup>

My approach has much in common with other feminist historians who found that telling histories of apparently 'surplus women of no significance', pushes us beyond the usual sources.<sup>4</sup> Saidiya

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<sup>1</sup> Pandey, *Unarchived Histories*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the annals of dance and performance maintained at the Royal Academy of Dance and the Theatre and Performance department of the V&A, as well as the London Metropolitan Archives, Hackney and Tower Hamlets archives, are all impoverished in terms of records of children's interwar performance.

<sup>3</sup> Jack Zipes, *Tales of Wonder: Retelling Fairy Tales Through Picture Postcards* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). Reviews of Zipes's book suggest there is much work left to be done. JoAnn Conrad, 'Review of *Tales of Wonder*, by Jack Zipes,' *The Lion and the Unicorn* 42, no. 3 (2018); Pollen, 'Book Review: *Tales of Wonder*.' A remarkable exception is Omar Khan, *Paper Jewels: Postcards from the Raj* (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 2018), which considers how texture and composition of cards shaped their use.

<sup>4</sup> Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, xv.

Hartman needed entirely new historical methods to tell the stories of young black women's rebellion at the turn of the twentieth century – girls triply marginalised due to age, race and gender. In *Wayward Lives* (2020), she 'pressed at the limits' of case files and documents which recorded their subjection, to speculate and imagine the lives of the young women she reanimated.<sup>5</sup>

Hartman's work approached individual and collective lives in a way that resonated with my own. In the chorus, 'one girl can stand in for any of them, can serve as the placeholder for the story ... If you listen closely, you can hear the whole world in a bent note, a throwaway lyric'.<sup>6</sup> I have listened closely to Eileen's performances as Red Riding Hood and a fairy. These were solos but she was far from unique; she belonged to a generation of young girls defined by their place at the side of the stage, dressed in identical clothes and taught to move in time. I have listened to the Jollities' put-on cockney accents and the throwaway references to rape and race. And I have heard the repeated words and phrases of the audiences, preoccupied with littleness and perfection.

### **How did fantasy function in family life?**

In their family photographs and letters, the Brocks demonstrated how cultural fantasies, known through popular pantomimes and fairytales, could provide templates for communicating complex experience and emotion. Will and Amy referred to archetypal characters including Red Riding Hood and Ali Baba; their daughter Eileen was dressed in fantasy costumes; at times of emotional hardship, they drew on the vocabulary of heroic tales. These fantasies came easily to hand, as Will and Amy were avid theatre-goers throughout their Edwardian courtship.

As literature scholars have shown, fairytales can be tools of communication and imagination; they might express a need (according to Pickering), be a call for help (Torok) or fuel a utopian drive (Zipes). All three of these can be identified in the Brocks' correspondence. In their letters, Amy and Will were the leading characters in their own romance, and Eileen could be their little princess. Will often used pantomimic language combining bravery and strength with a slapstick optimism, and explicitly evoked a happy-ever-after picture of Home Sweet Home. They were separated by forces beyond their control – war and conscription – but familiar cultural fantasies provided uniting narratives of danger, heroism and eventual satisfaction.

Under Amy Brock's direction, their daughter became an actor of fantasy for the camera. The same year bombs rained down on London from German airplanes, Amy created a picture of Eileen as Red

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., xiv. We hear an echo of Alexandra Carter's effort to surmise and infer.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 354.

Riding Hood. In a red hooded cape, encountering the wolf, Eileen played at being a fictional vulnerable, fatherless child at risk, while simultaneously living in those very real, actual circumstances. Role-playing in the photography studio, though, gave Amy an opportunity to mitigate the real risks by casting the adored family dog as the wolf, thus undermining and domesticating the threats of the original fairytale. Around the same time, adolescent Evelyn Behenna appeared onstage professionally as Red Riding Hood. Again, the status of the real-life child and fictional child informed each other. Evelyn made it into the newspapers when the laws 'protecting' young performers prevented her from appearing in the pantomime's final scene on Boxing Day (the journalist did not mention why she lacked the correct licence). This event contributed to the childlike and naïve persona of 'Little Evelyn' for the rest of the show's run, and I wonder now whether Evelyn's manager Madame Victor might have staged it for publicity, or at least made the best out of an administrative error.

The photographs of Eileen and Evelyn as Red Riding Hood leave us wondering which version of the oft-retold story they were performing; was it the one where the paternal woodsman returns to save the girl? Or the more ancient version where Red Riding Hood has to outsmart the wolf by herself? The beauty of the fantasy or fairytale is that these questions do not need to be resolved. And in Eileen's case, performing just one scene for the photographer's camera left her story's particular ending unwritten.

Eileen's performance as a fairy was even more ambiguous and open-ended. As I argued in chapter three, around 1921 fairies were a fashionable symbol of belief against the odds: in *Peter Pan*, belief is the thing that keeps Tinkerbell alive, and belief in girls' artlessness was at contention in the episode of the Cottingley fairy photographs. The war tested people's beliefs in many ways: religious and ideological belief in God and Nation, also their belief that their loved ones would survive and life would return to normal. Fairies were a perfect symbol of belief in the face of reality. As Arthur Conan Doyle explained, and a mass market for prints, books and postcards confirmed, fairies' role in the aftermath of war was to bring gladness and joy to a darkened world. The fairy figure (thanks to its long cultural history and darker folkloric associations) allowed the co-existence of romantic ideas of innocence and perfection, alongside experiences of loss and death. Fairies were often imagined communing with flowers, mushrooms, birds and insects, speaking the language of nature. In pantomime, sparkling fairies in wooded glades heralded the end of the show, in triumphant transformation scenes, when the banal became spectacular. Add to this transformational potency the sweet prettiness of a little girl, innocent of the horrors of war and full of potential, and the result was a persistent cultural symbol of hope and renewal.

So for Amy to dress Eileen as a fairy, in a homemade costume adorned with expensive sequins and paper roses, was an investment of belief in her daughter, her family, and their future. Looking at the IWM photograph now (See Figure 1 at the beginning of the thesis), I no longer ask why a mother might dress her daughter like that, but I marvel at what an ideal choice it was; Amy Brock caught the zeitgeist perfectly, from the wire wings to Eileen's bare feet.

Eileen was one of thousands of fairy-children of the interwar period, preserved in photographs, postcards and picture books. In her cultural history of fairies, Carol Silver dismisses the 1920s and 1930s work of Mabel Lucie Attwell, Margaret Tarrant, Ida Outhwaite and so on as 'excessive and trivialised representations' of fairy-life, and these prolific female artists rarely attract the attention of academic writing.<sup>7</sup> But this 'excess' – which emerges again in the discussion of littleness in this thesis – is testament to their resonance with cultural fantasies; the fairy-child figure was a direct response to widespread desires for gladness and hope. And *trivial* or not, these popular (and profitable) representations shaped generations of children's ideas about gender, their relationship with nature, and the process of enchantment.

### **How does this thesis contribute to histories of the war?**

This is a story of the First World War and its immediate effects, both obvious and more subtle, on the people who lived through it. Where the Brocks' experience does not fit the established 'grand narrative', it can spotlight the gaps and silences in the usual story. There is little mention of the trenches or the fighting here, as men like Will Brock, who were categorised as B1, did not head to the Western Front after initial training. Much of his wartime work was boring, repetitive and put him in less danger than his wife and child at home. He also missed out on the extra money paid to overseas soldiers. The wages for Privates based in England were at poverty levels and forced his family into (relative) hardship. The long marches to nowhere exacerbated his rheumatism and made it harder for him to return to his job when he was demobilised. Indeed, cynical minds might think that his conscription, and the Brock family's separation, financial hardship and eventual bereavement may have been pointless in terms of winning the war.

A more intangible aspect of the wartime experience arose in chapter two, in the discussion of children's dreams and inner worlds. The First World War was a transitional period in the understanding of dreams. It is established that psychoanalytically-trained doctors looked to dreams as diagnostic tools in their attempts to treat the psychological wounds of war. But it is less frequently acknowledged that popular beliefs about dreams were also shifting. Wartime postcards

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<sup>7</sup> Silver, *Strange and Secret*, 9.

demonstrated that in popular understanding, dreams could bring consolation. The old folk belief that dreams told the future was replaced by the idea that dreams could reveal some deeper truths about the dreamer *themselves* – their emotions, desires, wishes. Freud had codified these ideas as the ‘wish-fulfilment’ theory – and cited his grandchildren’s dreams as inspirational in the development of psychoanalytic dream interpretation – but mass-produced postcards that used dream motifs to signify love and longing, evidenced that this understanding did not rely on psychoanalytic scholarship. Dreams, like fairies, had one foot in the realm of folklore, and another in the realm of speculative science: whether or not the phenomena were truly understood, they offered a way of talking about and giving visual form to emotions and fantasies.

The many images of little girls dreaming of their daddies offered reassurance to fathers, that despite their absence, they occupied a central place in their child’s unconscious life. This adult fantasy imagined not only that it was possible to see clearly into the desires of another human being, but that if a father could see the desires of his daughter, he would see himself. For child viewers, these idealised images modelled appropriate behaviour, and reinforced how children were meant to feel about their daddies in khaki. We also saw how adult women used the postcards of dreaming children to voice their own desires, thereby borrowing and inhabiting the role of a child.

We can glimpse what real children dreamed thanks to the work of Charles Kimmins and his army of schoolteachers, who gathered the thousands of accounts that were distilled into his little book *Children’s Dreams*. Not only did Kimmins discover that characters, events and machinery of the war entered children’s dreams, but he found that children were strongly desirous beings, and that material deprivations produced imaginative consolatory fantasies. He described the dream as a ‘fairy godmother’ who brings children what they are missing in life. Previous historians have shown how the ‘total war’ extended into children’s lessons and playtimes, and we can now push that further, beyond the waking hours into their dreams.

Most of the events described in this thesis took place after November 1918, beyond the usual scope of First World War histories, yet Will Brock’s death in 1921 makes plain how the end of the First World War came at different times for different people. A biographical approach can validate public memory, by linking it back to real and lived experiences, but attending closely to one family’s experience in this way might also change our perception of the whole temporality of the war. Conscription continued until 1920 and the Treaty of Versailles and the Russian Revolution resulted in continued international conflicts, and fatalities, into the 1920s.



The first half of this thesis was written almost precisely a century after the events it describes took place. I started research in the autumn of 2016, one hundred years after Will Brock was called up to leave his family and fight. Over the next two years the centenary of the First World War had a strong presence in British culture, especially in the lead up to the Armistice anniversary in November 2018. But my immersion in the Brock family's temporality made the centenary celebrations seem premature, out of sync with the reality of 1918. What commemorations were there of the men sent away on ships carrying the Spanish Flu on the ill-fated Syren Operation? And the women who waited for them to return? There was a disjuncture between the lived experience of the events of 1918, and their public memorialisation a century later. In November 1918, Will Brock was far from finished with his war service; the conflict continued in Russia and he was yet to go to Finland. His brother Cecil was struggling to get supplies in Cologne and would not return to Britain until late 1919. Long after the Armistice, Amy continued to wait, and to write, and to send sheet music to her dispersed loved ones.

### **What role did children play in interwar performance?**

Throughout the war years, children played a significant part in the entertainment programmes of hospitals, parks and charities. Song and dance displays by local children were described as 'a source of delight' for men recovering in commandeered hospitals.<sup>8</sup> Eileen was too young to participate during the war, but her cousin took part in fundraising concerts in aid of the Red Cross. Evelyn Behenna did her bit for the war effort in large-scale outdoor concerts. These productions associated childhood with escapism and consolation: child performers' explicit task was to boost morale and transport their audiences away from the realities of war and injury. As previous historians have made clear, stage children had been drawing crowds for more than a century, but the First World War created a new philanthropic role for child performers.<sup>9</sup>

Well-documented Victorian fears of child exploitation faded away, and confident charity came to the fore: concerts were either free or ticket sales went to a good cause. Performing children were not there to be saved or educated, like their nineteenth-century counterparts, but savoured and celebrated. The associations and practices of the war years continued into the 1920s and would be refined by troupes like Grace Behenna's Juvenile Jollities. Indeed, Behenna later made the most of

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<sup>8</sup> Lord, *The Story of the Horton War Hospital*.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Gubar, 'Drama of Precocity'; Edel Lamb, *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theatre: The Children's Playing Companies 1599-1613* (Springer, 2008); Steedman, *Strange Dislocations*.

the idea that *entertainment* was something that could be donated; her Jollities troupe often performed in care homes or hospitals to those needing a good time.<sup>10</sup>

As I showed in the intermezzo section of the thesis, legislative changes in 1918 and 1921 formalised these changes in attitude. Ideas from developmental psychology and the solidity of the concept of universal education, gave policy-makers confidence to claim that the place for children was in school. Once the 1918 Education Act redefined children in terms of their status as school pupils, it gave lawmakers licence to reach beyond formal education to make radical interventions into many areas of childhood, including performance.

The debates around the 1918 Education Bill illuminated the contradictions and assumptions about performing children: Performance was not work, it was play. And children were in training. And small children were 'natural' and their performance was authentic. And the stage offered a path out of poverty to working-class girls with talent. And they weren't earning any money anyway. These fantasies of exceptionalism, enjoyment and talent were spun by lobbyists from the theatre industry and the dance world elite. The eventual compromise prohibited the performance of under-twelves but delayed enactment of the law until there was time for a theatre-industry committee to investigate the matter of licences.

The findings of that committee informed a new loophole in the Education (consolidation) Act 1921, allowing 'occasional' charity performances by any children under twelve. This charity clause arose directly from the wartime practices of fundraising and entertainment, and confirmed the establishment view that performing children were not workers at risk of exploitation (of various forms), but were safe and healthy middle-class philanthropists. When managers appeared to exploit the loophole and authorities stepped in, as in the Hull production of *The Windmill Man*, the well-coordinated backlash could be severe. Those who were thwarted by 'officialdom' felt their rights were being compromised, and the ambitions of the children were being crushed. This outrage was the flip-side of a strongly-held desire to watch and enjoy children's performance.

In 1921, the elocutionist Grace Behenna responded to the new legal landscape with a new children's troupe she called her Juvenile Jollities. The Jollities danced in the space between commerce and charity; they could demand high ticket prices for fundraising concerts (up to three shillings in Walthamstow), but they also performed for free. Behenna's success was validated through the

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<sup>10</sup> Child philanthropists appeared off stage too. The significance of little girls in the emotional life of veterans is explored in Roper, 'Little Ruby's Hand.'

length of her tenure – over forty years – and her local fame. Distinguished local community figures attended her troupe’s concert: the mayor, the chief Rabbi, the Chair of the Board of Guardians.

I identified seventy children who were members of the troupe during just five years in the 1920s. Hundreds of children from Stoke Newington and nearby must have passed through Behenna’s classes and concerts between the wars. But the picture is much bigger; the Jollities were participants in a nation-wide movement of children’s dance and performance, which involved thousands of young people, teachers and families. This nationwide landscape of children’s performance was not a homogenous space. In the West End, society children performed ‘cabaret’ in hotels, whereas the East End girls did variety. Some teachers totally prohibited dancing *en pointe*, others showcased it. Classes could cost pennies, or set parents back several pounds. All these were matters of active debate and personal negotiation, and involved ideologies of gender, age, class and race.

Paying attention to the Jollities revealed a community of children and adults, with parents involved making props and costumes and booking gigs, and a handful of professional accompanists, choreographers and stage managers. The demography of the troupe challenges some historians’ conclusions that London’s interwar leisure was segregated by religion: the Jollities included Jewish and non-Jewish families and performed at Jewish and non-Jewish venues. Many of the girls were second- or third-generation immigrants, whose parents were business-owners in the garment trades. But as I argued in chapter four, Behenna’s organisation of the troupe, their location in the inner suburbs, and the content of their concerts support historiographical narratives of anglicisation in the interwar East End. Troupe members had marks of Jewishness erased: they changed their names and refined their accents through voice training. At the same time, most of the Jollities’ network – from patrons to performers to venues – relied on networks of Jewish-specific sociability, region and education.

The presence of the Jollities in the synagogues and social clubs around Whitechapel and Mile End means we must challenge, or at least complicate, social historians’ depiction of the East End as exclusively a site of radical politics and labour.<sup>11</sup> The Jollities’ girls moved across the changing map of interwar London, from the East End to the inner suburbs, connecting Whitechapel to Bloomsbury, and they moved through borders of religion, ethnicity and class. Among the groups of men in black

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the entry for the Workers Circle in 'A Memory Map of the Jewish East End,' Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment, UCL, 2020, <https://jewisheastendmemorymap.org/>. This depiction has forceful political relevance, and is important in the located social memory of the left (especially as the grounds for the legendary battle of Cable Street), but its prevalence sounds like a fantasy. This narrative has to accept the presence of women and children like Behenna and Eileen in these radical spaces, for they were part of the social scene which produced the anti-fascist movement.

coats debating communism and anarchism on the pavements of Alie Street, we must paint in a colourful bouquet of little girls, trooping into the concert hall at the Workers Circle to sing old Music Hall songs and end their show with 'God Save the King'. In the 1930s, the son of Workers Circle founder Morris Mindel married former Jollities member Sylvia Mindel, whose 'posh' voice – polished by Madame Behenna – remained a lifelong point of distinction and pride.<sup>12</sup>

The Jollities also prove that children actively disseminated popular music between the wars. As James Nott and others have written, the 1920s was a decade of crazes, of fast-moving fashionable songs and dances that spread through dance halls and radio waves. But children's role in this has gone unacknowledged. The Jollities and other children's troupes quickly adopted dances like the Charleston, and picked up songs from West End musicals, including innovative American imports like *No, No Nanette*, and black-authored songs like 'Hottentot Totsy' and disseminated them in social clubs and hospitals. Historians have long debated whether 'popular mass culture' overcame gender and class barriers, but the question of age rarely enters the debate. The presence of four-year-old performers, demonstrating new moves to children's groups and elderly care-home audiences, extends the definition of culture-makers beyond the youths and adults usually assumed to be participating.

Less comfortably, the Jollities also rehearsed and repeated dominant racist ideologies, as located in cultural fantasies such as the cheerful Pickaninny and the lustful Sheik. Racist language and attitudes were pervasive in popular entertainment, and children contributed. The pejorative characterisations literally dictated to examination candidates by Espinosa and the AOD (quoted in chapter five) were a startling example of how racist ideas were presented to children, and what was at stake in their compliance. Songs like 'Pickaninny Alley' and 'Shadowland' reinforced ideas of Otherness, and in turn, privileged a white British identity and point of view. Even if individual audience members or performers identified differently, the assumed gaze and voice of the Jollities was white.

Eileen Brock's generation of child stage performers paved the way for child stars of the 1930s on the big screen, including Shirley Temple and Judy Garland. Temple so embodied the ideals of littleness, whiteness, and innocent precocity, that she became an international icon of childhood. The young celebrity was even a new possible fantasy role to emulate through dressing up: a mass-produced girls' clothing line sold copies of Temple's famous polka dot dresses with Peter Pan collars.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ruth Mindel, Email.

<sup>13</sup> Steve Humphries, Joanna Mack, and Robert Perks, *A Century of Childhood* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1988), 163.

Ironically, during a period when children were redefined as emotional rather than economic investments, little girls like Temple earned more than their adult counterparts.<sup>14</sup>

### **What does this tell us about ideas of childhood?**

Adult audience members of the mid-1920s identified with performing children. As well as being transported and delighted during the concerts, they reported feeling 'young again'.<sup>15</sup> These sentiments were formalised in psychoanalysis; through concepts such as repression and the unconscious, the division of childhood and adulthood were blurred. In 1929 analyst Susan Isaacs warned against 'a sharp emphasis on the contours of the difference between the child and the man ... at any but our rare objective moments, we and the child are one'.<sup>16</sup>

Isaac's statement echoed the nineteenth-century evocation of an emotional, uncivilised child, celebrated by the Romantic poets. The Romantics sought childhood in themselves too, but saw it only retrospectively, glimmering with unrecoverable genius.<sup>17</sup> Around 1800, Friedrich von Schiller described the 'infinite possibility of childhood embodied for the adult in the figure of the child', but his words might have been written for the 1920s.<sup>18</sup> The same tangled temporalities and identifications, and ideas of possibility and fate, were sharply resonant in the aftermath of the First World War. Nostalgia for the music hall existed alongside a passion for the new and modern, for dance crazes, neologisms and hits.

The nostalgic impulse of the 1920s looked back beyond the war to the 1890s, to the childhoods of their adult audiences. The children on the stage offered adult audiences reminders of what had been lost. This may have been their own past childhoods (as it was for those made 'young again') or their own dreamed-of futures, cut short by wartime bereavements (as in the case of Amy Brock). As Schiller suggested, children evoked a (lost/hopeful) future and (lost/hopeful) past, wrapped in a bittersweet present. An urge for futurity and novelty also embraced the children of the 1920s. Eileen and her colleagues in the Jollities were born during the war; they were the new growth of an aftermath generation who were innocent of the events of 1914–1918.

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<sup>14</sup> Temple was expected to maintain 'economic innocence' despite earning over \$300,000 per year. Kristen Hatch, *Shirley Temple and the Performance of Girlhood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 141-3; Ann Hulbert, *Off The Charts: The Hidden Lives and Lessons of American Child Prodigies* (Knopf, 2018).

<sup>15</sup> 'Delightful Dancing Display.'

<sup>16</sup> Susan Isaacs, 'Review of three books by Jean Piaget,' *The Pedagogical Seminary and Journal of Genetic Psychology* 36, no. 4 (1929).

<sup>17</sup> A very clear outline of Romantic ideas of childhood can be found in Linda Austin, 'Children of Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy,' *Studies in Romanticism* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Austin, 'Children of Childhood,' 83.

The compensation and jollity brought by children's troupes disavowed the mutilated bodies of the adult generation and the widespread loss and mourning. The fathers who came back were damaged on the outside and the inside – shell-shocked and injured by what they had experienced. War babies like Eileen and her friends occupied the stage with 'perfect', 'little' bodies which were unsullied by war. As discussed in Chapter Five, wartime songs were rarely performed by the Jollities, but when they were, their new context transformed their meaning: the corps of soldiers became a chorus of little girls.

As literary scholar Susan Honeywell recognised, 'the romantic and psychoanalytic child has become the endless repository of adult compensatory fantasy'.<sup>19</sup> My study of a specific generation of children confirms this literary deduction with historical evidence: it was not only 'the child', but real children who were expected to perform fantasies and provide compensation. Throughout the thesis, I have avoided using the phrase 'the child', because the definite article reduces a dynamic set of ideas into a solid block – a monument as heavy and empty as the cenotaph. The phrase is seductive: it sounds conceptually weighty and serious. But 'the child' is a fantasy echo, a piece of language that obscures the concepts it is used to illuminate. It sutures different times together using a single term. Ideas about childhood are demonstrably complex, shifting, and contradictory. As Joan Scott wrote of the phrase 'women's history': the category 'women' did not exist in the same way in the past, thus any history which retrospectively produces it is a fantasy. Thus forewarned, as well as avoiding 'the child', I have resisted drawing equivalences between 'performing children' of different eras.

In my survey of reactions to children's troupes, I was taken aback by the strength of feeling among adult audiences, who responded with mirth and enjoyment, and gushed over the 'babies' and 'littlest ones'. Avid audience members described fascination and intense enjoyment which resembled *jouissance*. I can hear a resonance between audiences' captivated fascination and the fairies' tool of enchantment. In folklore, the fairies' special and dangerous power of glamour enables them to shift form so they appeared most beautiful, most desirable, to their captivated prey. This shape-shifting, desire-meeting quality was also found in stage children, who, through the glamour of stagecraft, sought to reflect and give shape to audience desires, grab their attention and hold onto it. Littleness, another feature shared by fairies and children, was emphasised through diminutive stage names, the use of miniature adult costumes, and canny choreography that prioritised the smallest children on the stage.

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<sup>19</sup> Honeyman, 'Trans(cending)gender,' 169.

One consequence of the partnering of children and fairies was a confusion of fantasy and reality. Although it may seem that fairies are supernatural and children are real, the investment of so much fantasy into children had the effect of diminishing their reality – as we detected in the excessive, repetitive use of ‘little’ and ‘perfect’ to describe children onstage. Off stage too, children and fairies were denuded of their complexity and power, and turned into tiny quaint symbols. The psychologist Charles Kimmins was just as guilty of this as flower-fairy creator Cicely Mary Barker and poet Rose Fyleman.

### **How did children experience performance?**

Despite the choreographed nature of their performances, the Jollities girls had freedoms not usually experienced by lower-middle-class girls offstage. They had the freedom to move, to dance, and to develop strength in their bodies. Her toe-dancing thwarted by Miss Williams, Eileen had the satisfaction of demonstrating her skills with Madame Behenna. As Margaret Morris suggested in her memoir, dancing gave girls a way of relating to the world, which was at once emotional and physical, guarded and exposed. Onstage, girls could negotiate expectations and follow their own ambitions.

In the absence of written accounts from the Jollities’ performers, the material traces become more eloquent. Two costumes stand out from Eileen’s wardrobe: the red carnation dress and the black shorts and white shirt worn to dance ‘as a boy’. In their contrasts of colour, texture and shape, these outfits demonstrate the range of possibilities open to girls on the stage, as gendered dancers.

The fluttering artificial silk and chiffon layers of the carnation dress conformed to fantasies of femininity: a bright pretty flower, picked from cultivated nature. The appeal of such floaty fabrics was inadvertently recorded in psychologist Eve Macauley’s survey of schoolgirls. She dismissed the ‘inappropriate’ dreams of her participants, but her work gave texture and colour to girls’ fantasies, and revealed satin, lace and silk to be the fabrics of idealised womanhood.

In contrast, Eileen wore the boyish black and white outfit to lead her partner in a romantic duet. Shorts were not usually available to girls, and worn in this context, they offered counter-gendered practicality and fantasies of mastery. A tiny minority of performing children were boys, but the performances retained hetero-normative ideas of male/female couples and masculine/feminine roles. Interwar rehearsal rooms and stages were majority-female spaces in which girls could play all the parts, ripe with potential for transgressive enjoyment. So the Jollities girls played as boys, or even adult men, double-voicing through costume, movement and song. But whether these

costuming practices frustrated 'gendered binarisms' for the performers and audiences, or reasserted them, remains an open question.<sup>20</sup>

### **What can fantasy tell us about history?**

In archetypal fairytales, Roni Natov tells us,

the forest does contain paths, but the girl does not know which to take and can easily be tempted off the right one. Always there is more than one road and confusion ... there is no way of maturing, the tales repeatedly tell us, without entering the dark wood, whether we locate it in the outside world or the inner world of dreams and the unconscious.<sup>21</sup>

A PhD is also a dark wood, of many roads and much confusion. Walking between (intellectual) mothers and grandmothers, bearing gifts and offerings, and all the time, determined to find one's own path. The thesis that emerges at the end is a route map to knowledge, but the process of research and writing is more often a stumbling attempt to see the wood for the trees.

The path through this PhD thesis has wound inwards, towards dreams and unconscious fantasy, and looped outwards to the wider world. For these worlds are reflections of each other, mutually constituted through cultural practice, creativity and performance. In the Jollities, little girls acted fantasies, making them real. And in turn, they learned what it meant to desire and be desired.

Amy, Will and Eileen Brock show us how desire and ambition can be transferred between generations. Using pantomimes in the park and recycled Pierrot costumes, Amy nourished her daughter's desire to perform, all the while reproducing social fantasies of pretty, ideal childhood. Eileen and Amy established intergenerational echoes: in letters and postcards, mother and daughter spoke through and for each other. They wore the same clothes, decades apart. Their bodies performed the same actions, taken from the repertoire of dance. In Irigarean terms, Eileen emerged from Amy's vocabulary of pre-verbal gestures and textures.

However, Eileen's childhood experiences were different from her mother's in specific, historically explicable ways. Many possibilities and realities had changed: the boom in children's dance classes after the First World War; musical-inspired hit songs available as sheet music; the invention of artificial fabrics and changes in fashion which made costumes cheaper and easier to make; a charity clause that meant young children could perform in the evenings; a desperate need for post-war

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<sup>20</sup> Honeyman, 'Trans(cending)gender,' 167.

<sup>21</sup> Natov, *The Poetics of Childhood*, 120.



fundraising and philanthropy; the new cinemas that acted as glamorous performance venues and, together with the radio, inspired new ideas of stardom.

Fantasies of childhood – the character of Red Riding Hood, the trope of the fairy-child – are like fairy rings which emerge every year in forests and meadows. The mushrooms in a fairy ring are traces of a deep and dense network of interconnected fungi; they appear anew with the fresh growth, but are connected under the surface, and nourished by the decomposed remains of past seasons. Similarly, each emergence of fantasy childhood feeds upon the underlying networks of culture and meaning, and processes the past in the creation of new growth. These ideas of repetition and alteration were seeded within the fantasy echo. An echo alters between iterations, becoming more diffuse. As the same fantasy roles are repeated generation after generation, ideas spread from mother to daughter like mushrooms spreading their spores in an ever-increasing fairy ring. Each fairy-child or fairy-ring follows a pattern, but with each repetition something changes and something remains. They are shaped by the immediate circumstances of specific environment and social ecology. We might conclude that consistency in fantasy childhood is not the result of false identification, but evidence of a rooted connection which goes beyond appearances.

Over time, the fertile circle moves across the ground, delineating the shifting scope of girlhood. Fantasies move slowly, through generational transformation, just as a mother adjusts her own dresses to fit her daughter.

## Epilogue

Eileen left the Jollities troupe before she started the County Secondary School, Clapton (CSSC) in September 1926. The CSSC provided 'a liberal education for girls up to the age of 19 years', which included Latin and the natural sciences as well as sports and woodwork.<sup>1</sup> Their usual fees were £12 per year, but Eileen won an LCC-assisted place, so hers were reduced to £3.<sup>2</sup>

Pupils were sorted into houses which took the names of ancient cities – Athens, Rome, Venice, Florence and Winchester – and the school's performances were of a similarly grand and historical character; Eileen performed in 'Summer Revels' and pageants featuring maypoles and Morris dancing.<sup>3</sup> The CSSC performances were a cut above the Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay of the Jollities concerts, but Behenna's voice training would have stood Eileen in good stead for the 'The Court of Old King Cole', 'Scenes from Julius Caesar' and the stories of William of Wykeham and William Tell.<sup>4</sup> Amy continued to provide costumes. Performing in *Quality Street* (a J. M. Barrie play from 1901) Eileen wore a purple Edwardian dress of her mother's (which Amy had worn in the 'orb' photograph, see Figure 39).<sup>5</sup> Eileen's ascension into British high culture continued with Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, and as part of the Greek Dancing Class she presented 'Arietta' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (Figure 72).<sup>6</sup> Once again, she borrowed the dress from Amy, who had worn it to perform during her own adolescence (see Figure 6).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'The County Secondary School, Clapton', London County Council. 1932 MOC/BROC/2/2/3

<sup>2</sup> The archive contains receipts for fees for three years tuition. MOC/BROC/2/2/7

<sup>3</sup> Programme of Summer Revels, MOC/BROC/2/2/6

<sup>4</sup> Programmes, MOC/BROC/2/2/6

<sup>5</sup> V&A Catalogue, Misc.121-1986

<sup>6</sup> 'Tuesday, 5th December 1933' programme. MOC/BROC/2/2/6

<sup>7</sup> V&A Catalogue, Misc.89-1986



**Figure 72 Eileen (kneeling on far left) and fellow pupils in school production of *Dido and Aeneas* (c. 1933)<sup>8</sup>**

During her final school year in 1933, Eileen secured an interview at Somerville College Oxford. She made their waiting list as a runner up, but eventually went to the University of London to study History.<sup>9</sup> In 1938 she auditioned for membership of the Royal Academy of Dancing. Her application is a sign that she continued dance training, but Eileen failed the exam in every area, and the feedback was damning: ‘generally faulty ... Must pay more attention to detail’.<sup>10</sup>

At the start of the Second World War, Eileen was twenty-four, living with Amy and working for the Inland Revenue; in 1940, Eileen and her colleagues were evacuated to Llandudno.<sup>11</sup> King’s College London had also been evacuated to Wales and Eileen took advantage of their proximity, completing a ‘special laws course’ during Easter term 1943.<sup>12</sup> And just as her father had done a quarter of a century before, Eileen joined in with the organised entertainments; she ‘designed and executed’ scenery for *Will Shakespeare* in April 1941 and she appeared in *You Can’t Take it With You*, which played for three nights at the 2000-seat Pavilion theatre in December 1941.<sup>13</sup> We are left to wonder

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<sup>8</sup> Dress and Photograph, V&A Misc.89-1986

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Helen Darbishire, 13 December 1933 and ‘Service for Members of the University of London on Wednesday May 11th 1938’. Both author’s archive.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Report of Elementary Examination’, 8 June 1938, Royal Academy of Dancing. Author’s archive.

<sup>11</sup> Eileen Brock to Amy Brock, 21 June 1946, author’s archive. Along with the rest of the Estate Duties department, Wills officers were headquartered at St George’s Hotel from 1940. ‘Inland Revenue Records’ Email, Adrian Hughes, Curator of Home Front Museum, Llandudno, 30 May 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Invoice, counterfoil and receipt, author’s archive.

<sup>13</sup> Email, Adrian Hughes.

how many other plays and dances she enjoyed in these years by the seaside. The Inland Revenue stayed in Wales for a while after the War ended in 1945, and Eileen wrote to reassure Amy that she missed her – as well as the cup of tea that Amy brought to Eileen in bed every morning. She concluded another letter, ‘Hope you are not feeling too lonely. Cheer up; won’t you?’.<sup>14</sup> Eileen’s words echoed those of her father, but the reference to the daily act of mothering in the gesture of a cup of tea gives a glimpse into the domestic life of these two women.

Unlike her friend Margot, who tired of Wales and quit the Inland Revenue with nothing else lined up, Eileen was dependent on her own earnings and needed a job in London if she was to move back.<sup>15</sup> In 1946, she applied for a Librarian post at the Colonial Office and confided to Amy her hope that she ‘might have the advantage being a graduate twice over, especially in History and Law’.<sup>16</sup> She did not, and when Eileen eventually returned to London (presumably still working for the Inland Revenue), she and Amy moved to Wealdstone in the north-west borough of Harrow. In December 1951, Amy had a stroke and died at home.<sup>17</sup> Very soon after, in January 1952, Eileen paid nine pounds to buy the grave next to her mother’s in Pinner Cemetery, for her own eventual internment – an act of sincere commitment to being by her mother’s side.<sup>18</sup>

As letters from relatives made clear after Will’s death, Eileen was expected to be a support through her mother’s grief, and as an adult she continued to act as companion. This was a common experience for girls of Eileen’s generation. Michael Roper’s oral history interviews record how obligations to look after widowed mothers were ‘drummed into’ daughters in the aftermath of the war, and duty ‘overrode the personal wish for independence’.<sup>19</sup> Eileen did find some independence – she applied to Oxford University, she moved to Llandudno with work, she earned and managed her own money. But she was emotionally committed to her mother. As well as buying the adjacent burial plot, for thirty-odd years after Amy’s death, Eileen preserved her mother’s archive of papers and costumes and then donated them to museums.

I have assembled these bare bones of Eileen’s adult life from the box of receipts, certificates and letters fortuitously discovered by the ephemera dealer. Much of that box too relates to Amy. It is difficult to avoid interpreting Eileen in relation to her mother. Amy was the person who made the

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<sup>14</sup> Eileen to Amy Brock, 30 December 1946, author’s archive.

<sup>15</sup> Eileen to Amy Brock, 21 June 1946

<sup>16</sup> Eileen to Amy Brock, 21 June 1946

<sup>17</sup> ‘National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966’, digital images, *Ancestry.com* (accessed 23 July 2020), death date: 20 Dec 1951, death place: Middlesex; the Principal Probate Registry.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Harrow Urban District Council’, Certificate of Right of Burial, 26 January 1952, author’s archive.

<sup>19</sup> Roper, ‘Little Ruby’s Hand,’ 15.

costumes and framed her daughter in photographs. The relationship between this single parent and her only child was intensified by the absence of Will at the third point of the family triangle. Eileen defined her childhood by his death: she recalled starting school late because her mother had been 'recently widowed', and she attributed her assisted place at secondary school to her mother being a widow (thereby crediting the death of her father as both disadvantage and advantage).

We know so little about the woman Eileen became; she fades in and out of view, caught only as a reflection in the documents. The written resources are scant. Only very occasionally can we hear Eileen in her own words: the list of family members given to the IWM or the writing on the back of the photographs. She most often appears in the voices of others – Amy's letters to Will that report what she has done or said; Behenna's instructions for costumes and lyrics; in the notes taken by curators during phone calls and meetings.

And did Eileen continue to dance after that disappointing audition at the Royal Academy? I think she probably did, in one form or another. While writing this thesis, I met a group of dancers at the Festival Theatre, Edinburgh, who had learned to dance in the 1930s and had performed in variety shows as children. Marie Duthie had achieved local fame aged nine in 1932 for her ballet performance of the 'Dying Swan'.<sup>20</sup> Now in her nineties, Marie's memory is impaired by dementia; she was not able to tell me her story or share her memories. But she was able, clearly and gracefully, to teach me – a complete beginner – some tap dancing steps. She demonstrated, encouraged and critiqued. It was as though the repetitive nature of the dance steps, held in her bones and muscles, were deeper than the day-to-day problems of memory. They were part of her. I think that Eileen too would have carried the years of training, the 'natural ability' to dance *en pointe*, with her. The Jollities' girls' physical hard work likely shaped their bodies – their limbs and their brains – for the rest of their lives.

Eileen died aged eighty-five in 2000. But even after death, Eileen was overshadowed by her mother. The two women are buried next to each other, but when I visited the cemetery in 2019, Amy's grave had a headstone and Eileen's was unmarked. Eileen had provided the memorial for her mother but there was nobody to do the same for her.

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<sup>20</sup> Parker, *An Audience With*, 2.



Figure 73 A walking photograph of Eileen and Amy Brock, Westcliff on Sea, c.1929.<sup>21</sup>

There is a snapshot of Eileen and her mother walking along the high street of Westcliff on Sea which gives a precious un-posed glimpse of the two of them together (Figure 73). It is a series of quick-fire images, taken by a photographer from Spotlight Photos Ltd, set up on a busy corner to catch pedestrians as they crossed the road. This type of spontaneous 'walking portrait' was a common souvenir of an interwar day at the seaside.<sup>22</sup> In the three frames of Eileen and Amy approaching, the two women each wear a version of the then-fashionable flat-fronted boxy dress with a dropped waist. Eileen's short skirt and ankle socks are still childish, but she must be an inch or so taller than her mother; I guess she is about fourteen years old. The pair seem to have spotted the camera, but they continue talking as they walk in step. It is an act of voyeurism to see them like this; but they

<sup>21</sup> Author's archive.

<sup>22</sup> 'Commercial Beach Photography and Reflex Operators at the Seaside,' 17 June 2013, accessed 22 May 2020, <https://blog.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/sunny-snaps-and-the-world-of-the-walking-photographer/>.

recognised it in the moment and participated after the fact: they went to the photography shop and paid a shilling for this printed card, thereby confirming their collusion.

This photograph is emblematic of history writing such as this thesis, which concerns itself with an individual life, accessed through an archive. The three images give a serviceable illusion of lifelike movement and continuity; each frozen gesture is preserved and presented for magnification and scrutiny. But like every document that has survived in the archive, these single frames are snatched from the flowing continuity of a life.

Eileen and Amy are in the centre of the images, but there is plenty happening around them: a man walking past with a suitcase held on his shoulder; a woman with a handkerchief. The street is wide, the buildings are grand and there is a new motor car parked by the kerb on the left. It is only by chance that Eileen and her mother are the central subjects – from any other angle, they would be lost as just another pair of figures in the crowd. Similarly, in this thesis, Eileen and Amy have been the central figures in a well-populated picture of interwar life. There could have been any number of protagonists, but it was serendipity that led me to discover Eileen's archive. My defined, rooted point of view is like the photographer's, who kept his camera focused on Eileen and Amy for long enough to capture a well-focussed and clear portrait. Following this approach, we might get partial glimpses of other intriguing characters (the strong-jawed woman on the left, for example, striding in tennis shoes), but they are curtailed by the pre-defined focus on Eileen at the centre.

Although the three frames give an illusion of continuity, the split-second shutter of the camera creates gaps, which materialise as strong black bars on the printed photograph. These black lines represent voids or gaps in the story. They indicate that something is missing. And at the same time, they frame the image that we do see, and define the extent of our interest and focus. My choice to expose certain episodes – the fairy photograph, the dream postcard, the Jollities concerts – has cropped out other parts of Eileen's life. Behind the thick black bars between and around the final developed image, we might find other images, other stories, of Eileen's education, her school-friends, Amy's sisters or admirers.

Eileen and Amy appear the way they do because of the position of the photographer, who, despite being unseen, shapes what is captured and preserved on film. Analogously, the Brock family archives were shaped by invisible hands and limited by pre-determined points of view. As Karen Sanchez-Eppler explains, 'motivations of nostalgia, desire, fantasy and power underlie archival practice itself

... [and] acts of preservation express desire and hope'.<sup>23</sup> Eileen as family archivist preserved her father's letters and her mother's dressmaking, doubtless negotiating her own nostalgic fantasies while she did so.

But archiving institutions are also driven by fantasies and desires. Museums formalise their desires in collecting policies, which are enacted by individuals. When Eileen Brock made her donations to the V&A, the department she dealt with was called the 'Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood' and had a more 'local' character than the internationally renowned museum to which it belonged. At the time, the collecting curator was Noreen Marshall, under museum director Anthony Burton. Their motivation to collect 'childhood' (not individual *childhoods*) was belied in the way that Eileen's materials were (dis)organised when I first encountered them in 2012. Everything was separated into different categories. Her schoolbooks were mixed with hundreds of others, in a series of folders organised geographically, then alphabetically (she was in London – Clapton). Most of the photographs were 'copy prints' produced in the 1980s and 1990s, organised in a chronological series with hundreds – possibly thousands – of others. The purpose of this system was to create a narrative of the development of children's fashion, not to record the clothes of any *individual* child. The costumes, some of the Jollities programmes and sheet music and Eileen's childhood clothes and accessories were in the 'proper' museum collection, each given individual numbers, for instance 'Misc.194-1986' or 'B.154-1996' which you could only connect if you could decipher the code and access the hand-written catalogues. And then there was an unlisted brown cardboard box which held everything else: more programmes, prospectuses, letters to penpals. It was my established interest in women's life narratives, combined with the temporary presence of an archivist, that made me take the unusual approach of bringing these dispersed materials together into an archive collection under the name 'Eileen Brock'. This catalogue (now available online) became a lynchpin.<sup>24</sup> Just as Eileen and Amy turned the accidental 'walking photograph' into a souvenir by buying a copy of the print, Eileen gave the ephemeral programmes from her childhood performances to the V&A museum for them to be kept and shared. Whatever her personal motivations for the donations, ultimately Eileen's gifts to the V&A and IWM formed her memorial.

And then, in 2019, the whole Museum of Childhood collection became inaccessible during a prolonged auditing and redevelopment project. This in turn was interrupted by the coronavirus lockdown, which meant the museum was shut and staff were furloughed. In addition, the Imperial

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<sup>23</sup> Karen Sánchez-Eppler, 'In the Archives of Childhood,' in *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities*, ed. Anna Mae Duane (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 2013), 216, 31.

<sup>24</sup> 'Eileen Brock: Childhood Papers,' 2015, accessed 1 June 2020, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/archive/ARC58755>.



War Museum's centenary redevelopment restricted access to its archive for several years of my research. The point I am reinforcing here, is that a museum collection is not necessarily permanent, publicly accessible or knowable. The priorities which meant the items were accepted from Eileen's hand do not mean they make it to public view, or even to be catalogued. Previously, Eileen's donations were in the museum as examples of a type (mourning dress, school books, paper dolls, etc) and not as records of a life. The point of writing an archive-based biographically-rooted history (rather than the act of ordering or cataloguing an archive) has been to bring together the *stuff* that was spread out, blown by the winds of fate, and restore their connection to an individual, real person. The narrative is the thing that brings the material history together into an (apparently) cohesive whole.

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## Appendix 1: Members of the Jollities (1923–1927)

Arranged alphabetically by surname.

				Date of Birth (if known)	27 Jan 1923	28- Apr 1924	3 June 1924	6 Nov 1924	C. Jan 1925	17 Feb 1925	2 Mar 1925	9 Mar 1925	26 Mar 1925	29 Jun 1925	31 Oct 1925	21 Nov 1925	10 Jan 1926	16 Jan 1926	12 Apr 1926	27 Apr 1926	19 Feb 1927	No. of appearanc
1		Betty	Armglass	1917				✓														1
2		Phyllis	Armglass	12 Dec 1915				✓														1
3		Lilah	Baron											✓								1
4		Denis	Behenna	Mar 1920											✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	5
5		Soe Soe	Bendon	10 May 1921																✓	✓	2
6	Little	Stella	Bendon																		✓	1
7		Becky	Berko		✓																	1
8		Bryna	Berko		✓	✓																2
9	Tiny	Joan	Brill					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								7
10		Eileen	Brock	22 Feb 1915					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		12
11	Little	Irene	Burns																	✓	✓	2
12	Little	Marjorie	Coleman			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓										7
13		Freda	Collier																✓	✓	✓	3
14		Lily	Collier																	✓	✓	2
15	Wee	Jessie	Coombes					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓		11
16		Sadie	Davis											✓								1
17	Little	Nora	Doran					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		12
18		Winnie	Edridge	14 Feb 1911	✓																	1
19		Betty	Fortuin	6 Aug 1911											✓		✓			✓	✓	4
20	Little	Kitty	Fortuin	Aug 1915										✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	6
21		Millicent	Fortuin	7 Feb 1912																	✓	1
22		Zona	Foster	1921																		



23	Miss	Lillian	Gill														✓	✓	✓		3
24		Sadie	Goldstein											✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
25	Little	Rita	Grant		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								9
26		Pearl	Greene		✓	✓	✓														1
27	Little	Nellie	Green/e		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									6
28		Anita	Greenberg															✓	✓	✓	3
29		Maisie	Handel		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	16
30	Baby	Jewel	Hart															✓	✓	✓	3
31	Little	Minnie	Heller											✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	5
32		Dorris	Himmel			✓															1
33		Hannah	Hyams															✓	✓	✓	3
34		Ethel	Jones																	✓	1
35		Annette	Julius		✓		✓	✓													3
36		Joan	Kay		✓																1
37	The Kay	Joyce	Kay	7 Jun 1917	✓																1
38	Twins	Pearl	Kay	7 Jun 1917	✓																1
39		Stella	Kay		✓																1
40	Little	Hilda	Kinsler		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	16
41		Lily	Leanse		✓																1
42	Little	Doris	Lederman		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			12
43		Annie	Levy		✓																1
44		Hilda	Levy			✓		✓													2
45	Baby	Lily	Levy		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14
46		Irene	Lewis																	✓	1
47		Stella	Lyons		✓																1
48		Frances	Maister	26 Jun 1914	✓																1
49		Renie	Maister	Oct 1911	✓																1
50		Sylvia	Mindel	20 Sep 1914				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓					9

51	Wee	Catherine	Moscow	9 Oct 1920										✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	6	
52	Little	Millicent	Moscow	23 Feb 1916										✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	5	
53		Bessie	Myers					✓	✓	✓												3	
54		Raie	Nedas	1915	✓																	1	
55		Sybil	Nedas	20 Sep 1913	✓																	1	
56		Queenie	Oakes	2 Sep 1911		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	14	
57	Baby	Enid	Page	15 Jun 1917		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	14	
58	Master	Laurie	Page	5 Feb 1912				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									6	
59	Miss	Linda	Plumb	13 Mar 1908	✓																	1	
60	Little	Madge	Pratt					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									6	
61	Baby	Evelyn	Richards																		✓	1	
62		Ray	Rubenstein											✓		✓						2	
63		Lilah	Sampson											✓	✓					✓		3	
64	Baby	Irene	Sampson											✓					✓	✓		3	
65		Hilda	Schiska	17 Dec 1912	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	16	
66		Leonie	Simmons		✓																	1	
67		Muriel	Simmons		✓																	1	
68		Clarice	Stone	Jul 1914				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	12	
69	Little	Stella	Stone	Sep 1917				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	11	
70	Wee	Wendy	Warman		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	15	
	<b>Number of performers</b>					24	14	8*	19	21	21	21	19	20	21	24	8*	22	8*	24	29	28	

\* Names for concert on 3 June 1924 were listed in a newspaper report, rather than an itemised programme. Performances on 21 November 1925 and 16 January 1926 were productions of 'The Chocolates'.

## Appendix 2: Jollities concerts (1923–1928)

Arranged chronologically.

Date	Day	Venue	Notes	Source*
27 Jan 1923	Saturday	St Matthews Hall, Warwick Road, Clapton		V&A MOC/BROC/1/5
10 May 1923	Thursday	Mile End Hospital and Institution		ELO (19 May 1923) JC (18 May 1923)
17 Feb 1924	Sunday	Samaritan's Social Club		JC (22 Feb 1924)
28 Apr 1924	Monday	Empress Hall, Cambridge Road	In aid of Ancient Order of Druids, Sir Philip Magnus Lodge No 82	ELO (10 May 1924)
3 Jun 1924	Tuesday	Licensed Victuallers' School, Slough	Described as 'the pupils of Miss Linda Plumb...'	Reading Observer (7 June 1924)
6 Nov 1924	Thursday	St Matthews Hall, Warwick Road, Clapton		V&A MOC/BROC/1/5
23 Nov 1924	Sunday	The Jewish Institute		JC (28 Nov 1924)
4 Jan 1925	Sunday	Samaritan's Social Club		JC (4 Jan 1925)
5 Jan 1925	Monday	LBS Social and Literary Club, 198 Mile End Road		The Stage (15 Jan 1925)
25 Jan 1925	Sunday	Excelsior Social and Literary Club, Ken Hall		JC (23 Jan 1925 and 30 Jan 1925)
17 Feb 1925	Tuesday	Mile End Institution dining hall	In aid of Mile End Old Town Board of Guardians Hospital and Institution	V&A Misc.165-1986 ELO (28 Feb 1925)
18 Feb 1925	Wednesday	People's Palace Music Festival		V&A Misc.165-1986
2 Mar 1925	Monday	King George's Hall, Caroline St, Great Russell Street	In aid of Metropolitan Hospital Jewish Aid Society	V&A Misc.165-1986
9 Mar 1925	Monday	Bermondsey Town Hall	In aid of Unemployed Children's Outing Fund, Bermondsey & Rotherhithe Organised Unemployed	V&A Misc.165-1986
26 Mar 1925	Thursday	Netherlands Choral and Dramatic Club, Aldgate	In aid of North Eastern Hospital Aid Society	V&A Misc.165-1986
19 Apr 1925	Sunday	Hackney Empire	In aid of Metropolitan Hospital Jewish Aid Society	V&A Misc.165-1986 ELO (25 Apr 1925)

26 Apr 1925	Sunday	Stepney Jewish Lads' Club		JC (1 May 1925)
29 Jun 1925	Monday	Adler Assembly Hall, Adler St	In aid of Mile End Supporting Society	V&A Misc.165-1986
31 Oct 1925	Saturday	King George's Hall, Caroline St, Great Russell Street	In aid of Metropolitan Hospital Jewish Aid Society	V&A Misc.165-1986
21 Nov 1925	Saturday	Cane Hill Mental Hospital	With the Chocolates Vaudeville troupe	V&A Misc.165-1986
3 Jan 1926	Sunday	Hutchison House Lad's Club		JC (8 Jan 1926)
10 Jan 1926	Sunday	JFS Old Boys Club, Middlesex St		V&A Misc.165-1986 JC (8 Jan 1926)
16 Jan 1926	Saturday	Horton Mental Hospital, Epsom	With the Chocolates Vaudeville troupe	V&A Misc.165-1986
12 Apr 1926	Monday	Walthamstow Baths	In aid of Children's Country Holiday Home Fund	V&A Misc.165-1986
27 Apr 1926	Tuesday	Circle House, Aldgate	Organised by Workers Circle, No 1 Social & Literary Section	V&A Misc.165-1986
6 Feb 1927	Sunday	Home for Aged Jews	In aid of Stepney Philanthropic Society	JC (11 Feb 1927)
13 Feb 1927	Sunday	Rivoli, Whitechapel	In aid of East London Orphan Aid Society, Norwood	JC (18 Feb 1927)
19 Feb 1927	Saturday	St Matthews Hall, Warwick Road, Clapton	In aid of The Young Helper's League & Dr Barnardo's	V&A Misc.165-1986
26 Feb 1927	Saturday	Berner Old Boys' Club		JC (25 Feb 1927)
20 Mar 1927	Sunday	Cooper's Company Schools, Tredegar Square, Bow	Organised by Old Ford and North Bow Religious Classes	JC (11 Mar 1927)
12 Jun 1927	Sunday	Adler Assembly Hall, Adler St	Organised by East London Synagogue Ladies' Guild	JC (17 Jun 1927)
8 Jan 1928	Sunday	Home and Hospital for Jewish Incurables		JC (13 Jan 1928)
12 Feb 1928	Sunday	Synagogue Classrooms, South Hackney Synagogue, Devonshire Road	South Hackney Synagogue Social and Literary Society	JC (10 Feb 1928)
24 Jun 1928	Sunday	16 Woodbury Down, Finsbury Park	Garden fete hosted by Stamford Hill Ladies' Guild	JC (29 Jun 1928)

\* Abbreviations:

JC – The Jewish Chronicle

ELO – East London Observer

### Appendix 3: Songs performed by the Jollities (1925–1926)

Arranged by frequency of performance and date. \* Performances on 21 November 1925 and 16 January 1926 were productions of 'The Chocolates'.

	Format (if stated)	Title	C. Jan 1925	17 Feb 1925	2 Mar 1925	9 Mar 1925	26 Mar 1925	29 Jun 1925	31 Oct 1925	21 Nov 1925*	10 Jan 1926	16 Jan 1926*	12 Apr 1926	27 Apr 1926	Frequency
1	Song scena	[Untitled, 'Japanese']	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							6
2	Ensemble	Cheerio	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							6
3	Song scena	Dream Daddy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							6
4	Song scena	In The Days Of The Crinoline	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							6
5	Song scena	It Ain't Gonna Rain No More	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							6
6	Song/dance scena	National	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							6
7	Original ballet	The [Little] Fairy Who Became A Canary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							6
8	Scena	The Wedding Of Baby Peggy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							6
9	Comedy scena	Shine	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							6
10	Song scena	[Untitled, 'Cabaret']	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
11	Original comedy	A Street Just Anywhere	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
12	Original comedy	At The Pictures	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
13		Don't Love You From Tonight	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
14	Song	Kentucky Dixie Way	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
15	Song scena	Lena	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
16	Musical number	Our Big Jazz Band	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
17	Song	Sahara	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
18	Dance	The Hinkey Dee	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
19	Recitation	The Imp	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
20	Dance	The Oom Pah Trot	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
21		You Take A Step	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								5
22	Recitation	Seeing Fings At Night	✓	✓	✓	✓									4

23	Song	Uker, Uker, Ukerlay	✓	✓	✓	✓											4
24	Song	Yum Yum Lane	✓	✓	✓	✓											4
25	Song	Pom Tiddley Om Pom	✓	✓		✓	✓										4
26	Song	After The Storm [Life And Love Seem Sweeter]	✓	✓	✓												3
27	Song	Keep Her Away From The Cabaret	✓	✓	✓												3
28	Recitation	Miss Edith Helps Things Along	✓	✓	✓												3
29	Song	Tra La La La	✓	✓	✓												3
30	Song	When She's In Red	✓	✓			✓										3
31	Recitation	Doctor Pierrot	✓	✓												✓	3
32	Song	All For The Love Of Mike	✓	✓													2
33	Song	I'm Not All There	✓	✓													2
34	Song	Oh Gee Georgie	✓	✓													2
35	Song	Sarah	✓	✓													2
36	Song	Wee-Oo-La-La	✓	✓													2
37	Song	He Looks At Her	✓														1
38	Song	I've Got Ye Eye	✓														1
39	Song	Savannah		✓	✓	✓											3
40	Song	Does The Spearmint Lose Its Flavour		✓													1
41	Song	At, Choo (Also Atchoo)			✓	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓		6
42	Recitation	The Pigtail Of Li Fang Fu			✓	✓	✓	✓									4
43	Original dance scena	[Untitled, 'Eastern']			✓	✓	✓							✓	✓		5
44	Song	M'yes, M'no			✓	✓	✓										3
45	Song	Oh! Sergeant Percy			✓	✓	✓										3
46	Song	Sorry, Oh That's Quite Alright			✓	✓	✓										3
47	Song	Wait A Bit Susie			✓	✓											2
48	Song	A New Man With A New Kind Of Love [For Me]			✓		✓										2
49	Song	By The Sleepy Zuyder Zee			✓												1
50	Song	There Are No Flies On Auntie			✓												1

51	Song	How's Your Poor Old Feet?				✓	✓										2
52	Song	June Night				✓	✓										2
53	Song	Murphy, Mccarthy, Mcginty, Mcgee				✓	✓										2
54	Song	Eat More Fruit [Probably 'Everything Is Fresh Today']				✓		✓									2
55	Song	Tommy Boy				✓											1
56	Song	Why Did I Kiss That Girl				✓											1
57	Song	Cross Words [They Never Have A Cross Word Now]					✓	✓	✓								3
58	Recitation	Matilda Who Told Lies					✓									✓	2
59	Song	Bebe					✓										1
60	Song	I Love You					✓										1
61	Song	If You Want To Get On In Revue					✓										1
62	Song	Oh Darling Do Say Yes						✓	✓	✓			✓				4
63	Song	Yum Tum Tum						✓	✓						✓	✓	4
64	Song	Tea For Two						✓	✓								2
65	Song	I Want To Be Happy						✓		✓			✓				3
66	Song	When My Baby Walks Down The Street						✓		✓	✓						3
67	Song	Won't Go						✓							✓	✓	3
68	Song	All Alone						✓									1
69	Song	[Six Feet Tall No Wonder They Call Him] Big Boy						✓									1
70	Song	Everybody Loves My Baby						✓									1
71	Recitation	Fisherman Jim's Kids						✓									1
72	Song	Follow The Swallow						✓									1
73	Song	He's The Kind Of Man						✓									1
74	Song	I'll Take Him Back						✓									1
75	Song	Let's Have A Bit Of A Do						✓									1
76	Song	Listen In Virginia						✓									1
77	Song	Oh How I Love My Darling						✓									1
78	Recitation	Our Baby						✓									1

79	Song	Those Good Old Time							✓								1
80	Song	Two Rosy Cheeks							✓								1
81	Song	Where's My Sweetie Hiding							✓								1
82	Original comedy sketch	[Untitled]							✓								1
83	Original toe dance	[Untitled]							✓								1
84	Original troupe dance	[Untitled]							✓								1
85	Songs	The Bloke That Wrote The Sheik								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			5
86	Song	Ukekele Lady								✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	5
87	Song	The Dancing Lesson								✓	✓	✓	✓				4
88	Song	Don't Bring Lulu								✓	✓	✓					3
89	Song	San Francisco								✓	✓	✓					3
90	Song	Everything Is Hotsy Totsy Now								✓	✓						2
91	Song	Red Headed Mama								✓	✓						2
92	Song	Why Couldn't It Be Poor Little Me								✓	✓						2
93	Acrobatic scena	Alabamy Bound								✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
94	Song and dance scena	Bouquet								✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
95	Song scena	Shadowland								✓		✓	✓				3
96	Dance	A Tarentella								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
97	Old songs	Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me A Bow Wow								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
98	Song and dance scena	Fairy Dreamboat								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
99	Recitation	Haschisch								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
100		Here We Are Again								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
101	Original scena	How Do You Do?								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
102	Song scena	Leetle Mr Baggy Breeches								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
103	Old songs	Lily Of Laguna								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
104	Song scena	Mother Kelly's Doorstep								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
105	Old songs	My Old Dutch								✓		✓		✓	✓		4
106	Original song scena	Shelling Peas								✓		✓		✓	✓		4



107	Old songs	Ta-Ra-Ra Boom-Der-Ay								✓		✓		✓	✓	4
108	Old songs	The New Perjama Hat								✓		✓		✓	✓	4
109	Song scena	The Toy Drum Major								✓		✓		✓	✓	4
110	Song scena	Ain't My Baby Grand								✓		✓		✓	✓	4
111	Original ballet	[Untitled, incl. Nymph, Boy, Cupid, Daisy Girl, Pan]								✓		✓		✓	✓	4
112	Old songs	The Chairman								✓		✓		✓		3
113	Song at the piano	Awkward Questions								✓		✓				2
114	Song scena	Piccaninny Alley								✓		✓				2
115	Song	She's Such A Nice Girl								✓		✓				2
116	Dance / pas sriel	Souvenir								✓		✓				2
117	Song	Cosmopolitan Courtships								✓				✓	✓	3
118	Recitation	Girls								✓				✓	✓	3
119	Song	Dancing Land								✓						1
120	Song	Dottyville								✓						1
121	Comedy sketch	Going To The Zoo								✓						1
122	Song	High Street Africa								✓						1
123	Song	I Can't Help Loving That Girl								✓						1
124	Song	I Want A Girl Like Peggy O'Neil								✓						1
125	Song	Let It Rain, Let It Pour								✓						1
126	Song	Little Sleepy Eyes								✓						1
127		Mexican Tango								✓						1
128	Recite	Tisn't Worth It								✓						1
129	Old songs	Two Little Girls In Blue								✓						1
130	Song	Who Takes Care Of The Caretaker's Daughter								✓						1
131	Song	Paddlin' Madelin Home										✓	✓	✓	✓	4
132	Song	Asking Papa										✓	✓			2
133	Song	Ukulele Baby										✓		✓	✓	3
134	Songs	Yes Sir That's My Baby										✓		✓	✓	3

135	Song	Collegiate									✓				1
136	Song	I Don't Feel At 'ome in 'igh Society									✓				1
137	Song	If You Knew Susie									✓				1
138	Song	I'm A Little Bit Fonder Of You									✓				1
139	Song	Jimbo Jumbo									✓				1
140	Song	My Daddy's Dreamtime Lullaby									✓				1
141	Song	My Sugar									✓				1
142	Song	Our Avenue									✓				1
143	Song	Tale Of A Guinea Pig									✓				1
144	Song	We're All Jolly Good Fellows									✓				1
145	Song	Oh! Boy What A Girl										✓			1
146	Song	Sunny Havana										✓			1
147	Instrumental duet	[Untitled]											✓	✓	2
148	Song	Buy The Ring											✓	✓	2
149	Song	Charleston Baby											✓	✓	2
150	Song	Cutie											✓	✓	2
151	Song	Dear Matilda											✓	✓	2
152	Song	I Want To See [My] Tennessee											✓	✓	2
153	Song	I Won't Kiss You Goodnight											✓	✓	2
154	Song	[I've Got A] Hottentot Totsy											✓	✓	2
155	Song	Keep Your Skirts Down											✓	✓	2
156	Old songs	Little Annie Rooney											✓	✓	2
157	Song	Mary O'Brien											✓	✓	2
158	Song	Moonlight And Roses											✓	✓	2
159	Song	Topical Homes											✓	✓	2
160	Song	Ukulele Lullaby											✓	✓	2
161	Song	Valencia											✓	✓	2
162	Song	Where Is That Girl											✓	✓	2

163	Song	Why Don't My Dreams Come True											✓	✓	2
164	Song	You Ought To Hear What They're Saying											✓	✓	2
165	Song	Angry											✓		1
166	Song	Carolina Sweetheart											✓		1
167	Song	Heading For Louisville											✓		1
168	Song	Love Me Now (Madame Pompadour)											✓		1
169	Speciality dance	[Untitled]											✓		1
170	Song	Brown Eyes Why Are You Blue												✓	1
171	Song	California												✓	1
172	Song	I Should Say So												✓	1
173	Song	Rose In The Bud												✓	1
174	Song	Susie												✓	1
		Total Number Of Programme Items (450)	38	38	39	39	38	36	50	11	44	12	52	53	