

Docile Child and Pedophilic Sentimentality: Sexual Implications in Shirley Temple's Movies

Kim, Myungsung

[Abstract]

This essay explores the “sentimental sexuality” of the child movie star Shirley Temple. The pedophilic child fetishism implicit in her movies, which stimulated a male fantasy of an obedient female during the Great Depression, was an outcome of a cultural dynamic where the U.S. film industry attempted to find a way to relive the patriarchal failure of the era in a female body. Assuring the male ownership of a female body, this essay argues, Shirley Temple’s sentimental sexuality satisfies a paternal white gaze and, more importantly, “functions both to expose the constraints and limitations that the capitalistic unclear family imposes on women and, at the same time, to ‘educate’ women to accept those constraints as ‘natural,’ inevitable-as ‘given’” (Kaplan 124). Released by the time the Production Code Administration began prohibiting sexually suggestive scenes, Shirley Temple’s movies use family drama as a basic platform to stabilize the potential perversity of a white adult male desire. Such a construction of female child images promised the emotional stability of the nation under the Great Depression, while simultaneously fulfilling a patriarchal fantasy that identified female sexuality with child immaturity.

Key Words: Shirley Temple, pedophilia, child sexuality, child sentimentality, Motion Picture Production Code

I . Introduction

Shirley Temple was one of the most popular movie stars of 1930s Hollywood. The popularity of the ten-year-old celebrity was comparable to adult actors such as Clark Gable, Robert Taylor, and Bing Crosby. Little girls imitated Shirley Temple's curly hair and dolls named after her gained incredible sales. Although she had no prior experience in Hollywood show business, she made a substantial imprint on the history of American pop culture. This essay observes the behind-the-scene dynamics of the curious popularity of Shirley Temple, arguing that her movies transform child sexuality into sentimental family drama, which satisfies an adult male fantasy for immature women. This eccentric child fetishism, which prevailed in the early twentieth-century U.S. film industry, stemmed from social surveillance over child sexuality.

According to Kathy Merlock Jackson, what underlies Shirley Temple's film persona is her "fix-it" ability. This term refers to child figures who are detached from the corrupt sphere of the adult generation. Without any economic interests, they make reconciliations among conflicting groups. In contrast to those child figures commonly depicted as self-centered, a fix-it child has an innate morality. Under the social milieu of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Shirley Temple gained a cultural acceptance by projecting "hope at a time when most audience members were mired in despair" and became a symbol of the era (Hammontree 7). Full of a positive belief in the future, her film persona symbolized a "triumph over adversity," a

mythic victory over reality that “lifted the spirits of audiences” (Hammonstree 7). Such positive evaluations were balanced by critical objections that problematized the exploitation of her sexuality. The English novelist Graham Greene famously criticized the “sentimental exploitation of childhood” and “disreputable enjoyments” (Greene 106). He pointed out in his review of *The Littlest Rebel* (1935), Shirley Temple’s popularity rested on a “coquetry quite as mature as Miss [Claudette] Colbert’s and an oddly precocious body as voluptuous in grey flannel trousers as Miss Dietrich’s” (Sinclair 58). In a review of *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937), Greene also gave notice to “Temple’s ‘agile studio eyes,’ ‘dimpled depravity,’ and ‘neat and well-developed rump twisted in the tap-dance’” (duCille 15).

Greene’s objection to the exploitation of child sexuality in Temple’s movies harshly heaped blame on audiences and filmmakers of the time. However, as Freudian psychoanalysis and an increasing nationwide fear against pedophilia emerged, Greene’s uncomfortable objection began to gain persuasiveness. For example, Geraldine Pauling notes that in most of Shirley Temple’s films “her image is suggestively erotic” even though “she remains a cherubic little girl” (306). Kristen Hatch interprets “Shirley Temple’s appeals as implicitly pedophilic,” which lie in “the conventions surrounding child stardom in early Hollywood” (150). In similar terms, Molly Haskell sees Temple’s characters as “post-Production Code sex kitten[s]” or “screen Lolita[s] ... who fulfill old men’s fantasies as painlessly and covertly as possible” (123, 346). Under the Motion Picture Production Code known as Hays Codes, which served as a set of moral guidelines in the film industry in the United State from the 1930s to 1980s, the magical transformation of male sexual pleasure into sentimentality concealed child sexuality. What gave a fictional satisfaction to audiences was such deliberate conjunction of her sexuality as a woman and her sentimentality as a child.

This essay discusses how Shirley Temple's sexuality becomes secured through the sentimentalization of the body of a young girl, and stimulates the male fantasy of an innocent, obedient female. This notion of child sentimentality underlies the social and cultural aspects of adult-child relations in the Great Depression era, in which "moral" children, serving as a bridge between the past generations and the future, were key to the reconstruction of disintegrated patriarchal world. Shirley Temple's movies prove that, I argue, such a desire of the era was deeply associated with a supposedly docile female sexuality. While this essay observes some of her famous movies such as *The Little Colonel* (1935), *Captain January* (1936), and *Susannah of the Mounties* (1939), special attention must be paid to *Bright Eyes* (1934), which a relatively small number of critics have discussed in comparison to her other movies. The critical indifference towards *Bright Eyes* is curious, since this was the first movie to be produced and developed specifically for Shirley Temple and to bring her international fame. This essay discovers, by focusing on the incestuous father-daughter relationship depicted in this movie, an underlying narrative structure by which child sexuality is transformed into sentimental appeal in family dramas.

II. Family Drama and Incestuous Father-Daughter

Shirley Blake, the protagonist of *Bright Eyes*, lives with her mother Mary at the house of the Smythe family who employ Mary as a housekeeper. Although she has lost her father, Shirley Blake is angelic girl who makes her surroundings happy. Loop, Shirley's godfather and an old friend of Shirley's father, takes care of her in spite of his low income as an aviator. The Smythes are contrasted with the Blakes in many ways. Joy,¹⁾ the Smythes' only daughter, is self-centered and disobedient to

her parents. The Smythes look after fastidious, disabled Uncle Ned Smith, but only because they are interested in inheriting his property. The fix-it persona of Shirley Blake comes naturally to her. Even Uncle Ned Smith, a man of highly nervous temperament, feels warmhearted affection for Shirley because she is the only one around who likes him as a person. Shirley's fix-it persona is most dramatically visible during the last part of the movie. After Shirley's mother is killed in a car accident on her way to bring Shirley a Christmas cake, Loop and Uncle Ned begin to fight for the custody of the orphaned Shirley. This struggle goes to court where the judge gives Shirley the right to make the final decision for herself. Shirley Blake chooses both Loop and Uncle Ned to be members of her family along with Adele, Loop's old flame and a guest of Uncle Ned. After hearing Shirley's decision, the judge rules to allow Loop, Uncle Ned, and Adelle to live together with Shirley Blake, while the vicious Smythes are driven out of the house. This exemplifies Shirley's fix-it persona as she not only settles the problem of legal guardianship by herself, but also creates close bonds between three lonely people.

Bright Eyes has the narrative structure of a moral family drama that points to assiduity, honesty, and family bonds, the virtues that "Americans clung to during the hard times of the Great Depression" (Jackson 59). Loop and Shirley represent familial love that overcomes harsh circumstances, while the Smythes reveal the opposite. Like Jackson's argument that Shirley Temple's success "adhere[d] to basic American values of independence, hard work, honesty, fairness, wholesomeness and patriotism" (59), the ending of *Bright Eyes*, where happiness is acquired through the exclusion of the Smythes, seems to be an inevitable consequence of American fantasy during the great depression. The happy ending of *Bright Eyes* conceals that the familial structure is disintegrated. This crisis derives from the instability of the patriarchal order, one of the several problems associated with the economic

difficulties of the era. Shirley's father passed away several years ago, and the State court does not allow Shirley's godfather Loop to adopt her because of his financial instability as a low-wage aviator.

Absence of a father is one of the most common issues in Temple's films. *Captain January* depicts the father-daughter relationship between Helen 'Star' Mason, Shirley Temple's character, and Captain January, a lighthouse keeper who rescued Star from drowning. January takes care of the orphaned Star, but Agatha Morgan, a truant officer, requires Star to go to a boarding school that January cannot afford. Furthermore, January loses his job as a lighthouse keeper when the facility is automatized. January's financial inability aggravates the situation and prevents him from achieving any viable solution. In similar terms, in *The Little Colonel*, the father of Lloyd Sherman, Temple's character, is physically debilitated by a fever after losing everything in his business. In both films, the failure of a father figure incites the crisis, and Temple's characters carry crucial roles in settling the situations. Such retrogressions of an adult male and his supplementation by a child figure are symbolized in a fantasy scene in *Captain January*, in which Star, dressed like a nurse, takes care of January, who wears baby clothes and sucks his thumb like an infant.

Patriarchal deconstruction and its rehabilitation by child sentimentality are also present as central themes in *Bright Eyes*. After Shirley's mother died, Loop tries to adopt orphaned Shirley. His financial inability is covered up when the court orders him to live with Shirley in the house of Uncle Ned, an old man of great wealth. This is the formula of Temple's movies, one that underscores a traditional lesson—familial love overcomes the depressing reality.

It is the father-daughter bond that protects the orphaned Shirley. Simultaneously, Loop's sexual desire is concealed. What causes invisible sexual tension is that Loop

does not show any sexual impulse towards other women, such as Shirley's mother or Adelle. This hidden sexuality is visible in the relationship between Shirley Blake and male aviators, particularly in the sequence where the aviators devote their entire afternoon break to a Christmas event for Shirley. They invite Shirley to an airplane, where she sings the song "On the Good Ship Lollipop"²⁾ with coquettish gestures as if she is an adult songstress enchanting male audiences. Male aviators, bewitched by Shirley's performance, react to her every gesture and movement. Wearing feminized costumes and curled hair, she is confined between the two rows of male aviators. The sexual objectification in this scene becomes more conspicuous when compared to the scene in the film where she appears for the first time. On her way to airport to meet Loop, Shirley wears a leather flight suit with an aviation cap which covers her curly blond hair. This masculinized child attempts to hitchhike to the airport, speaking and behaving as if she were a boy. Comparing this "tomboy" representation to her airplane performance enables us to understand how the Lollipop scene is deliberately constructed to emphasize Temple's sexuality. From this scene in which an innocent child is caressed by male pilots, it is not difficult to bring to mind the images of the "virgin-whore" (duCille 16) who is abused by a group of men without realizing it.³⁾

It is Loop who wins this competition of masculinity between the aviators. The ambiguously depicted intimacy between Loop and Shirley takes a central place in the narrative of *Bright Eyes*. A quasi-courtship scene, in which Loop puts a ring on Shirley's finger with romantic words, recreates a traditional romantic narrative. Parental love entrenches an incestuous desire and Loop's struggle for Shirley's custody becomes a struggling romance. The traditional romantic narrative line becomes a father-daughter romance.⁴⁾

A Father-daughter relationship underlies the basic impulse of *Bright Eyes* on

multiple levels. Shirley's dead father is identified with a "winged angel" in the sky she cannot reach. This fetishistic desire towards the sky, alluded to as an airfield, airplanes, and aviation, serves a metaphor for her longing for her father. Evoking the Freudian concept of "family romance," a psychological child fantasy where a child turns towards imaginary parents whose social standings are higher than that of his or her actual parents, this fetishistic father-sky impulse is conspicuously suggested in the flight of Loop and Shirley, in which Loop tells her of her mother's death and reassures her of his love. Loop takes the place of her parents in this scene. The vanishing of her mother satisfies Loop's obsession, and the flight actualizes their bonding. Like Jeanine Basinger's argument that "the wife/mother figure has to disappear to make way for the real love union between child and father" (284), the death of Shirley's mother in *Bright Eyes* provides an opportunity to strengthen the intimacy between Loop and Shirley Blake, since Loop cannot possess Shirley until her real mother disappears.

Shirley Temple's movies are placed in the Hollywood tradition where "desexed men appear as a disguised form of liberation for women" (Basinger 280). In such narrative structures, "the man is not really a man because the woman is never going to have sex with him" (280). Basinger suggests five types of asexual men in women's film: the father figure, the asexual husband, a ghost or an angel, the family doctor, and an impresario. These sexless male figures allude to "relationships without sex of fear of pregnancy," which would satisfy female audiences who "went to the movies to find not only escape but a more serious dream of freedom" (281). The father figure is the most primary figure of these categories. Loop in *Bright Eyes* follows this cinematic convention; Loop does not feel any sexual impulse from his ex-girlfriend, Adelle, and spends most of his time focusing on Shirley. His abnormal desire is observed, especially in the sequence in which he flies in a rainstorm at the

risk of his own life in order to make money to pay for the attorney fees for custody of Shirley Blake.

The sexual tension of *Bright Eyes* lies here. He is *not* Shirley's real father, even though these two are depicted as one in the movie. The clandestine tension of *Bright Eyes*, which in fact protects the male-father audience's hidden desire, arises from their sexualized father-daughter relationship, although it is disguised as not. Moreover, as Basinger argues, former flying buddies of Shirley's father serve as "Daddy's substitutes" (284). This constructs the overall relationship in the movie in the form of sexual fathers/daughters. The sexual male gaze directed towards Shirley at this point becomes the gaze of the father.

The sudden reunion of Loop and his old flame Adelle at the end of the movie appears to be an inevitable consequence aiming to erase this sexualized tension and to exempt Loop from the guilty desire of incest.⁵⁾ By providing Loop with a justified sexual object, Adelle, and thus by preventing Loop from projecting his sexual desire onto Shirley Blake, *Bright Eyes* sneaks away from social surveillance, and Loop and Shirley remain securely in their social places. If he exposes his sexual desire externally, Loop cannot help being deprived of his custody of Shirley. "Fatherhood" serves as a safeguard that desexualizes his relationship with Shirley, exonerating him from his guilty desires.

Loop's sexual desire is implicit but not materialized, so the sexual intercourse between him and Shirley remains potential. Such an implicit production of child sexuality in *Bright Eyes* is closely associated with the cultural situation of the era; *Bright Eyes* was released in the same year the Production Code Administration, which prohibited sexually suggestive scenes in movies, was first established. The father/daughter frame can be read in this regard as a device to stabilize the potential perversity of a white adult male desire. Under such a cinematic formula where

“men’s child loving signaled their willingness to indulge in sentimental pleasures rather than sexual ones” (Hatch 130), *Bright Eyes* attempts to transform child sexuality into sentimental appeal, successfully idealizing a “fairly stable idea of adult male affection” (Hatch 129). Such a construction of female child images promised the emotional stability of the nation under the Great Depression, while simultaneously assuring the asexual fantasy of a female audience and fulfilling a patriarchal fantasy that identified female sexuality with child immaturity.

This is why, in spite of her parents’ death and the deconstruction of her familial space, Shirley Blake in *Bright Eyes* is still socially protected. This is most visibly observable in the conflict between Loop and Uncle Ned for the custody of Shirley Blake. Shirley’s disintegrated-yet-intact family points to a cultural atmosphere where a child was allowed to possess sentimentality for the first time in history. Before the turn of the century, a child was expected to contribute to a family economy in material senses until a cultural movement, which gave rise to a collective melancholia for children, removed children from the labor market, endowing them with an “economically ‘worthless’ but emotionally ‘priceless’” condition (Zelizer 7). A “fix-it child” is an ideological consequence of such a sentimentalization of children. Instead of financial contribution, children began signifying what the adult generation could not achieve, a moral integrity.

III. The Great Depression and Patriarchal Crisis

The notion of the sentimentalization of children is particularly significant in understanding a cultural context, which forms some of the basic premises of adult-child relations in *Bright Eyes*. In sociological perspectives, a child has an

affiliative contribution to primary group ties and affection, signifying parenthood as reaching a social status of “a truly mature, stable, and acceptable member of the community,” a “culmination of the socialization process” (Hoffman et al. 588). Signified children were met with the moral expectations of adults who confronted their own incompetence and desire for exit in the Depression era. Thus these adults heaped their desires onto their children, who served a “continuation of past generations and [a] key to future ones” (Jackson 56).

Shirley Temple should be understood in such historical and cultural contexts in which the innate morality of the fix-it child is constructed by adult desire. The American public's affection for Shirley Temple arose from its sentiments regarding the primary American values of independence, hard work, and wholesomeness, which were considered the driving forces behind the hope of overcoming the Great Depression. Marianne Sinclair's argument that “by the time Shirley Temple was twelve Templemania was dead” (61) illuminates how the American public consumed her in the “golden age of the kiddy-star picture made for *adults* rather than children” (Sinclair 44, original italic).⁶⁾ Shirley Temple's fix-it persona, manifested in its sentimental representation of independence, morality, and virtuousness, symbolically corrected the patriarchal failure of the time.

In *Bright Eyes*, love and affection for Shirley Blake constitute an illusionary space which is never to be destroyed. Enraptured, people who surround Shirley Blake lavish their affection on her, which is represented as due to her ability to bring brightness into their lives. A paradox emerges here. Shirley Blake herself does not solve any problem. Conversely, she is loved only because people want to love her unconditionally. Such unconditional love allows Shirley to remain as a fix-it child despite her unsubstantial ability. This is a typical cinematic template of Shirley Temple. In spite of the films' representation of her fix-it persona, what solves her

crisis is in fact the strong financial sufficiency of others. In *Captain January* (1936), January's unemployment causes January and Star to experience a financial crisis, but Star's wealthy relatives solve this crisis. The wealthy uncle and aunt claim Star when they hear of her difficult situation, and hire January as a captain of their ship. The movie depicts that Star's love and affection towards January rescue him from his unemployment, but in fact it is not Star's magical persona which rehabilitates January's inability. Instead, what recues him is the financial affluence of Star's uncle and aunt. Similarly, in *Bright Eyes*, the crisis of Loop and Shirley is solved by Uncle Ned's strong finances, not by Shirley's magical ability. These savior-figures' financial contributions underlie the basic narrative structure, but they are concealed behind Temple's sentimental aura, constituting a fundamental basis that frames the world in her movies. Jackson points out this paradox, asserting that "she is independent and able to take care of herself,... [but] she remains very much a child" who "needs love and someone to look up to" (Jackson 61).

Susannah of the Mounties shows the paradox of Temple's duality. When she performed in this movie, Shirley Temple was eleven years old and physically more mature than she had been at the beginning of her career. What is more noteworthy than her physical maturity is her situation. Her first appearance in the movie is striking; a group of Mounties patrolling in the Canadian west finds Susannah Sheldon (Shirley Temple), who is orphaned by an Indian attack and has hidden in a cask in the midst of corpses and broken wagons. She is extremely frightened, spasmodically crying and screaming. Instead of the images of a cheerful little girl that Temple has shown before, the movie puts forward her vulnerability. She is no longer the center of the universe. Little Chief, a son of Chief Big Eagle, a Native Indian leader who is friendly to whites, treats Susannah indifferently, even though she tries to befriend him. Temple's vulnerable image is distinctly suggested in the sequence where she

tries to ride a horse. She tries several times, but ends up falling from the horse. Watching her failure, Little Chief ridicules her, calling her "papoose," which arouses her anger. She slaps his cheek, and Little Chief pushes her down to a ground. In this sequence, she is struggling to overcome her inability but does not succeed without the help of others. Likewise, she cannot settle the crisis of the movie anymore. When Monty, the head of the Mountie patrol and whom Susannah loves, is kidnapped as part of an evil plot by Wolf Pelt, an evil Native Indian who tries to instigate a war between the white community and the Indian tribe, she ventures out on her own to rescue him but is taken prisoner. She eventually manages to make an appeal to Big Chief, explaining that Wolf Pelt is lying, and Big Chief uses the stick of truth to make sure. What eventually settles the crisis is Big Chief's generosity and his superstitious belief in the stick of truth. *Susannah of the Mounties* shows Temple's inevitable vulnerability for the first time, proving that she loses her sentimental power in her transition to adolescence.

Her physical growth in *Susannah of the Mounties* notwithstanding, Shirley Temple is more incomplete and has moved to the reality from the magical world that secured her. Simultaneously, she becomes explicitly sexualized in this transition. In her earlier movies, Shirley Temple's "leading man might have a vague sweetheart or fiancée," although "he had to spend most of his time with [Shirley]" (Sinclair 54). This sexual safeguard disappears in *Susannah of the Mounties*; she has a sexual rival for the first time, and she feels jealous over the woman with whom Monty, the leading man, falls in love.

Comparing *Susannah of the Mounties* to her previous movies allows us to see the cinematic device that enabled child Shirley Temple to reflect and satisfy the adult fantasy of the time. Simultaneously, Temple's paradox observed in *Susannah of the Mounties* proves that the sentimental child loving of adults that constitutes Temple's

morality and her magical power is also a premise of her subordination. She should be owned, appropriated, and secured by a rightful “male” owner, through which “a pliant white female sexuality ... [is] indulged, petted, and, quite frequently, bedded” (duCille 17). The paradoxical world of *Bright Eyes* where Shirley Blake remains a priceless child is constituted on her hidden sexuality, which is elaborately converted into the acceptable form of child loving. It is very suggestive of the male fantasy of the woman as a child that the child, more precisely a girl, better suits their satisfaction and happiness. In this manner, the fix-it ability of Shirley Temple and the persona it constructs become an “attempt to infantilize female sexuality” in the early Hollywood film industry (Pauling 306).

IV. Conclusion

Shirley Temple’s popularity was a victory of her sentimentality over the sexuality of such adult female stars as Mae West and Marlene Dietrich, but Temple’s sentimentalized body was in fact an outcome of male sexual fantasies. Shirley Temple’s body has a doubled meaning; while the sentimentalization of the child enabled Shirley Temple to promise a mythic peace to the failed patriarchy, she also had to assure adult male ownership of the female body that would relieve their anxiety. Such sentimental sexuality reflects the patriarchal desire for docile women, in which adult female sexuality becomes identical to child immaturity. Visible in *Bright Eyes* during the scene where Shirley’s mother tells her mistress that Shirley is a pet of male aviators, child, pet, and woman are made equal.

Sewing and scrubbing one moment, batting her eyelashes the next, Shirley Temple is at once a pint-size purveyor of true-womanhood ideology and a make-a-blind-man-see femme fatale. A young, handsome, skirt-chasing Robert Young gives up his playboy ways for her in *Stowaway* (1936), and a jewel thieving Gary Cooper attempts to go straight because of her in *Now and Forever* (1934). She is every man's white dream, the perfect embodiment of the virgin whore that patriarchy loves to look at—simultaneously Snow White and Black Widow (albeit without the bite). (duCille 16)

Shirley Temple's movies disclose the unconscious desire of the patriarchy that has long been objectifying and appropriating female body, and which has been "deeply committed to myths of demarcated sex difference" (Kaplan 125). This is why, no matter how often she is described as cute and cherubic, "Temple's films still work to incite, excite, and satisfy a paternal white gaze" (duCille 16). This infantile sexuality was innate from the first movie when, in *The Runt Rage*, three-year-old Shirley Temple played a call girl with black-laced underwear and acted as a sexually mature woman that "impersonated Marlene Dietrich – the reigning sex-symbol" (Sinclair 54). Shirley Temple's movies follow the family melodrama that "functions both to expose the constraints and limitations that the capitalistic unclear family imposes on women and, at the same time, to 'educate' women to accept those constraints as 'natural,' inevitable-as 'given'" (Kaplan 124).

Notes

- 1) The character Joy, played by Jane Withers, is also worth noting because *Bright Eyes* is the only movie in which Shirley Temple, who is "the model child, ... [and] the incredible sum of what most parents would have liked their dream child to be," and Jane Withers, who is "much closer to the real thing, the noisy, brawling youngster," are acting together (Sommerville 219).

- 2) The “Lollipop dance” is one of the most famous scenes in Temple’s entire film career. More than 500,000 copies of the sheet music were sold after *Bright Eyes* was released, and the song has been covered several times by other actors and musicians, including James Dunn, who played Loop in *Bright Eyes*.
- 3) “In essence, it is the child, not a woman more suitable to their age, who brings brightness in their lives, thus suggestive of the male fantasy of the woman as child” (Jackson 60-61).
- 4) The reason we cannot see Shirley Black as a reflection of masculine desire is that the image of Shirley Blake is too feminine to read her as a mere child. She clearly knows her gender identity. For example, she gets angry at the person who calls her “boy.” Also, her curly hair and short skirts recall the trappings of a mature woman.
- 5) In Temple’s movies, there are sometimes other women, most of whom are sexually grown-up, but they never violate the centrality of Shirley Temple. Occasionally they appear as a mother figure, or a surrogate mother like Adelle in *Bright Eyes*, but “they are never as important as the daddies and surrogate daddies that Temple hooks up with” (Basinger 285).
- 6) Regarding this, Ann duCille points out that “one target audience for her videos is the adult consumer looking for, in the words of one ad, the perfect way to relieve [their] own childhood” (30).

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국문초록

길들여진 아동과 소아성애적 감성: 셸리 템플의 성적 이미지들

김 명 성 (Arizona State University)

본 논문은 20세기 초에 활동한 미국 아동 여성 배우 셸리 템플의 섹슈얼리티 문제를 다룬다. 특히 아동 여성의 섹슈얼리티가 감성적인 형태로 은폐되는 방식, 이른바 “감성적 섹슈얼리티”의 실체에 집중한다. 셸리 템플의 영화 속에 내재된 소아성애적 시선들은 대공황 시기에 두드러졌던 성적 환상, 즉 유순한 여성에 대한 남성적 욕망을 자극하는 것이었는데, 이것은 대공황을 겪으며 드러난 가부장적 실패를 여성 신체의 전유를 통해 치유하려던 20세기 초기 미국 영화계의 노력의 일환이었다. 이를 이해하기 위해서는 실패한 백인 남성의 욕망을 만족시키며 여성에게 부과된 사회적, 문화적 제약들을 자연스럽게 내면화하도록 강요한 시대적 맥락, 다시 말해 남성의 가부장적 여성 소유권을 재확인하고 자본주의적 가족 이념을 미성숙한 여성의 신체를 통해 재생산하려한 20세기 초반 미국의 사회문화적 구조 속으로 셸리 템플의 섹슈얼리티를 위치시킬 필요가 있다. 또한 이 영화들은 미국 영화산업의 영화제작규정이 제정되어 성적 장면들의 묘사를 제한하기 시작한 시기에 개봉되었던 만큼, 백인남성의 도착적 욕망을 가족 드라마 장르의 형식을 이용하여 친숙한 형태로 변형시켜 그려낸다. 결국 셸리 템플의 영화들은 여성을 억압함으로써 정신적 탈출구를 마련하고자 했던 실패한 가부장제의 집단 무의식이 아동의 섹슈얼리티를 통해 복잡하게 구조화되고 재현되던 방식을 보여주는 것이다.

주제어: 셸리 템플, 소아성애, 아동 성, 아동 감성, 영화제작규정

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이름: 김명성

소속: Arizona State University

주소: Mesa, Arizona, USA 85281

이메일: mkim105@asu.edu