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The red frog prince: a fairytale about the shifting social status of sugar confectionery

Abstract:

Once upon a time, sugar was a magical substance in an ordinary world. When it became cheap and readily available in the mid-nineteenth century, sugar and sugar confectionery became part of the ordinary diet, and have since fallen to the status of junk food, and, more recently, poison. But children relate to lollies at the level of imagination, so lollies are a vital part of the wonder of childhood and retain for children the magical cultural status once attributed to them. Allen's red jelly frogs are banned from school tuckshops, but they play a noble role in opening doors for youth chaplains during the notorious Schoolies Week. Furthermore, the humble lolly descends from the elaborate sugarwork that once featured in royal banquets; it was noble all along. Lollies are no longer on the menu, and they do not even fit into food categories, but judgements based on food value alone fail to take into account the magical role they play in children's lives and ignore the ways in which health authorities, artists, and advertisers use confectionery. Lollies have more in common with fairytales than food. The Frog Prince—a fairytale about a royal son who is turned into an ugly frog by a wicked enchantress and then rescued through his relationship with a child—is a metaphor for red frog lollies. This paper examines red frogs as sites of transformation, thereby repositioning sugar confectionery as magic and challenging dominant narratives that reduce the complexity of lollies and their cultural significance.

Biographical note:

Toni Risson is a children's author with a background in the visual arts and a passion for Australian cultural history. Her PhD thesis about the cultural roles lollies play in the lives of Australian children is the first research into Australian confectionery. Toni has also published two mystery adventure novels for older readers with UQP, and in 2007 published a book about the Greek cafe/milk bar. This Australian icon is fast disappearing from the landscape, but *Aphrodite and the Mixed Grill: Greek Cafes in Twentieth-Century Australia* celebrates the part it once played in the lives of Greek immigrants and in the social fabric of Australia.

Keywords:

Lollies—children—magic—confectionery—sugar—red frogs—fairytales—children's literature—popular culture—hotel chaplaincy—childhood obesity

Fairy floss is pure sugar; watching someone conjure threads of pink gossamer by waving a wand inside a fairy floss machine is pure magic. In ways that seem miraculous, confectioners transform white sugar crystals into the ‘Wonderland’ of brilliantly-coloured objects at the lolly counter, and, although British confectionery historian Laura Mason claims that mechanisation in the nineteenth century ‘banished the magic’ of the confectioner’s art, the production and consumption of confectionery still offer escape from the ordinary into the realm of the fabulous and enchanting (1998: 132). Stories like *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang: The Magical Car* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which describes Willy Wonka as ‘a magician’ who can make anything he wants, reinscribe the discourse of wonder inherent in confectionery and confectionery manufacture (Dahl 1988: 72). Even the Australian government portrayed prominent Melbourne confectioner Macpherson Robertson as ‘a magician,’ ‘a fairy godfather,’ and ‘an alchemist,’ who changed sugar and cocoa into Old Gold and had a career that was ‘so marvellous and entrancing’ that it read ‘like a fairytale’ (Pratt 1934: 272, 269, 268). But if the power of sugar to transform and be transformed is marvellous, the history of its symbolic transformation is even more magical.

Drawing upon children’s literature, film, art, advertising, memoirs, and a variety of other texts, this paper challenges the dominant narrative of devaluation and demonisation perpetuated in representations of sugar. In particular, it examines Allen’s red frogs as sites of transformation, thereby rewriting sugar confectionery in terms of magic. Red frogs were banned from school tuckshops, and then transformed into a noble emblem through youth chaplaincy. Lollies are no longer on the menu, and they do not even fit into food categories, but the humble lolly descends from the elaborate sugarwork that once featured in royal banquets—it was noble all along. Lollies are magical, and they have more in common with fairytales than food. The Frog Prince, a fairytale about a royal son who has been turned into an ugly frog and is rescued through his relationship with a child, is a metaphor for red frog lollies.

Red frogs are ruby-coloured, raspberry-flavoured starch jellies moulded in the shape of a frog that is similar in size to Freddo Frog. MacRobertson’s created Freddo in 1930, but it is difficult to determine the origin of red frogs. They were once manufactured in Australia by Mastercraft, which also produced Golden (Coconut) Roughs and Mint Patties as well as wrapped hard-lolly bars like Milkos, Redskins, Bobbies, and Kurls. Mastercraft’s red frogs, green frogs, king frogs (chocolate), milky frogs (white chocolate), coconut stars, milky stars, and musk sticks were count lines, however, which means that they were sold loose and unwrapped, and were not necessarily associated with a particular brand. Life Savers (Aust.) Pty Ltd purchased Mastercraft in 1960 and subsequently merged with Allen’s, a prominent Melbourne firm established by Alfred Weaver Allen in the late 1800s. Then, in 1989, two years after the merger, Nestlé acquired Allen’s Life Savers Pty Ltd, and now sells bags of red frogs in supermarkets as Allen’s Frogs Alive, although these are a miniature version of the original. Some corner shops still sell red frogs, and these cost around fifteen cents each. School tuckshops stocked red frogs because they were popular with students and because teachers used them as classroom incentives.¹ Both as count lines and supermarket lines, red frogs are cheap confectionery produced for children.

Red frogs, sherbet cones, musk sticks, Rainbow Balls, and Jaffas are a vital part of the wonder of childhood. Children live with one foot in the ordinary world and one in the land of spells, enchantment, and nonsense, and childhood memoirs suggest that lollies belong to the latter. Alan Marshall remembers standing ‘completely entranced’ at a shop window filled with lollies (1981: 71) and Clive James describes receiving fairy bread as ‘like being handed a slice of powdered rainbow’ (1980: 19). This is the language of magic. Children are also curious and playful, and they consume lollies because they are looking for fun and adventure, not because they are hungry. Children, therefore, relate to lollies at the level of imagination; lollies act like the food in magical stories, and a child sampling the contents of a bag of mixed lollies is like Alice wandering through Wonderland. Lollies open a portal between the ordinary world and a realm where food colours the tongue and explodes in the mouth, where children are giants biting the heads off jelly babies and lollies double as brilliantly-coloured missiles, daggers, and even ‘booger balls.’ Mason puts it this way: ‘Sugar is fantasy land’ (1998: 19).

The late twentieth century saw increasing concerns, however, about sugary snacks designed for children. In the mid-1980s, the Health Department launched a programme of tuckshop seminars aimed at promoting good health in school children, and in the opening address at a seminar in Ipswich in 1986, paediatrician Dr Robert McGregor claimed that, although the word ‘tuckshop’ evoked pleasurable childhood memories of ‘cream buns, packets of chips and boiled sweets,’ the institution had become a ‘sacred cow’ that needed to be dismantled: ‘Let’s bury the cream bun, the jam split and the sugar coated donut,’ he said, so that in the twenty-first century, the word ‘tuckshop’ will be associated with salmon sandwiches, yoghurt, fresh vegetables, and fruit juice (1986: 3). In 2004, a national survey revealed that one in four Australian children aged between five and sixteen was overweight (Madigan 2008: 24), and in a publication on the subject of children and food Roger Haden observed that ‘the problem of obesity and diabetes has now become a public outrage’ (2006: 266). In 2007, the Healthy Schools Legislation introduced a traffic-light system as a means of regulating food sold in tuckshops: GREEN for healthy foods, AMBER for restricted foods, RED for forbidden foods. Made from sugar, red colouring, and little else, red frogs are the reddest of the RED. Red frogs are banned.

Red frogs are ‘junk’ food and the epitome of popular culture as John Fiske frames it: an excessive, vibrant, all-pervasive presence that is denigrated as vulgar, obvious, and superficial (1996: 114). Now situated at the bottom of the food order, the jelly frog is abhorrent and profane, the equivalent of the fairytale frog, about which the princess exclaims, ‘He’s so wet and ugly and his eyes bulge out!’ (Sideman 1967: 67). David Gillespie’s convincing argument that sugar acts ‘like slow-acting arsenic,’ however, positions the childhood favourite as ‘Sweet Poison’ rather than food (2008: 169). This reluctance to associate the frog lolly with food is also paralleled in the fairytale: ‘Now he ... wants to come in and eat from my plate and drink from my cup ... But I couldn’t bear that, Papa.’ The king makes the princess keep her promise, however, and when the frog demands, ‘Now shove your plate a little closer so we can eat together like real playmates,’ the princess shudders (Sideman 1967: 67, 68). In a

season of moral panic about the future health of Australians, lollies at the table are unthinkable.

Contemporary children's texts reflect concerns about the impact of sugar on children's health. The title of Australian author Margaret Clark's young adult novel—*The Big Chocolate Bar*—alludes simultaneously to the excessive nature of consumption and the 'barring' of junk food at a school camp in the interests of children's health. Similarly, when giant food rains from the sky in the animated film *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, monstrous candy corn threatens to crush obese bodies, a boy goes into a coma from eating too much confectionery, and the heroine suffers anaphylactic shock after scratching her arm on a giant shard of peanut brittle. Had the film been made in Australia, it would likely depict enormous red frogs falling into school playgrounds and flattening bloated Australian children. Carolyn Daniel observes that, in contemporary children's literature, 'everyday food is the enemy and its intake is pathologically monitored' (2006: 213). These texts reinforce the message that when food gets out of proportion it is terrifying, deadly, and disgusting.

The devaluation and demonisation of sugar confectionery is not a recent phenomenon. Victorian physicians recommended that confectionery be restricted to adults because it could 'incite impure thoughts,' harm 'the physical and moral fibre,' and lead to 'more deleterious vices' like stealing, smoking, and gambling (Woloson 2002: 56, 57, 59). Norman Lindsay's bildungsroman *Saturdee* (1934) also associates confectionery with immorality. Here, lust for Fyshang toffee leads children to the Chinese camp, where they are exposed to squalor, gambling, and opium, and finally resort to violence and stealing to satisfy their craving (1981: 79-85). Lollies are doubly demonised in the 1950's film *Smiley*, because they are connected with opium and the Chinese and are also positioned in opposition to saving, which is valorised. Lollies are further demonised by association with child-abductors like the White Witch of Narnia, whose Turkish Delight leads Edmund astray, and the child-catcher in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, who lures children into his wagon with bunches of lollipops and the promise of 'lovely goodies.' If contemporary texts position confectionery as junk food and poison, in these earlier texts a lolly is lure, temptation, and the slippery slope to immorality.

It is not the intention of this paper to debate the impact of lollies on children's health and morality, but the history of sugar is fraught with complex and contradictory meanings that problematise the notion that sugar is always and only bad for children. Sugar is a high-energy source, and because confectionery is light, compact, and able to withstand desert and jungle conditions, it is a basic provision for travellers, hikers, and the military; in emergency situations, when people are stranded without food, confectionery saves lives. Michael Redclift relates the story of a British teenager who was lost for three days in remote northern Queensland and survived on a packet of chewing gum, a small bottle of water, and a banana: 'I'm always going to thank chewing gum for my survival,' she said (2004: 2). Similarly, two children stranded in the Australian desert in *Walkabout* survive on a single stick of barley sugar until an Aboriginal boy befriends them (Marshall 1973). Moreover, to demonise lollies is to mask the impact of a sedentary lifestyle on child obesity, and the fact that children

consume significant amounts of sugar in ‘healthy’ foods like cereal, muesli bars, and fruit juice.

In earlier decades, government and advertisers promoted sugar confectionery and iced confectionery as pure, natural, wholesome, and energy-rich—health food. In narratives of health, quality, and scientific achievement, *The National Handbook of Australia’s Industries* (1934) featured sugar as a pure gift of Nature, describing modern, hygienic factories in parkland settings, and depicting contented employees with white uniforms, recreational facilities, and health care (Pratt 1934: 162-4, 202-3, 268-72, 566, 568). The caption beneath one photograph draws attention to ‘the excellent physique’ of female Nestlé employees in a fitness class, as if the wellbeing of these real-life Oompah-Loompahs transfers to the confections they produce (Pratt 1934: 164). Elsewhere, advertisers promoted Peter’s Ice Cream as the ‘health food of the nation,’ licorice as ‘wholesome’ and ‘nutritious,’ Sweetacres Milkshake lollies as between-meal snacks full of glucose for extra energy, and MacRobertson’s Snack Chocolates as ‘a good *food* which nourishes energizes and sustains ... [and] is rich in tissue-building proteins and essential energizing food elements.’² The Queensland Sugar Board’s vigorous campaign in 1983 to combat the growing image of sugar as ‘white and deadly’ also emphasised sugar as a ‘natural part of life’ (Griggs 2006). Even contemporary advertisers use the health angle to sell confectionery: Nestlé advertises red frogs and other Allen’s jelly lollies as 99% fat-free.

If sugar has saved lives, and has at various times been represented as healthy food, then the profane status of the red frog, like that of the fairytale frog, proves to be a spell cast upon it at a particular moment in time. The abhorrent amphibian is not the fairytale character’s true identity, and this becomes apparent through his relationship with a child:

The girl thought she would never be able to sleep with a horrid, damp, goggle-eyed Frog under her pillow. She began to weep softly to herself and couldn’t stop until at last she cried herself to sleep.

When the night was over and the morning sunlight burst in at the window, the Frog crept out from under her pillow and hopped off the bed. But as soon as his feet touched the floor something happened to him. In that moment he was no longer a cold, fat, goggle-eyed Frog—he had turned into a young Prince with handsome, friendly eyes!

‘You see,’ he said, ‘I wasn’t what I seemed to be!’ (Sideman 1967: 71)

For the red frog, too, ‘poison’ is a disguise; it is only part of the story. While they are banned from school tuckshops in a bid to safeguard children’s health, red frogs play a vital role in rescuing 17-year-olds placed at risk by the excesses of the notorious schoolies phenomenon. Doubtless, media sensationalise what is for the majority a joyous celebration, but the fierce assertion of independence in the week following graduation can see schoolies involved in sex, drugs, alcohol, and dangerous driving. In a mix made potentially lethal through inexperience, adult supervision is unheard of. Ironically, while these same individuals were forbidden to have them at school the week before, red frogs are magic keys that admit more experienced people to schoolies’ hotel rooms and activities, thereby potentially rescuing hundreds of young people.

Red Frogs Hotel Chaplaincy is an Australia-wide schoolies support network that began on the Sunshine Coast in 1997 and now involves over 2,000 young volunteers and 70,000 schoolies in 17 locations. Chaplains' tasks include distributing red frogs and water to keep schoolies energised and hydrated, providing diversionary activities to minimize alcohol consumption, escorting schoolies home late at night, cleaning their hotel rooms and cooking pancakes for breakfast next morning, and operating a 24-hour hotline, which responds to schoolies who have passed out, been assaulted or raped, or are suffering from drug experimentation or contemplating suicide. Hotel managers and ambulance officers claim that they could not cope with Schoolies Week without the help of Red Frogs (YouTube 2010), but the real impact is evident in the stories of chaplains and schoolies on Facebook pages and blogsites. In a blog documenting Schoolies Week 2009, volunteer Ruth Limkin records some of the comments posted on the Red Frog Facebook site: 'thanks for saving my friends life,' 'Red Frogers Rule,' 'you guys saved me! thanks for the pancakes and an awesome week!,' 'i dont think i would have made it without the red frogs it would have been so depressing,' 'you guys are so awesome,' 'you guys are what make schoolies so amazing,' and 'goshdang you guys were kickass, thank you so much' (2010) [sic]. The stories behind these brief comments began with a familiar red lolly.

As an energy source, red frogs counteract the effects of alcohol in underage and underfed drinkers, but the real magic of red frogs is their ability to open doors. Nicknamed the Red Frog Crew, chaplains use Allen's red jelly frogs as calling cards and ice-breakers to develop relationships with school-leavers, distributing around five tonnes of red frogs during the average Schoolies Week. 'It gets us into the parties,' explains founder Andy Gourley. '[I]t introduces who we are and we do it over a packet of red frogs and they just love it ... The amount of hours spent soaking up tears with red frogs is quite amazing during Schoolies Week' (Townsend 2002). Although schoolies reject adult supervision, many cannot cope with their sudden 'adult' freedom. Red frogs solve this dilemma. Walking streets and hotel corridors with bags of lollies, chaplains do not represent the adult world: 'Red Frogs ... are not police, or paramedics. They are not parents or hotel managers. They are volunteers who give up time, money and sleep to provide support and care for young people in what often becomes a stressful time' (Alex of Schoolies 2007). As non-adult objects, red frogs represent the slightly illicit practices of childhood; a red frog says, 'I understand' without passing judgement. And as an emblem of childhood, it represents the familiar past in an environment that can be depressing and frightening. Clothed in an adult body, the child that is still very much part of the schoolie persona responds to a red frog and a friendly face. Just as the fairytale frog is transformed into a prince, so too the outcast red frog lolly is transformed into the noble Red Frog mascot, and this is highlighted in an early Red Frog t-shirt design, which incorporates a crown above the head of a red frog.³

This is the moment in the fairytale when the prince reveals his regal heritage and relates the events that brought him to his lowly state: 'A wicked old woman bewitched me. None but you could break the spell, little Princess, and I waited and waited at the well for you to help me' (Sideman 1967: 71). Unlike Cinderella, who is transformed from kitchen maid to belle-of-the-ball, the frog, like the bear in *Snow*

White and Rose Red and the beast in *Beauty and the Beast*, was royalty all along. Lollies too have a noble pedigree. Sugar was once considered magical. It was associated with health as well as royalty, so the history of sugar does not end happily-ever-after, according to Gillespie, but it begins like a fairytale.

Once upon a time, sugar came to a world where people lived on a bland diet, and it was greeted with awe because it ‘possessed magical properties that could transform almost anything into pleasure’ (Woloson 2002: 116). Expressions like ‘a sweet shot’ and ‘home sweet home’ enshrine the idea that ‘sweet’ equals ‘good.’ The Bible even aligns sweetness with divinity (Exodus 3:8, Exodus 16:31, Judges 14:18, Psalm 19:10). In addition to its magical effect upon the tastebuds, sugar was a magic potion, or ‘wonder drug’ and ‘panacea’ (Mintz 1986: 97). It ‘entered the world by way of the apothecary’s laboratory,’ where licorice, peppermint, marshmallow, and comfits—seeds coated with sugar—were produced for the treatment of a range of ailments (Brillat-Savarin 1994: 99).⁴ Thus, when Thomas Aquinas investigated the status of sugar in the twelfth century, he deemed that eating spiced sugars did not constitute a violation of a fast because, although nutritious, they were not eaten with nourishment in mind. Ironically, sugar was ‘non-food’ not because it was poison, but because it was medicine (Mintz 1986: 99). Medicinal confectionery is still popular, but confectionery historian Tim Richardson claims that confectionery in general is therapeutic because it makes us happier: ‘To a degree unmatched by any other taste experience, sweetness is transcendent, lifting us out of our days and into the ether of the universe, dispersing our troubles into the air’ (2002: 10). Nigel Slater similarly notes ‘the sense of calm that ensues as the sugar dissolves in our mouths’ (2007: 190). Sugar was also a luxury commodity, so the therapeutic effect of comfits was the province of the wealthy, but sugar’s noble status is most evident in its presence at the meal table.

Ornamental, edible sugar sculptures—called subtleties—were the work of highly-skilled sugar-bakers, and they were the highlight of medieval banquets in English and European courts from the eleventh to eighteenth centuries. In his landmark history of sugar, Sidney Mintz describes such spectacular sugar objects as ‘a stag that bleeds’ claret wine when an arrow is removed from its flank, a castle that fires its artillery at a man-of-war, and gilded sugar pies filled with live frogs and birds’ (1986: 92-3). These marvels displayed the host’s social status and their arrival at the feast was a spectacular event, a tradition that endures in the modern day wedding cake.⁵ Sugar sculpture was the embodiment of wealth and power, and while lollies like jelly beans, Jaffas, and hundreds-and-thousands are modern-day comfits or panned confectionery, moulded sugar lollies like red frogs, black cats, milk bottles, false teeth, bananas, and snakes descend from the elaborate and costly sugarwork that once graced royal tables.

The cultural status of sugarwork changed in the mid-nineteenth century when sugar became cheap and readily-available, and this transformed the confectionery market. American confectionery historian Wendy Woloson observes that confectioners began to favour the pleasures of the working class and the tastes of children (2002: 33). The moulded frogs that were ‘once the playthings of the court and the wealthy,’ explains Mintz, became ‘the playthings of children’ (1986: 94). Mason aligns them with nursery rhymes: “[sweets] were once full of significance for adults but are now bits of

nonsense for children” (1998: 10). Sweetness also conflated with femininity and domesticity: Woloson observes that ‘sweets had been feminised, and women were sweet’ (2002: 3). In less than two hundred years, sugar tumbled from magical, medicinal compound and emblem of power and status, through household ingredient, food of children and the lower classes, to badge of femininity and domesticity, junk food, and, now, poison. Today, lollies litter the counter in all kinds of retail outlets, but they descend from the festive emblems of rank and nobility that were made by highly-skilled sugar-bakers. Sugar was once a magical substance in an ordinary world, and lollies have a royal pedigree.

It is a chequered history, but despite the dominant narrative of demonisation and devaluation, lollies are still synonymous with childhood and confectionery increasingly dominates the physical and cultural landscape of Australia. Red frogs exemplify this paradox, but Red Frog Chaplaincy is not alone in exploiting the potential of lollies. Confectionery may be derided as unhealthy, but healthcare professionals use it in the interests of health: the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation uses jelly babies in television campaigns and fundraising merchandise, doctors give patients apple lollipops after flu vaccines, and the Australian Red Cross uses heart-shaped lollipops and other confectionery to boost blood donors’ blood-sugar levels. And when children need immunisation or unpleasant medications, parents fall back on lollies as comforts, bribes, and rewards. A spoonful of sugar has always helped the medicine go down.

Advertisers and graphic designers also exploit the aesthetic and symbolic potential of lollies because the form, colour, and texture of lollies make interesting images and their social connotations quickly convey meaning. When a television commercial for the Mazda Allsorts Sale in mid-2010 featured bouncing licorice allsorts, the promotion drew upon the diversity associated with these popular lollies as well as the fun and enthusiasm associated with childhood. A different advertisement, this time for colour newspaper advertising, used one coloured licorice allsort in an otherwise black and white image of a scoop of allsorts to assert that colour is more tempting (2009). This drew upon the contrast between the coloured fondant and the black licorice as well as the association between lollies and temptation.⁶ When Vodafone wanted to promote unlimited calls, a newspaper advertisement featured a slice of fairy bread covered in hundreds-and-thousands, the smallest lollies, which, like grains of sand, connote infinity (2010).⁷ The *Crave Sydney* campaign (2009) promoted Sydney as a highly desirable destination with an assortment of tourist attractions by using a box of exquisite chocolates, each representing one of seven tourist delights: food, art, festivals, the harbour, comedy, the bridge, walking tours:

Like an exquisite degustation of life’s most wonderful things, [Sydney in October] is a place and a time to be tasted bit by bit, explored, savoured, admired and gobbled up with gusto ... The only way to really appreciate what Sydney has to offer is to ... taste every little bit of it ... piece by piece. You’ll want it. You’ll love it. You’ll crave some more. Crave Sydney. One little taste and you will realise yet again, there’s nowhere as wonderful as Sydney.⁸

The use of gourmet chocolates in a pink chocolate box targets an adult, even female, market. Diane Barthel has explored the association between advertising, chocolate boxes, and women (1989), but the many cultural meanings upon which these advertisements mostly draw are forged in childhood and have wide appeal.

Artists also exploit the potential of objects made from sugar. An installation at the Ipswich Art gallery in 2009 was promoted as ‘a special treat in ... sugary delights’ and featured lollies as sculptural elements. Rose Skinner’s installation *I Wish I Lived in Wonderland* was made from lollies, coloured sugar, and found objects like toys and domestic furniture. In February the following year, the Asia Pacific Triennial Exhibition at the Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane featured the work of Farhad Moshiri, who applies acrylic paint with a piping tube as if it is icing and uses lolly colours to complete the impression of fake icing.⁹ The deep-seated aesthetic appeal of confectionery is, as Woloson explains, a mystery that is beyond understanding and articulation (2002: x). As a result, confectionery, which represents the apotheosis of ‘low’ culture, invades the most hallowed space of all, the art gallery, to become the stuff of ‘high’ culture. Doubtless, lollies play a role in childhood obesity and poor dental health, but labels like junk food and poison tell only part of the story.

Once upon a time, sugar was a magical substance in an ordinary world. When it became cheap and readily available in the mid-nineteenth century, it became part of the ordinary diet. Sugar and sugar confectionery have since fallen to the status of junk food and poison. For children, however, lollies retain the magic once attributed to them; lollies still contribute to the wonder of childhood, and popular representations of confectioners and confectionery reinscribe the magic inherent in the art of sugarwork. Allen’s red frogs are evidence that cultural transformations in the meanings of sugar are equally magical, moving like fairy dust from the tip of a sorcerer’s wand. Descended from the sugary emblems of rank at medieval banquets, red frogs were banned from school tuckshops out of concern for children’s health, but have regained noble status through the role they play during Schoolies Week. Like the handsome fairytale prince, who is transformed into a repulsive reptile and reinstated through relationship with a little girl, the red frog lolly challenges dominant narratives that reduce the complexity of lollies and their cultural significance. Judgements based solely on food value fail to take into account the magical role lollies play in children’s lives. And it is not only in children’s consumption that the magic of lollies is visible; the ways in which health authorities, artists, and advertising agencies use lollies also reflect the fairytale origins of sugar. Sugar frogs and the like may no longer be on the menu, but the cultural meanings of sugar continue to be re-written, and confectionery proves to be magical still. As for children and their sweet companions, well . . . they lived happily ever after, of course.

Endnotes

¹ Robyn Fahey was tuckshop convenor at Ipswich State High School from 1993 to 2010. With almost two decades of tuckshop experience, she recalls that Redskins were the biggest seller at the lolly counter and red frogs were almost as popular. Bagging frogs—placing them in lots of ten in white paper packets—was a regular task for tuckshop volunteers.

² Respectively: Peter's Ice Cream posters, a glass cinema slide for Giant brand licorice held in the Nestlé archives, a magazine advertisement (source unknown), *The Australian women's weekly*, 1 July 1950, 10

³ To protect schoolies, Red Frog chaplains wear a uniform t-shirt, the design of which changes yearly.

⁴ Confectionery historian Laura Mason and anthropologist Sidney Mintz document the use of comfits, also known as suketts, dragées, and sugar plums, and early novels like Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* provide further insights into the association between chemists and confectionery—licorice, musk, marshmallow, peppermint—which were prescribed for colds, indigestion, nerve complaints, flatulence, bad breath, and the like (chapters I - III).

⁵ See Mintz 78-95, 132, 139; Lees 28-9; Mason 22-3

⁶ 2009 'Colour's more tempting' *Courier mail* 5 March, 64

⁷ 2010 'Unlimited calls Vodafone to Vodafone' *Courier mail* 14 May, 21

⁸ 2009 'Taste the sweet life' QWeekend *Courier Mail* 12/13 September, 24-5

⁹ Other artists who use lollies in their artwork include Pop and Pip and Elizabeth Willing.

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