



## **Little Red Riding Hood and the Pedophile in Film: *Freeway, Hard Candy, and The Woodsman***

—Pauline Greenhill and Steven Kohm

“Little Red Riding Hood” is one of very few well-known fairy tales not to have come under “the Disney spell” (Zipes, “Breaking”) that has ossified and Americanized so many others. Outrage at the revisioning of stories, like “Snow White,”<sup>1</sup> that many Euro North Americans associate with a purportedly innocent state of childhood, has never dominated reactions to alterations of “Little Red Riding Hood.” Perhaps that’s why creators have subjected it to such a tremendous variety of rewriting and reconceptualizing: not only films, but also novels, short stories, children’s literature, comic books, television productions, cartoons, and advertisements (see Beckett, “Recycling”; Daniels; Mieder; Nodelman). Though some offer fairly straightforward tellings, others parody the story, alter its genre (from wonder to horror, for example), and/or place it in a contemporary setting. Discussing tellings of “Little Red Riding Hood” in particular, Sandra Beckett comments, “[T]raditional motifs are

transfigured and generally subverted to convey new messages and present modern social problems. . . . [A]uthors nonetheless achieve their goals through the use of archetypes, characters, motifs, and narrative structures of an age-old genre. . . . [R]e-versions of folk and fairy tales . . . reveal shifts in social values and ideologies” (“Once” 489).

Most film audiences familiar with “Little Red Riding Hood” may not know it as an international traditional tale. Versions of type 333 in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index (henceforth ATU 333)<sup>2</sup> have been collected from some 35 ethno-cultural-linguistic groups (Uther 225). North American audiences usually know the version published in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s collections,<sup>3</sup> in which Little Red Riding Hood (or Little Red Cap), bringing a basket of food to her grandmother, meets a wolf in the forest. He asks where she is going, and then precedes her to the house, where he swallows the grandmother. By the

time the girl arrives, the wolf has installed himself in the grandmother's bed, in her clothes. Little Red Riding Hood comments, in a formulaic series, what big ears, hands, and mouth the grandmother/wolf has, and then the wolf eats her, too. A passing hunter shoots the wolf and rescues both grandmother and girl. They place stones in the wolf's belly so that he dies when he tries to escape. In a less familiar coda, Little Red Riding Hood returns and meets another wolf, but runs and tells her grandmother. They lock him out, but he jumps on the roof. They trick him into falling into a pot of water in which sausages have been boiled, and he drowns.

This version is only one of at least three European forms of the narrative, distinguishable by their endings. In the French text published by Charles Perrault in 1697 (Heiner), no saviour delivers Red and her grandmother, and the appended moral prefigures some of the films we discuss:

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. . . . [T]here are various kinds of wolves. There are also those who are charming, quiet, polite, unassuming, complacent, and sweet, who pursue young women at home and in the streets. And unfortunately, it is these gentle wolves who are the most dangerous ones of all. (Ashliman)<sup>4</sup>

A third ending, found in oral French versions, involves Red's self-rescue, with female helpers. She recognizes that the wolf is not her grandmother, but goes along with the plot, removing her clothes and getting into bed. Then she tells the wolf she must relieve herself. Suspicious, he ties a string to her leg, but she unties it and runs away. When he discovers her ruse, the wolf runs after her. When Red reaches a river, washerwomen on the other bank throw sheets across and pull Red to safety. They make the same offer to the wolf, but let go when he is in the middle of the river so that he drowns (see Douglas; Verdier).

It takes some familiarity with folktale types and folkloric motifs, and comfort with the notion that "no fairy tale text is sacred" (Tatar 229), to recognize that the films we discuss follow tradition, despite their differences from well-known texts. Adaptation, understood as "repetition without replication," may involve a degree of faithful homage in its alteration or translation, but fidelity may just as easily be located in the service of critique rather than imitative tribute (Hutcheon 7). With each reinterpretation, incorporation, or transposition of familiar stories, the teller creates a new tale that serves contemporary needs. The process of revisiting classics renders them defamiliarized or strange, opening the possibility of a shift in perspective that encourages the audience to reflect anew on narratives that may have sedimented into the bedrock of cultural narratives (Tatar). Many

modern fairy-tale film transmutations demonstrate varieties of transtextuality—embedded interlinked texts—as theorized by Gérard Genette. Numerous examples show the kind of resolutely *unfaithful* adaptation that Robert Stam would describe as “less a resuscitation of an ordinary word than a turn in an ongoing [intertextual] dialogical process” (25). The range of cinematic adaptations extends far beyond homage or critique to include filmic rewritings, resuscitations, resignifications, and even cannibalizations of literary or oral pretexts. Like those we consider here, the results reflect various outcomes: changing, correcting, echoing, or experimenting with the original story (see also Welsh and Lev).

The three “Little Red Riding Hood” films discussed here reference the plot and/or central images of ATU 333, but offer various twists. All use the thriller/drama genre (see Beckett, *Red* 207) and employ current, realistic settings rather than magical, fantasied times and places. Unlike some more straightforward tellings of the story, and in contradistinction to the Disney iterations of other tales, they are not “family films” aimed at children, but feature-length, primarily live-action, commercial (if independent) productions. All three explore, as a significant theme, adult-child sexual relationships. We find that the “Little Red Riding Hood” story offers filmmakers and viewers a metaphorical tool for developing novel understandings of the relations between pedophiles and victims that open up the

possibility of a shift in perspective on issues pertaining to them.<sup>5</sup> That is, insofar as pedophiles and victims are discursively constructed—created and reinforced in a multitude of locations from the popular cultural to the institutional—pedophile crime films using ATU 333 contribute to the development of these figures. As we will show, the three examples we discuss here frequently diverge from some mass-media and criminological orthodoxies on pedophiles and victims alike.

The subject of pedophilia is complex. For example, James Kincaid argues that, in Victorian and contemporary texts, “[t]he ‘pedophile’ . . . is a role and position, brought into being by and coordinate with the eroticizing of the child” (*Child* 5) and that “[Euro North American] culture has enthusiastically sexualized the child while denying just as enthusiastically that it was doing any such thing” (*Erotic* 13). We avoid making any such sweeping generalizations, because they can too easily be countered by a few contradictory examples. We also decline to suggest what may be the possibilities for actual social change, because we understand current constructions of pedophile and victim as multifaceted, and the discourses around these figures as extremely troubled.

By questioning what makes a Red Riding Hood and what makes a wolf (and sometimes also what makes a woodsman), these films both rely on and depart from more familiar versions of the tale. First

making viewers comfortable by offering them a recognizable narrative and characters, these films go on to shift understandings of roles and storylines. To do so, each plot employs one of the three ending strategies identified above: *The Woodsman* uses the Grimm tale—Red needs a rescuer; *Freeway* applies the oral French versions—Red, with female helpers, is perfectly capable of taking care of herself where wolves are concerned; and *Hard Candy* alludes to the Perrault tale—Red is symbolically ingested by the wolf, and thus the distinction between them blurs radically. Before we turn to close readings, we address the views of scholars who see ATU 333 as referencing sex, rape, or child sex, and we locate these three films specifically in the context of others about pedophilia.

The present work comprises part of our individual (Kohm) and collective (Kohm and Greenhill; Greenhill and Kohm) examinations of cultural representations as analytical sources shedding light on popular understandings of crime. Criminal justice theorist Nicole Rafter writes that:

Philosophically, crime films raise questions concerning the nature of good and evil. Psychologically, crime films encourage viewers to identify with victims and offenders—even serial killers—whose sexualities, vulnerabilities and moralities may be totally unfamiliar. Ethically, crime films take passionate moral positions that would be

out of place in academic analyses. (“Crime” 415)

While many cultural representations follow dominant notions of justice and morality that view crime from the perspective of blameless victims or state-sanctioned authorities, a growing number take up alternative and critical stances, such as that “morality itself is relative or deeply obscure” (Rafter, *Shots* 214). The three ATU 333 pedophile crime films we discuss here are significant moves toward rupturing accepted orthodoxies, both popular and academic, about pedophilia.

### Academic Views

Scholars across the disciplines have read “Little Red Riding Hood” using an assortment of theoretical lenses.<sup>6</sup> For a considerable number of analysts, however, ATU 333 implicates sex and sexuality.<sup>7</sup> Steven Swann Jones explores contemporary North American jokes about “Little Red Riding Hood” to show that this notion is not just a perverse interpretation by filthy-minded academics, but is understood in this way by the story’s current audiences (“On Analyzing”). Feminist post-structuralist Hélène Cixous understands ATU 333 as narrating women’s sex and sexuality: “[T]he ‘red riding hood’ in question is a little clitoris. Little Red Riding Hood basically gets up to some mischief: she’s the little female sex that tries to play a bit and sets out with her little pot



Surprisingly few interpretations focus on the fact that Red is a *child* upon whom *adult* sexual intentions are imposed.



of butter and her little jar of honey” (43; cf. Hoogland). Marjorie Garber argues that “the confrontation with the wolf in bed . . . is pervasively and complicatedly erotic, not least so at the moment of disclosure” (387; cf. A. Martin). Catherine Vellay-Vallentin notes that “[f]or Perrault scholars, ethnologists, or even psychoanalysts . . . ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ is the story of a sexual initiation. In the worst of cases, this story stages a rape, even if the act of devouring, a sexual symbol par excellence, also involves the grandmother” (271). Susan Brownmiller famously comments that “*Red Riding Hood* is a parable of rape. There are frightening male figures abroad in the woods—we call them wolves, among other names—and females are helpless before them. Better stick close to the path, better not be adventurous. If you are lucky, a *good, friendly* male may be able to save you from certain disaster” (310). Zipes makes the case that the Perrault version in particular shows rape (*Fairy* 29; *Why* 28–39). Marina Warner similarly contends that “Little Red Riding Hood” “contains . . . deeply disturbing adult material” (*From* 269).

Surprisingly few interpretations focus on the fact that Red is a *child* upon whom *adult* sexual intentions are imposed. Reading her character more literally (as the three films do) makes the tale about pedophilia, not adult sex or adult rape. Jones approaches this notion in his discussion of one version of ATU 333, when he argues that

The central focus of this text is on the child’s fascination with the wolf’s wolfness (which may be read as a thinly veiled metaphor of masculine virility since the distinguishing wolf’s features may also apply to mature men), which lures the child into the wolf’s bed even though the child realizes that the figure in the bed could not possibly be her grandmother. The tale is really about a child’s

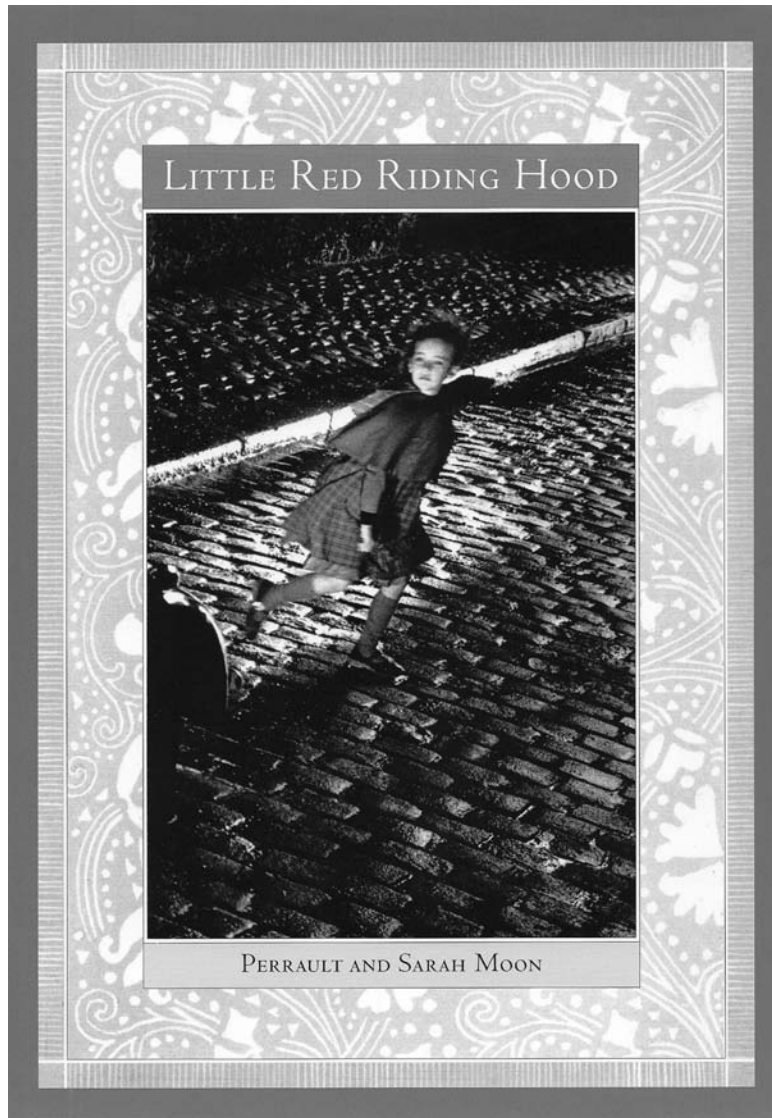


Figure 1

fascination with what goes on in bed between a man and a woman. ("On Analyzing" 103)

Making the focus the child's interest in adult sex, rather than adult interest in sex with children, softens his interpretation's possible impact. In contrast, Sarah Moon's black-and-white photography, linked with the Perrault version, offers what Beckett calls a "daring portrayal of violence and violation . . . effectively transporting the dangers of the forest into today's city streets" (*Recycling* 49–50). She summarizes: "Moon's photographs tell the horrors of modern male violence against children: abuse, rape, prostitution" (*Recycling* 52; see Figure 1).

### **Pedophile Crime Films**

The three films we discuss in depth fall into a larger grouping of films that explore the causes and criminal-justice consequences of adult-child sexual relationships. Pedophile crime films explore the issue of child sexual abuse through a variety of stock characters, recurring themes, and typical plotlines that have evolved over some eighty years of cinema.<sup>8</sup> Ideologically, these works sometimes critique and sometimes reinforce



contemporary thinking about child sexual abuse and the appropriate responses to sexual offenders. Like most crime films, however, they tend to follow the Hollywood tradition of providing viewers with a dual satisfaction—the thrill of criminal or sexual transgression, and the reassurance that the status quo will be restored in the end. Most pedophile crime films engage in this “double movement” (Rafters, *Shots* 3) by allowing audiences to observe, with horror and fascination, the violation of what many regard as the most sacred sexual tenet of western society (thou shalt not have sex with children); and then to return from the brink when the pedophile is rooted out, morally condemned, and punished dearly for his transgressions in the end.<sup>9</sup> In fact, a standard plotline of many pedophile crime films culminates in the discovery and punishment of the child molester.

Less common, but growing in importance, are a select number of crime films that Rafters calls critical, alternative, and morally ambiguous. In them, the bright line between good and evil dissolves and morality itself becomes “relative or obscure” (*Shots* 214). While few critical crime films were produced in North America prior to about 1970, excellent earlier international examples include Akira Kurosawa’s *Rashômon* and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Breathless*. In North America, films like Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange*, Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown*, and Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* set a new tone for crime films. Such films

deny audiences clear-cut heroes and villains, happy endings, and the restoration of moral and legal order. Instead, these works interrogate and problematize the very idea of justice, often suggesting that it is easily subverted and frequently denied. While films from the 1970s like *Chinatown* and *Taxi Driver* explore taboo sexualities such as child prostitution and incest, only quite recently have a few brave independent filmmakers taken a critical stance on child sexual abuse and society’s reactions to pedophiles. A cycle of films appearing since 2001 has examined the issue from a range of perspectives, including the point of view of the offenders themselves. Of particular note are three recent critically acclaimed independent films: *L.I.E.*, *Capturing the Friedmans*, and *The Woodsman*. They challenge viewers to re-examine not only some taken-for-granted assumptions about sexual offending, but also the very notions of guilt, innocence, and truth. While these three works suggest that pedophile crime films may head in new critical directions, they form only the most recent manifestations. In order to better situate their emergence, we briefly outline the category’s development and examine the characters and recurrent themes of pedophile crime films. The characters and themes we discuss may have emerged and developed in particular historical periods, but they remain part of the discourse of crime films in general, up to their most recent manifestations. Indeed, in some cases, the clearest examples of such moves in

pedophile crime films in particular may appear much later than when these ideas first emerged.

Fritz Lang's early "talkie" *M*, produced in pre-war Germany prior to his exile in the United States, may be the earliest example of a pedophile crime film. Loosely based on real-life serial murderer Peter Kürten, "the Vampire of Dusseldorf," *M*'s Hans Beckert (played by Peter Lorre) is a "pedophilic serial killer who lures children with candy in order to violate and eventually murder them" (Rafter, *Shots* 25). Desperate and with few viable leads, the police resort to shakedowns of known criminals in the city. Underworld bosses, annoyed with the disruption the police harassment presents to their criminal business, meet and vow to use all of their nefarious resources to find the murderer. They quickly succeed and force Beckert to stand trial before a kangaroo court assembled in an abandoned brewery. Complete with criminals acting as defense attorney, prosecutor, and judges, the trial sequence stands out as one of the film's most compelling scenes. Beckert pleads for his life while onlookers shout for justice. Thus, *M* introduces one of the most troubling themes that would play out in many pedophile crime films that followed: how can society conceive of justice in cases of child sexual abuse? Are pedophiles sick people needing treatment, or evil deviants deserving punishment or even death? *M* declines to resolve this dilemma, but further problematizes the issue by questioning the police's ability to protect society

against offenders.

Thus, *M* introduces a second recurring theme of many pedophile crime films: the need for vigilante action due to the inadequacy of the criminal justice system's responses to child sexual abuse. Both themes are reinforced by the characterization of the pedophile not only as a stranger who lures innocent children off the street with candy and balloons, but also as a compulsive and twisted sex psychopath. The association of "stranger danger" with pedophilia and the characterization of all sex offenders as actual or potential murderers are enduring features of the pedophile's popular-cultural image (Sonenschein). *M* foreshadowed a key shift in the development of popular attitudes toward sex offenders in North America and elsewhere. As Estelle Freedman notes, within about four years of *M*'s opening in the United States, newspapers, national magazines, legal authorities, and psychiatric professionals were suggesting that a major sex crime wave was hitting America (83).

Following on the heels of *M*, a widespread, mediated panic over sex offenders grew in the 1930s and 1940s, and saw the enactment of a variety of largely symbolic sexual-psychopath statutes in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere (Chenier; Freedman; Jenkins, *Moral*). These laws, sweeping in their definition of the "sexual psychopath," carried potentially life-destroying consequences for those



caught in their vague ambit. Most statutes authorized indeterminate sentences and allowed an unlimited incarceration period for offences from public exposure to forcible rape. Though these laws were supported by some contemporary psychiatrists and criminologists, others vehemently opposed them and worried about the misappropriation of psychiatric concepts and terminology. Philip Jenkins observes that, as a result of the fierce debate surrounding the sexual psychopath laws, scholars through the 1950s and 1960s tended to underplay “the scale and seriousness of the sex-offender issue and urged a movement away from punitive public reactions. . . . Molestation was seen as a nonthreatening symptom of sexual inadequacy, meriting therapy rather than punishment . . . . A sexual episode would cause little harm to a child, provided the police and courts did not ‘make an issue’ of it” (*Moral* 16).

During what Jenkins calls the “Liberal Era,” through the late 1950s and 1960s, the depiction of sex offenders in film shifted significantly (*Moral*). The twisted monsters and serial sexual killers typified by *M*'s Hans Beckert largely disappeared. In their place, pathetic and damaged sexual deviants appeared, with behaviour traced to childhood traumas that determined adult sexual inadequacy. Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*, based on Vladimir Nabokov's novel of the same name, plays on vaguely Freudian themes of distorted childhood sexual development. *Lolita* suggests that its pathetic

protagonist's sexual attraction to young Lolita stems directly from psychologically traumatic past events and a yearning to revisit his disrupted childhood sexual development. Similarly, *The Mark* chronicles the therapeutic journey of a recently paroled “sexual psychopath” who had been incarcerated for abducting a young girl with the intent to molest her. Dr. McNally (Rod Steiger), a correctional psychiatrist, works with Jim Fuller (Stuart Whitman), the convicted child-sex offender. McNally ultimately helps Fuller understand the psychological roots of his sexual psychopathology: an overbearing mother and a cuckold father. The film bolsters professional psychotherapy's value as McNally keeps Fuller from folding under the pressure of a society that cannot seem to forgive his past. As Jenkins observes, *The Mark* demonstrates that rehabilitation is “possible and desirable, if it is not derailed by the malice of an ill-informed public goaded by a sensationalist press” (*Moral* 108). *The Mark* draws attention to a third enduring theme in pedophile crime films: the possibility of redemption and reintegration for sex offenders released back into the community. With a number of more recent films, *The Mark* contrasts the community's impulse to reject released sex offenders against offenders' need to be allowed to rebuild their lives by resuming normal living, working, and even adult sexual relationships. So, while the liberal era gave rise to more sympathetic views of the pedophile in popular culture, its filmic portrayals of



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the sex offender reinforce the notion of stranger danger. This theme occupies a central place in the later film *Little Children*, wherein released sex offender Ronnie McGorvey (Jackie Earle Haley) acts as a lightning rod for the anger and frustrations of residents of a sleepy, upscale suburban community. McGorvey is hounded and stalked by a local “committee” of concerned citizens who vandalize his home and threaten violence, while busybody housewives openly muse about castration as the only viable solution. Voicing the frustration of many concerned parents, one young mother laments that the police are powerless to act until a law is broken: “I guess they’ll just have to wait until he kills someone.” Along with *The Mark*, other liberal-era British films like *Eight O’Clock Walk* and *Never Take Sweets from a Stranger* present child molesters as deadly outsiders luring children away from the playground with candy.

The liberal era gave way in the 1970s and 1980s to more conservative thinking about crime in general and child sexual abuse in particular. During this period, pedophilia was rediscovered in what Jenkins refers to as the “child abuse revolution” (*Moral* 118). Scholars note the emergence of a cycle of conservative, vigilante-themed crime films, and pedophile crime films proliferated. Vigilante-themed pedophile crime films lost all interest in the psychological roots of sexual deviation and suggested, collectively, that the state was in no position to protect the public from the sexual menace posed by pimps, pedophiles, and child pornographers. Accordingly, films adopted the victim’s perspective on sexual abuse and demanded justice for individuals, communities, and families torn apart by crime and sexual violence. Works like *Taxi Driver* presented the lone male avenger as a viable solution to the government’s failure to stem the tide of filth and sexual deviance. In its seedy underworld, deranged Vietnam veteran

Travis Bickle (Robert DeNiro) seems the only one sane enough to be concerned that twelve-year-old Iris (Jodie Foster) is turning tricks for a sleazy pimp (Harvey Keitel). With police virtually absent in this underworld, Bickle steps in to restore moral order in a bloody shootout that leaves everyone but Iris dead or dying. Like other vigilante pedophile films to follow, *Taxi Driver* powerfully condemns politicians and state justice agencies for their inaction around the sexual abuse of children. The notion of vigilante justice as necessary and desirable in the face of government inaction resurfaces as a recurrent theme. Avenger characters are motivated by intensely personal reasons as well as more general principles of justice. Some are rogue police officers, like Harry Callahan (Clint Eastwood) in *Dirty Harry*, who pursues and kills a deranged hippie killer responsible for a fourteen-year-old girl's death (see Lenz); or fathers of pedophile rape victims, as in *A Time To Kill*. Others take direct action upon their own abusers, like Tommy Marcano (Ron Eldard) and John Reilly (Billy Crudup) in *Sleepers*, who kill pedophile Sean Nokes (Kevin Bacon) after suffering years of sexual abuse from him and other guards at a youth detention centre. Vigilante pedophile crime films, including *Hard Candy* and *Freeway*, discussed below, remain a viable and popular type.<sup>10</sup>

After the rediscovery of child molestation in the 1970s and 1980s came a series of moral panics through the 1980s and 1990s about ritual sexual abuse

among Satanists and child pornography rings operating out of daycare centres, along with the recognition of extensive child sexual abuse by clergy of several denominations in a variety of institutional contexts (Best; Jenkins, *Pedophiles*; Jenkins, *Moral*). By the 1990s, with the rise of mass consumer Internet access, the pedophile “emerged as arguably the most feared and vilified of all ‘predatory strangers’” (Schofield 121). Accordingly, pedophile crime films like *Sleepers*, *The Boys of St. Vincent*, and *Do You Know the Muffin Man* depicted child sexual abuse by trusted authority figures in youth prisons, religious schools, and daycare centres. The popular cultural image of the sexual predator expanded to include not only the shadowy stranger operating on playgrounds and schoolyards, but also the largely invisible everyman (the filmed pedophile is invariably male) who could easily blend, unnoticed, into the background. To Rafter, this represents a “new kind of movie bad guy: the neighborhood pervert, camouflaged by ordinariness, all the more dangerous because he lacks the stogy stigmata of traditional movie criminals” (*Shots* 225).

Among recent films, one of the most critical is the 2003 postmodern documentary *Capturing the Friedmans*. Its documentary form offers special relevance, since it both participates in and critiques the cultural construction of narratives about actual pedophiles implicated in all film genres, including the fictions we discuss here. Like other reflexive

documentaries, *Capturing the Friedmans* exists in the nexus between factual and fictional filmmaking, calling attention to itself as an artifact assembled by the filmmaker and only loosely approximating any sort of documentary truth. Thus, we read this film like any cinematic story of pedophilia and its consequences: it is a product of its social and political context, and its depiction of the pedophile figure both reinforces and disrupts culturally accepted stereotypes. Relying on extensive home movies shot by the Friedman family from Great Neck, New York, it interrogates and, at times, disrupts allegations and assumptions of ritual abuse by Arnold Friedman and his son, Jesse Friedman. Arnold was a respected, award-winning high-school teacher who ran computer classes in the basement of his suburban Long Island home. Allegations of molestation of the children enrolled in these classes shook the community, and, after an extensive and likely flawed police investigation, Arnold pleaded guilty in the hope that his son would be spared. Director Andrew Jarecki uses television news footage, home movies, and interviews to assemble a montage of clues suggesting Arnold's probable innocence of these particular allegations, though he was most certainly a pedophile, deeply sexually attracted to young boys. *Capturing the Friedmans* questions the nature of recovered memories and the tactics of psychiatrists and investigators working with young children who are eager to please their adult interrogators. It offers an

emerging theme in pedophile crime films that focuses on the uncertainty of truth in cases of child sexual abuse. While legal proceedings and news reports might construct a dominant version of the truth in these matters, equally plausible truths may be crafted by documentary filmmakers.<sup>11</sup> In the end, these films recast the problem of pedophilia as more complex than might be assumed and place it solidly inside the family home, the church, the daycare centre, and a variety of private contexts too often thought to be beyond the reach of the pedophile.

In the past decade, a multiplication of approaches has developed for the depiction of pedophilia in crime films. As pedophilia increasingly becomes part of the North American cultural landscape, filmmakers have proved more willing to poke fun at both pedophiles and panicked societal reactions toward them. The aforementioned *Little Children* treats the subject matter with dark comedic moments, occasionally demonstrating the absurdity of the mass public hysteria that sex offenders can generate. When paroled pedophile Ronnie McGorvey tries to cool off in the town pool during a summer heat wave, mass panic ensues as screaming mothers scramble to pull their children out of the water, as if the mere presence of a sexual deviant in the pool had poisoned the water. More deliberately satirical is the slimy and ridiculous purple-jumpsuit-wearing pedophile Jesus Quintana (John Turturro) who provides comic relief in the Coen



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brothers' cult classic, *The Big Lebowski* (1998). Quintana, an absurd, lisping, effeminate pederast, has been released from prison and is required to announce his presence to angry neighbours. Audiences laugh at the character's absurdity, but also recognize the ubiquity of the released sex offender in contemporary North American urban culture. Even pedophiles can join bowling teams and compete for trophies.

Pedophile crime films have evolved over the last eighty years to reflect, reinforce, and, at times, challenge conventional understandings of the child-sexual-abuse problem. That imagery and narratives adapted from "Little Red Riding Hood" have recently been inserted into, or have framed, pedophile crime films suggests that filmmakers seek new ways to shift the lens through which they present this social issue. Perhaps not surprisingly, this trend seems to characterize those films most critical of conventional wisdom about child sexual abuse. Zipes comments that some "radical" versions of the Little Red Riding Hood tale "seek to rehabilitate the wolf," while others act as "unusual aesthetic experiments, debunking traditional narrative forms and seeking to free readers and listeners so they can question the conventional cultural patterns" (*Trials* 39). The three films we consider in detail offer resistant views of various characters, their sexualities, and their moralities.

### ***The Woodsman***

*The Woodsman*, particularly, asks its audience to take a view of a pedophile that considerably departs from contemporary visions, and "challenge[s] viewers to understand issues of child predation and molestation in new and different ways" (Kleinhans and Lesage 5). Carol-Ann Hooper and Ann Kaloski note that pedophiles are "locked within a plethora of words and a poverty of meaning . . . shadowy



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schoolyard.



'bogey-men' figures who remain unidentifiable within the community while being culturally identified by . . . a white, dishevelled and loosely creepy appearance." They see child molesters "demonized and dehumanized in popular discourse, and . . . sometimes also in social work practice" (149–50). In contrast, *The Woodsman's* story aims to invest complex humanity in its paroled pedophile, Walter (Kevin Bacon), who is trying to avoid recidivism after twelve years in prison. The only apartment he can get overlooks a schoolyard. He finds carpentry work, and becomes involved with fellow-worker Vickie (Kyra Sedgwick), who experienced sexual abuse as a child. His other supporters include his employer Bob (David Alan Grier), his brother-in-law Carlos (Benjamin Bratt), and his counsellor Rosen (Michael Shannon). His detractors are fellow employees Mary-Kay (Eve) and Pedro (Carlos Leon), and police officer Sgt. Lucas (Mos Def). The narrative also crucially involves Walter's observation and interaction with a pedophile, whom he names "Candy" (Kevin Rice), who is stalking the playground, and with his own potential victim, Robin (Hannah Pilkes).

In her work on literary rewritings of ATU 333, Rita Ghesquiere looks at the underlying structure of nurturer/aggressor and victim/rescuer in the tales, and finds that individual characters take both sides of these semiotic oppositions. We locate this same doubling and overlapping of figures as an essential element of "Little Red Riding Hood"/pedophile films, and *The Woodsman* exemplifies this strategy. The viewers' familiarity with fairy-tale characters helps to complicate their potential knee-jerk reactions to Walter as pedophile. His most obvious parallels are with the eponymous woodsman and wolf. As literal woodsman (woodworker/carpenter, cf. Rafter, "Crime"), he is also a potential saviour for Candy's victims, as well as for Robin. As




wolf, he's a possible reoffender, stalking a girl in a shopping mall and striking up a conversation with Robin as the two walk through the woods in a park.


Almost from the beginning, however, the script complicates the obvious associations of the characters in the film with those from "Little Red Riding Hood." When the viewer first sees Vickie walking into the factory, Pedro sexually harasses her, saying, "You look good enough to eat, baby!"—an obvious reference to the fairy tale's cannibalism/sex motif. Thus, Pedro momentarily becomes wolf to Vickie's Red. Positions quickly reverse, however, when Vickie retorts, "Play with yourself, asshole"—rendering Pedro the sexualized child (Red). Similar manoeuvring of character locations happens when Vickie offers Walter a ride in her truck, saying "Come on, I won't bite." She takes the wolf's role, initiating the relationship—alluding again to cannibalism/sex—with Walter the [R]ider (though he never wears red).<sup>12</sup> These brief character inversions set viewers up for the main narrative focus—on Walter's wolf/woodsman dilemma, and on Robin as Red. Robin is multiply so marked, including her red jacket, her age, and her vulnerability. Even her name evokes not only the red-breasted American songbird, but also the subjects of her own constant surreptitious surveillance. Just as Robin constantly watches birds in the woods, Walter, an admitted "people watcher," watches Robin. With the grandmother figure absent, the film focuses on the

Grimm story's core—interaction between wolf, Red, and woodsman.

Fiona Mackintosh's consideration of Argentine women writers' revisions of "Little Red Riding Hood" notes that "[m]any rewritings of fairy tales do not only stake a claim on the wood for female explorations and self-discovery, challenging its traditional role as a forbidden and forbidding place; several of the new versions also draw out the female character's positive attraction to the wood" (159). The woods offer refuge, solace, and personal exploration for Robin, who goes to the park to watch birds and, implicitly, to escape the sexual attentions of her father.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the woods, though dangerous because Walter and others like him lurk there, are actually safer than her supposed haven at home. (Note that versions of ATU 333 locate grandmother's home, not the woods, as the locus for sexuality/cannibalism.) Even if this construction of the woods was not in director Nicole Kassell's conscious intention, it accurately reflects the feminist insight that the home, not the streets (woods), is the most unsafe location for women and girls, contra multiple attempts to keep them literally and figuratively confined to the domestic context, allegedly for their own good. As Hooper and Kaloski note, the home is also the primary location for pedophilia, and the perpetrator is more likely to be a family member than a hitherto unknown individual: "The dominant construction of the problem as one of 'stranger danger,' 'the



The film's  
denouement is  
uncharacteristically  
open for an American  
production.



paedophile' as monster/pervert . . . obscures the issues of masculinity raised by feminist theory and research, and the evidence of much more widespread abusiveness within society" (151). Thus, *The Woodsman* reflects a sorry truth about pedophilia, that though "hatred is largely directed towards predatory strangers . . . approximately nine out of every ten sexual offenses against children are committed by family members or acquaintances of the victim" (Bennett, "Reel" 362).

Indeed, in the end, Walter is neither truly wolf nor truly woodsman, as professional prison manager Jamie Bennett points out: "Most devastatingly . . . Walter pulls back from his approaches to the young girl, Robin, when she reveals that her father has been molesting her. He tells her to 'go home,' but there is no sanctuary there. Unlike the Woodsman saving Red Riding Hood from the Wolf, in saving Robin from himself, Walter does not grant her safety" ("Seeing" 56). Conversely, Hooper and Kaloski note that "'Candy' doesn't see Walter until Walter beats him up . . . perhaps becoming the woodsman of the Red Riding Hood story by 'saving' the child 'Candy' is with from the 'wolf,' and in the process beating up/defeating/distancing himself from the 'paedophile' part of himself" (152; cf. Kleinhans and Lesage). The woodsman figure, not surprisingly, permeates the movie, and Walter is not the only failed rescuer. Indeed, the explicit reference to the "Little Red Riding Hood" story links it to another narration in the film: Sgt. Lucas's telling of his worst experience with a violent and murderous pedophilia case, which has clearly scarred him both personally and professionally. Indeed, this filmed juxtaposition offers the possibility that Lucas himself could be the fairy-tale saviour, but, he comments sardonically, "There ain't no fuckin' woodsman in this world."

The film's denouement is uncharacteristically open for an American production. Walter never transforms into a "good" person.

Indeed, his moment of woodsman-like apparent rescue, when he beats up Candy (momentarily seeing himself in Candy's face), is ambivalent: as Hooper and Kaloski comment, he "aligns himself with more respectable forms of violent masculinity" (153). Though Sgt. Lucas clearly approves of Walter's action, its fury is more pathetic than redemptive. Indeed, despite the very American conclusion that Walter's salvation can result from sheer will and the love of a good woman, the film shows that "[t]he change Walter makes is halting, provisional, very unheroic" (Hooper and Kaloski 154). Bennett, however, finds considerable value in *The Woodsman*. He approves of the film's humanizing perspective on Walter as an individual trying to cope with a serious and socially stigmatized and stigmatizing problem: "Filming a sensitive portrayal of a released child-sex offender is a challenging job in today's moral, political and social environment . . . . The strategy of the film involves presenting the perspective of a sex offender as legitimate" ("Reel" 361–62)—not a mainstream view in current popular culture. He argues that "there is an inter-relationship between representations of criminal justice issues in film and popular political discourses . . . . [that] both reflects public perceptions and helps to influence them by creating a source of discussion and ideas" ("Seeing" 52–53). Mike Nellis concurs: "It is only through high-quality fiction—good books, movies and plays—that certain types of story

can be placed in the public domain" (145). Rounding out the academic adoration, Graham Vickers calls the film "[a]n honorable bid to explore a variety of issues raised by a pedophile newly released from prison who is uncertainly seeking reform or redemption but fears recidivism;" and "one of American cinema's most painfully honest attempts to deal with the subject" (87).

While *The Woodsman* largely succeeds in sketching a sympathetic and even realistic portrait of a recently released sex offender, it partially reinforces stereotypes of the pedophile as a male stranger who stalks his victims in parks and neighbourhood playgrounds. Moreover, while providing a sensitive portrayal of Walter's struggles, the film simultaneously presents a far less developed pedophile bogeyman, who literally uses sweets to lure prepubescent boys away from the school playground in broad daylight. Jon Davies accuses the film of homophobia in thus characterizing Candy—an apparently irredeemable homosexual pedophile—alongside the much more compassionate, self-questioning heterosexual pedophile Walter. Indeed, in the end, Candy seems to exist mainly to be punished violently, while Walter finds some measure of hope after realizing the damage he has done to his young victims. Nevertheless, *The Woodsman* presents a complex filmic narrative of the pedophile in contemporary American society, while challenging and reinforcing cultural mythology.

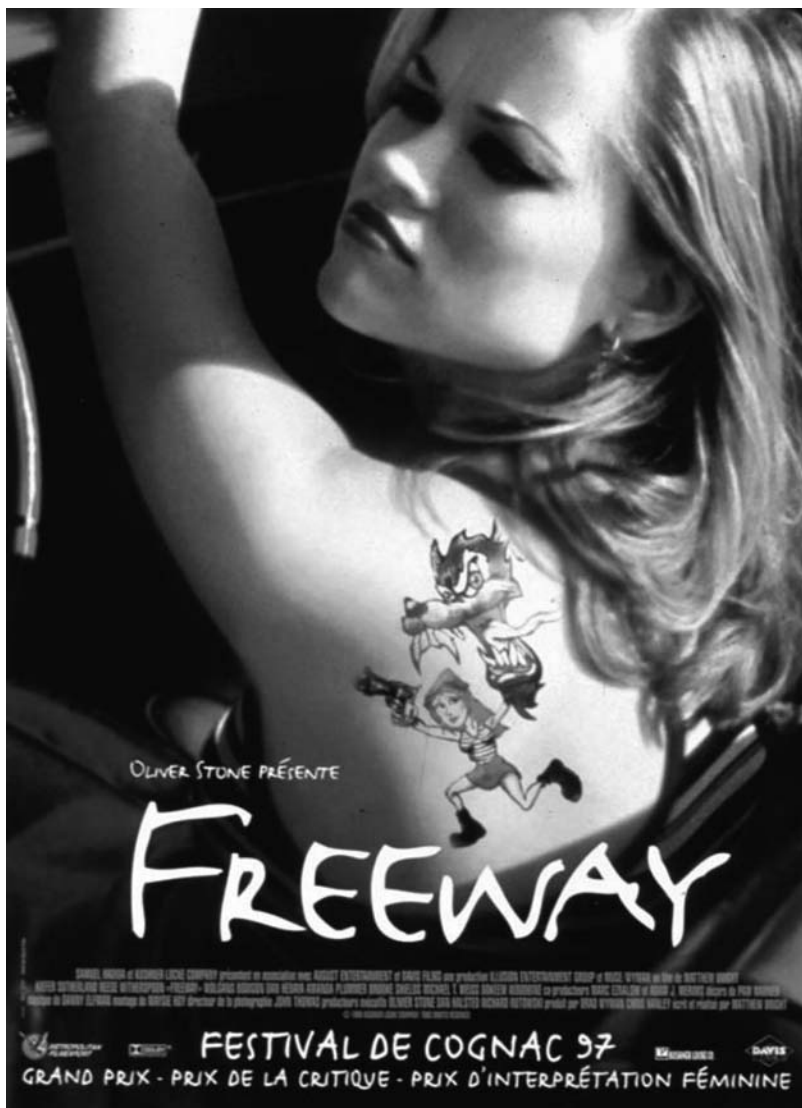


Figure 2: Photo provided courtesy of Muse Films and The Kushner-Locke Company

### **Freeway**

In a darkly sardonic vein, *Freeway* (see Figure 2) directly reworks the narrative structure and imagery of “Little Red Riding Hood” to comedic and, at times, critical effect. Though the film centres on a sadistic, pedophilic serial killer, the audience laughs at Bob Wolverton’s (Kiefer Sutherland) monstrous and wolf-like absurdity, while delighting in the street-hardened yet child-like Red, Vanessa Lutz (Reese Witherspoon). A much less controlled and less explicitly moralistic film than *The Woodsman*, it has been dubbed “the ‘angry girl’ film par excellence” (Roberts 217). Film theorist Carol Clover understands ATU 333 as an opportunity for filmmakers to explore the resonances of Red and the woodsman, but also links it to rape revenge films:

Consider Little Red Riding Hood, who strikes off into the wilderness only to be captured and eaten by a wolf (whom she foolishly trusts), though she is finally saved by a passing woodsman. Multiply and humanize the wolf, read “rape” for “eat,” skip the woodsman (let Red save herself) and you have *I Spit*

*On Your Grave*. (Nor is the woodsman's revenge in the folktale—slashing open the wolf to let Red back out—all that much prettier than its cinematic counterparts.) (124)

Most “rape revenge” films (Clover 137–54), from *I Spit On Your Grave* to *Straightheads* and beyond, involve actual victims taking personal retribution. But though *Freeway* and *Hard Candy* (both made after Clover's work) involve retribution, the pedophile's victims are other girls, not the heroines themselves. According to Sara Martin, “*Freeway* suggests that freeing oneself is not simply a choice but a painful, unavoidable obligation. [Writer-director Matthew] Bright's tale focuses, above all, on the consequences that Little Red Riding Hoods must face in a late twentieth-century American society more willing to protect ‘wolves’ than women” (29). As Bright himself notes, Vanessa “has a social conscience” (DVD commentary); instead of being satisfied with simply escaping the wolf's clutches herself, she must save other potential victims by executing Wolverton. Indeed, Vanessa is so self-reliant that the setbacks in her life seem to offer her new opportunities.

The film sets up Vanessa as an illiterate sixteen-year-old. When her mother (Amanda Plummer) and stepfather (Michael T. Weiss) are arrested, Vanessa ditches her social worker (Conchata Ferrell), picks up a gun from her boyfriend Chopper Wood

(Bokeem Woodbine, immediately killed in a drive-by shooting), and sets off to her grandmother's house. When her car breaks down on the freeway, sleazy child psychologist Wolverton picks her up, but turns out to be the “freeway killer” for whom the cops have been searching. Vanessa easily subdues Wolverton and shoots him several times, leaving him for dead. Wolverton survives and Vanessa is arrested and placed in juvenile detention. With her female friends, she breaks out of prison and continues to her grandmother's house, followed by two cops (Dan Hedaya and Wolfgang Bodison), who, eventually realizing that she is innocent, want to save her from Wolverton, who has figured out her destination. Preceding her, Wolverton murders Vanessa's grandmother and hides in her bed, dressed in her clothes. Vanessa soon recognizes him—“Them's some big ugly fuckin' teeth you got, Bob”—and chokes him to death, leaving the house to meet the cops, who have arrived too late.

References to ATU 333 abound, from the quickly dispatched Chopper Wood and his equally unsuccessful woodsman/saviour cop counterparts, to the grandmother's house and the dangerous road—the freeway itself—that leads there, to Vanessa's red outfit and basket. Again, though, the film complicates and renders ambivalent associations of nurturer/aggressor and victim/rescuer. Though Bright likens Vanessa's stepfather (who molests her) to a hyena

(DVD commentary), and Catherine Orenstein notes the “hirsute, lupine stepfather” (221), he is not a particularly successful wolf. Of course, neither is Wolverton, once he meets Vanessa. Wolf masquerading as woodsman, and a counsellor very different from *The Woodsman’s* Rosen, “since Bob’s job is to listen to people, to be submissive/passive . . . he uses these characteristics against women in order to gain their trust before killing them” (Sinn 6). Thus, as Wolverton carefully grooms Vanessa for metaphorical consumption, he rhetorically inverts the traditional wolf-heroine relationship when he implores, “You’re going to have to trust me. You’re going to have to let me in.” Audiences familiar with the Grimms’ version know Wolverton really wants the reverse: he plans to consume the heroine. Yet, he remains a fairly one-dimensional wolf. When Vanessa shoots and horribly disfigures him, he becomes an overdetermined monster—not a victim.

Bright clearly presents a sexualized narrative: “I always thought that the story of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ had an element of smut in it” (DVD commentary). Similarly, Zipes contends that “mass media’s dissemination of images through commercials, films, video, and news stories tends to follow Perrault and continues to suggest that women lure and seduce men and ultimately are responsible if anything happens to them. The contested representations suggest that there is another way of viewing desire, seduction,

and violation” (*Why* 39). Taking into consideration the inclusion in the oral French versions of female helpers and Red’s self-rescuing ingenuity, however, *Freeway* looks much closer to traditional ATU 333 versions than viewers who know only the Grimms’ version might think. Catherine Orenstein observes that “*Freeway* transforms the fairy tale into a critique of modern society—exaggerating and then debunking stereotypes of race, class and gender and mocking the fairy tale even as it carries on the tradition. The film not only gives the characters of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ a new set and wardrobe; it also restores the original lesson in self-reliance” (227). Zipes notes that “many narratives portray Little Red Riding Hood coming into her own, developing a sense of independence without males” (*Trials* 39). Vanessa’s female helpers, including Mesquita (Alanna Ubach), are “well aware of the fact that nobody is going to watch out for girls—especially those without the standard support systems of school and family—except other girls” (Roberts 229). Like the washerwomen who pull Red across the water to escape the wolf, Vanessa’s girlfriends and fellow inmates support and sustain her where, for the most part, potential male helpers like the two cops actively hinder her or, at best, just get in the way. These helpless and ineffectual rescuers distance the narrative from the woodsman of the Grimm version; the female helpers and self-reliant Red invoke the oral French forms.

Thus, though viewers knowing only the Grimms



might understand Vanessa's character as departing from that of her traditional counterpart, clearly this is not so. She expresses an active agency that is "significant and pleasurable precisely because the expression of anger has hitherto been the unspoken domain of men and boys" (Roberts 222). Feminist and women-centred revisions of ATU 333 have (not surprisingly) generally made Red the hero, not the heroine/victim. But *Freeway* also presents in Vanessa what was, for the mid-1990s, a relatively unfamiliar version of a teenaged girl: "Some of the frightening images of teenagers in recent movies are related to driving ambition and methodical efficiency, topped off by unsentimental dedication. . . . *Freeway* . . . present[s] new versions of these dark new themes. [It] present[s] successful survivors, not macabre slackers. As a result, adults are grist for their mill and pawns in their game" (Beck 19). Bright acknowledges this view of Vanessa, saying "I guess I'm just a feminist at heart" (DVD commentary).

But Vanessa's ruthlessness against, at best, prejudiced and weak human obstacles, and, at worst, explicitly murderous ones, calls to mind not only Red, but also the wolf. Arguably, "Vanessa embodies both the victim and the survivor" (Wiseman 86) within the film's diegesis; wolf-like, her victimhood is fleeting and vigorously resisted. Her facility with guns offers some alternatives to the most obvious female subject position as passive recipient of others' actions (see

Lentz 374–75). Yet, despite the fact that Vanessa shoots Wolverton many times, she cannot kill him with this phallic object, but must strangle him in the end (see Lentz 376). Vanessa's diegetical defeats are plural: she fails at first to kill Wolverton, she is arrested and jailed because she cannot initially convince the police that he is the freeway killer, and she can't save her grandmother. She ultimately triumphs, however, over both her sister inmates (by beating one of them to a pulp and thus earning their respect) and the cops. Sara Martin comments, "As a fantasy of empowerment, *Freeway* is, possibly, the most effective version of 'Little Red Riding Hood' especially because by casting in the role of the heroine a young woman of questionable behaviour it stresses the idea that all victims deserve protection" (30).

If Wolverton is a potential Red, or ultimate victim, and Vanessa a "lone wolf" (so described by Roberts 223) in the end, her role is somewhat ambivalent. As her creator Bright comments, she "looks like a psychopath but she's not—or if she is, she's a good psychopath" (DVD commentary). Kimberley Roberts concurs: "those with power are the real wolves" (225). Thus, Vanessa gives voice to those who believe that when it comes to predators like Wolverton, perhaps Euro North Americans ought to understand a little less and condemn a bit more. In a revealing exchange between Wolverton and Vanessa, just before she shoots him, Vanessa articulates the sentiments of victims



Figure 3: Photo provided courtesy Maple Pictures Corp. © 2006, all rights reserved.

outraged at criminals who try to wear the mantle of victimhood. Countering Wolverton's sobbing pleas that she should spare him because he is a "profoundly sick man," Vanessa retorts:

I know there's a lot of sick guys that get hard thinkin' about messin' women up. Hell, that's all you ever see on TV. But when a guy goes and does that for real like you were plannin' on doin' . . . . When a guy goes and hurts someone who never hurt them, that makes them a criminal first and a sick guy second. It's like being sick has to take second place to being crooked. And Bob, you're crooked.

*Freeway* adeptly uses the narrative structure of ATU 333 to powerfully restate the vigilante theme that so often figures in pedophile crime films. In the final analysis, the viewer sides only with Vanessa—her wrath is righteous and the violence she uses is only against those who have threatened her or others like her.

### *Hard Candy*

The same cannot be said of Hayley (Ellen Page) in *Hard Candy* (see Figure 3). The lines between nurturer/aggressor, victim/rescuer,

and even psychopathology/sanity are ambivalently drawn. The two primary characters, Hayley the Red/wolf (as victim/aggressor) and Jeff (Patrick Wilson) the wolf/Red (as aggressor/victim) regularly exchange positions throughout the film, and viewers find themselves alternately rooting for Hayley and feeling just a bit sorry for the vastly overmatched and manifestly tortured Jeff. Sandra Beckett comments that “[m]any allusions to the story of Little Red Riding Hood are strictly visual” (*Recycling* 5), and this is certainly true of *Hard Candy*. The most direct link is the red hoodie that Hayley wears. Writer Brian Nelson comments, “It was not actually an intentional ‘Red Riding Hood’ statement at all; that was something that people brought to the film later” (DVD commentary). (Note that he does not deny the reference; just that it was conscious.) Actors Page and Wilson call it “a coincidence.” Yet, director David Slade notes that “later on we could have changed” the red-hoodie reference, but they chose not to do so. Nelson says, “We would call it part of the unconscious poetry of the film” (DVD commentary). Following narrative parallels to the fairy tale helps to illuminate the film.

*Hard Candy* follows fourteen-year-old Hayley, who meets thirtyish Jeff in a chat room and then arranges to meet him at a café, where a poster advertises a missing girl. Hayley goes back to Jeff’s house, where they drink alcohol and she offers to pose for photographs. She spikes Jeff’s drink, and he awakes to find himself

tied up. Hayley accuses Jeff of being a pedophile, and finds incriminating evidence (not revealed to the viewer). Though the most Jeff eventually admits to is “watching,” the rest of the film involves Hayley’s psychological torture of Jeff (including a performance of castration). Although Jeff escapes momentarily several times, Hayley eventually manipulates him into hanging himself.

For North American audiences used to polarized good guys and bad guys, who exchange triumphs but never moral positions, Hayley and Jeff in *Hard Candy* may be just too ambivalent. Adrian Schober’s insight that “recent filmic depictions uncomfortably blur the usually safe boundaries between normal and pathological to ultimately expose the ‘latent’ pedophile within society at large” (134) prophesies both *The Woodsman* and *Hard Candy*. But the latter film goes much further in normalizing the apparently pathological and pathologizing the apparently normal. The expectation that Hayley would be Red, or perhaps even woodsman, to Jeff’s uncomplicated wolf is rigorously denied; the film never allows such an easy identification. Similarly, it resists casting Jeff only as the wolf. Its creators claim that the film interrogates the vigilante film, asking how much revenge is too much. Nelson notes, “We do have this culture that likes to sexualize teenage girls and even younger girls and then somehow makes it the fault of those girls rather than the fault of the people who



We may be pushing  
the metaphor  
somewhat in arguing  
that Hayley is  
Perrault's Red.



are manufacturing these clothes" (DVD Commentary).<sup>14</sup> Like the academic critics of *The Woodsman*, Slade calls the term *pedophile* "the most abusive word in the human language." But others have called Hayley a "very ambiguous little girl . . . new Lolita for the cyberage" and have drawn attention to her "stunning metamorphosis from breathless young teen to self-assured psychopath" (Vickers 88–89). Because her identity is forged online, we never know for certain that Hayley is who she claims to be. She might be fourteen, or she might be older. Certainly, her actions and words suggest a level of maturity beyond that of an early teenager. Following the wolf/Red duality implicit in her character, Hayley acts both as a naïve teen and as a hardened young adult.

We may be pushing the metaphor somewhat in arguing that Hayley is Perrault's Red. Yet, she is clearly entirely consumed by the conventional wolf's role as (sexualized) attacker, so much so that their characters and morality become nearly indistinguishable. Once again, this view of Red is not far from tradition, nor from the revisions of the Argentine women writers whom Fiona Mackintosh discusses:

Little Red Riding Hood is thus something of a wolf in sheep's clothing, and the true wolf is most disappointed that his idyllic impression of her was so far from the truth . . . . The collapse of this hyperbolic, idealized version of Little Red Riding Hood also signals the demise of the sickly, demure stereotype that has been standard fare since Perrault. . . . Little Red Riding Hood is . . . resourceful, single-minded, and pragmatic, whereas the "ferocious wolf" . . . is dragged down by the weight of his traditional role and behavior. (161)

Indeed, Mackintosh's comments could refer directly to *Hard Candy's* Hayley: "Her metamorphic journey appears to have turned her not into a woman but into a wolf. . . . Little Red Riding Hood's feared, prohibited, yet inevitable encounter with the wolf, made so weighty and inevitable precisely by the countless retellings of this tale, is transformed by her as an all-powerful narrating sexual being into a positive triumph of erotic suggestivity" (163). Though, of the three films discussed, *Hard Candy* draws the least on the ATU 333 narrative, it is arguably most useful in understanding a critical view of pedophilia. The interpolation of "Little Red Riding Hood" into the film leads audiences to consider that distinguishing Red and the wolf may be not at all straightforward in contemporary Euro North American society.

### **Shifting perspectives**

Fiona Mackintosh observes that Argentine women writers "question the unthinking transmission from woman to woman . . . both of classic folkloric tales and of social mores, retold or reiterated without interrogating their underlying ideological biases" (162). The same could be said of the three films we discuss. Using patterns from the all-too-familiar ATU 333, they interrogate society and story alike by presenting ambivalent figures rather than stock characters. The emergence of "Little Red Riding Hood" narrative and imagery in pedophile crime films like *Freeway*, *Hard*

*Candy*, and *The Woodsman* allows audiences to reflect upon the subject matter anew and, at times, can allow filmmakers to subvert traditional conceptions of the problem of child sexual abuse and its potential remedies. The films work at an ideological level by reworking stock characterizations and highlighting recurrent themes that suggest the nature and scope of the pedophile as a social problem. They show all too clearly that the pedophile is a figure that is culturally constructed, in response as much to social discourses as to real dangers.

Pedophile crime films over the past eighty-some years have demonstrated remarkable consistency in their focus on issues of justice, vigilante action, and the possibilities of redemption/reintegration for pedophiles. They may suggest that police and the justice system cannot deal with pedophilia, either because they are incompetent or ineffectual, or because child abuse is a medical rather than a criminological issue. They may contend that pedophiles should be jailed, that they should be killed, or that they should be allowed to rejoin society once they have paid their legal debt to it and have shown the will and capability to reform. The recent insertion of "Little Red Riding Hood" narrative/imagery adds critical depth to the traditional plots, themes, and characters for this type of film. *The Woodsman* explores the redemption/integration themes found in *The Mark*, and both *Freeway* and *Hard Candy*

are essentially vigilante/vengeance pedophile films that explore the perception that the state is unable to protect children from the pedophile. All three operate in the context of querying what could be a just response for pedophiles and victims alike. But the ATU 333 narrative adds discursive power by introducing, then doubling, overlapping, and sometimes reversing a number of polarized dualisms—wolf/Red (pedophile/victim), wolf/woodsman (pedophile/rescuer), and so

on—that subvert the dominant historical narrative of pedophiles in popular culture. Using familiar fairy-tale characters comfortably grounds these films within fictional narratives, while simultaneously furthering discursive cultural critiques. By no means do they present a single, simple view. If anything, they complicate understandings of child-adult sex, revealing how problematic have been the responses of other mass media and the justice system.

### Acknowledgements

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For example, telling reactions on The Internet Movie Database to the live-action, horror film *Snow White: A Tale of Terror* include: “The dwarfs weren’t even played by real midgets, they were normal size people. That’s just wrong” (Taknezek; see also Snowden).

<sup>2</sup> The index of folktale types originally developed by Antti Aarne, translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson, has recently been updated by Hans-Jörg Uther.

<sup>3</sup> The Grimms published seven different editions of their collection between 1812 and 1857 (Zipes, *Complete xxx-xxxi*).

<sup>4</sup> The moral appears in the original version by Perrault (Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma mère l’Oye*. Paris, 1697). The translation given here is from D. L. Ashliman’s *Folktex* website, where the attributed source is Andrew Lang. See also Warner, “Goose.”

<sup>5</sup> Euro North Americans understand pedophiles as individuals who seek sexual interaction with children under the age of legal consent.

<sup>6</sup> A sample can be found in casebooks of versions and analysis compiled by Alan Dundes and Jack Zipes (*Trials*).



<sup>7</sup> Films that sexualize ATU 333 include *Red Hot Riding Hood*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *A Wicked Tale*.

<sup>8</sup> In forthcoming work (Kohm and Greenhill), we address pedophile crime films in general.

<sup>9</sup> "His" is deliberate; the stock pedophile film character is invariably male. We have not yet unearthed any clear examples centring on a female child-sex offender.

<sup>10</sup> Revenging Reds like those in these two films also appear in *Red Riding Hood* (about a girl whose response to every crime from shoplifting to blackmail is to murder the perpetrator) and *Little Erin Merryweather* (about a serial killer who targets men whose dirty hands remind her of her abusive father). See Greenhill and Kohm, forthcoming.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer* and *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer*.

<sup>12</sup> Director Nicole Kassell's DVD commentary underlines her deliberate choice to avoid the colour red except around children, or when making allusions to children (as in the red ball that symbolizes Walter's pedophilic desires).

<sup>13</sup> Perhaps coincidentally, in the film *Bye-bye Chaperon rouge*, the woodsman/mother's-boyfriend character is an ornithologist, and the Red character, Fanny, says she, too, is an ornithologist when she mistakes him for her father.

<sup>14</sup> Kincaid argues, similarly, that "the erotic child" is sold in a variety of entertainment media (*Child* 363-75) and that "erotic innocence" pervades Euro North American culture (*Erotic*).

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