

***Wee Willie Winkie* (1937) and *Susannah of the Mounties* (1939): Different Imperial Frontiers, Same Shirley Temple?**

Richard A. Voeltz

Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma, USA

Abstract

The Paper really has two themes. One will be an exploration of how Hollywood dealt with imperial themes involving British India (really Afghanistan) with the Lancers and the Canadian west with the “Mounties”. Here the disarming relationship of child film star Shirley Temple with “savage native peoples” comes into play. A second more central theme centers on the film career of Shirley Temple herself and her roles in *Wee Willie Winkie* and *Susannah of the Mounties*. Her apogee of popularity reached its peak in the period 1937-1939, the time frame for both films. Although she made some films in 1940, *Susannah* really marked an end to a certain period of her career as puberty beckoned. The peculiar gender relationship with the principle male characters (Victor McLaglen and Randolph Scott) will then be explored, showing how her “non-threatening white sexuality” did not impinge on the two masculine imperial frontier domains. All this points to Shirley Temple as a cultural icon and as a commercial and sexual commodity in American popular culture.

[**Keywords:** Imperial, Hollywood, Shirley Temple; gender relationship; icon, commodity, popular culture]

In the A&E Television Network *Biography* series the actress Gloria Stuart (late of *Titanic* fame) relates a humorous anecdote about how the comedian Harpo Marx once asked if “he could buy Shirley Temple” because she was so cute, charming and precious.^(Biography) Shirley Temple’s short, meteoric career in Depression-era America, a time when audiences found welcome escape in her delightful charm, youth, spirit, singing, and dancing, and the fact that she almost single-handedly saved 20th Century Fox Studio and perhaps even Hollywood itself (or at least the mythology tells us that), need not be extensively related here, but some general observations about her extraordinary career warrant attention. In the 1930s children’s movies flourished, a phenomenon very unique to this period. As historian June Sochen writes:

One could argue that the child star, Shirley in particular, was the quintessential Mary, the sweet, pure innocent in child form, untouched by all of the travails of the depression. In contrast to characters in the Disney films such as *Snow White*, which were animated characters taken from fairy tales, Shirley and her cohorts were real live children whose film experiences could offer comfort and support to both children and their parents.^{(Sochen, 108)¹}

But make no doubt about it, Shirley Temple was the first among non-equals as scriptwriter J.P. McEvoy wrote, “Hollywood is lousy with talent—children who can sing, who can dance, who can act, who have curls, dimples and little round legs. But there is only one Shirley.”^(Sochen 108) At the age of three her mother Gertrude enrolled her in the Ethel Meglin Dance Studio in Santa Monica where she learned to tap dance, tango, and rumba. There a talent scout spotted her and eleven other children to play in a series of one-reel spoofs called *Baby Burlesks* produced by Educational Films. In these films preschool children play the roles of adults in famous movies wearing grown-up clothes. Her first feature was called *War Babies*, based upon on the film *What Price Glory?* Here she played a French girl with two “soldiers” in love with her. She wore a blouse with one bare shoulder and a rose in her hair and already her talent, discipline, and sweet personality were coming to the fore. Shirley also vamped the famous Marlene Dietrich scene from *The Blue Angel* and played a small Jane to a little Tarzan wearing a very brief costume.^(Haskins 6-8) Shirley is captured by Indians in *Pie-Covered Wagon* where she finds herself tied to a stake. She was Madame Cradlebait the missionary—with pith helmet and rifle—in *Kid ‘n’Africa* where she spent some time in a large stew pot as a potential meal for a group of “cannibals.” One of her biographers Robert Windeler remarked, “Fortunately for her and the United States *Kid’n’Africa* was never shown in Ghana”, where the future Shirley Temple Black served as ambassador.^(Windeler 113, 121) These films were very popular in the matinees of the thirties accompanied by the obvious sexual titillation that these films afforded. Such films today would not only be considered controversial and in bad taste—ala JonBenet Ramsey—but also not very conducive to healthy adult thinking about children.

Shirley left Educational Films, which then promptly went bankrupt, and goes with 20th Century Fox where she was featured in a number of bit parts. *Stand Up and Cheer* (1934) stands as her big break-out movie that featured the song “Baby, Take A Bow” and a memorable scene in which Shirley wearing a modified Girl Scout uniform led the parade of patriotic musicians dressed in some *faux* military uniforms. She was just five years old. This feel-good film centers on a mythical United States Secretary of Amusements whose job it was to cheer the country during the depression by sponsoring vaudeville acts. (Windeler 122) She never looked back as she had a string of hits that included *Little Miss Marker*, *Baby Take a Bow*, *Now and Forever* with Carole Lombard and Gary Cooper who called Shirley “Wiggle-britches”; *Bright Eyes* where she finally gets top billing and a trademark song that will forever identify her, “On the Good Ship Lollipop”; *The Little Colonel*, featuring the famous stair dance with Bill “Bojangles” Robinson; *Our Little Girl*, a project that Robert Windeler calls “the soapiest and least interesting of Temple films”; *Curley Top*, featuring the song “Animal Crackers”; *The Littlest Rebel*, which features Shirley in blackface as a disguise and she charms Abraham

Lincoln as well; *Captain January*, her first release of 1936 became a huge money maker and featured dance duets with Buddy Ebsen; *Poor Little Rich Girl*, featured Shirley in a tap finale with Jack Haley and Alice Faye; *Dimples* had a Dickensian feel with Shirley as a New York street urchin; and *Stowaway*, her last 1936 film has her orphaned again as the daughter of missionaries in China killed by bandits. An aging Shirley now appeared in such vehicles as *Heidi*, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*, *Little Miss Broadway*, with hooper and future California Senator George Murphy as well as Jimmy Durante, and *The Little Princess*. The latter film, although a money maker, was buried at the box office in 1939 by the *The Wizard of Oz*, and Shirley's response to that film, *The Blue Bird*, was both a technical and a financial failure. By the time she made *Young People*, and sang "We're young people...we're not little babies anymore", her career at age twelve, would now have to move in a different direction. No longer a cute child, she still was too young to be an interesting adolescent.^(Windeler 122) ² Her stardom would not survive the 1940s but neither did her childhood. At the height of her popularity in 1938, President Franklin Roosevelt observed, "It is a splendid thing that for just fifteen cents, an American can go to a movie and look at the smiling face of a baby and forget his troubles."^(Sochen 133) Shirley Temple made them feel warm and happy, at least for a while. But then so did Rin Tin Tin, another big star of the 1930s. Years later, Shirley Temple said, "People in the Depression wanted something to cheer them up, and they fell in love with a dog and a little girl."^(Haskins 16)

The remainder of this essay will focus on two films in particular out of the entire Shirley Temple oeuvre: *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937) and *Susannah of the Mounties* (1939). The former has been touted by Leonard Maltin "as the perfect Shirley Temple vehicle" and Shirley herself considered it her favorite film, while the latter as been described as a "miscalculation on Zanuck's part...The story was banal and Shirley's character the least sympathetic she had ever played." Or even worse, "...it might turn away unsuspecting viewers from Temple quicker than a hot-tempered KKK member."^(Matlin 1530, Windeler 183, Schrodt) The two films also form a pair of book ends for the career of Shirley Temple. Shirley went from the number one box office favorite in 1938 to number 13 in 1939 with *Susannah of the Mounties*, the last movie in her seven-year association with 20th Century Fox to make money. Also in the course of just two years Shirley Temple had moved from a child actor to a pre-adolescent young woman and the change is physically apparent in the film. Also she moves from a childish relationship with a young boy in *Wee Willie Winkie* to a semi-romantic, but not yet sexual, interest in Martin Good Rider, a pure-blood Blackfoot Indian boy actor in the film. In between these two films came *The Little Princess*, a critical and technical success that featured Temple as a Victorian waif whose mother is dead (Mary Pickford played the part in the silent version) while the father goes off to fight in the Boer War, and who proves that she cannot just charm Abraham Lincoln but also Queen Victoria. Also by 1939 war had broken out in Europe and Americans were moving away from fantasy and escape to reality by flocking to see the latest war news from Europe in newsreels.

Some of the success of *The Little Princess* might have been the Boer War background and the poignant scenes of Temple searching for her father among the survivors brought back to a London hospital.^(Edwards 110-111) Another Temple vehicle *The Blue Bird* (1940), a trite retelling of a Maurice Maeterlinck fantasy, was doomed from the start in the new war atmosphere.

Wee Willie Winkie was part of genre of Hollywood British Empire films that commenced with Paramount's hit *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* in 1935. Other films in this cycle included *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), *The Light That Failed* (1939), and really concluded with the rollicking antics of *Gunga Din* (1939). The British made their contribution to this genre as well, especially the Korda brothers. This genre dealt with the mounted military authorities on the frontiers of the empire protecting that empire from native revolts. Loyalty, duty, honor, comradeship, are constant themes that glorify the self-sacrifice of the British army and celebrate the esprit de corps of that very tight-knit masculine world. *Susannah of the Mounties* shares some similarities with this British Empire genre. Obviously Canada exists within the British Empire, and the North West Mounted Police act as the military authority to protect communities, people, property, and railroads against the trepidations of hostile Indians. And values such as bravery, honor, commitment, self-sacrifice, and team play also exist in the context of a tight-knit masculine realm. But Canada has always presented a unique situation for Hollywood which wants to see the Canadian West in terms of the American West. So Hollywood Canadian films are more likely to fall as well under the Western genre, and in the process get things terribly wrong about Canadian westward expansion, the "Mounties", and their treatment of Native Americans. Regardless both these films portray the native, the "other" in a degrading, comical manner, or at worst, as being vicious and barbaric. Also in these two films women tend to be extruded out of the male values, male comradeship/bonding system of the military. It is into these two masculine, hostile, imperial, frontier realms that Shirley Temple injects herself causing affectionate distraction and comic disruption.

"One day," recalled director John Ford, "Darryl Zanuck said, 'I'm going to give you something to scream about. I'm going to put you together with Shirley Temple.' He thought that combination would make me and everybody howl. I said, 'Great,' and we just went out and made the picture (*Wee Willie Winkie*, 1937)...The picture made a lot of money—and she adored me."

Actually Ford did not look forward to working with Temple and was initially distant and gruff toward her, but just as in the film in her relationships with the male characters she turned the gruff and stiff Ford into a mild pussy cat who looked upon her with affection and showed respect for her professionalism. Temple knew the secret John Ford tried so hard to hide from those around him:

“Outwardly, he is a rugged person, but inside kindly and sentimental.”^(McBride 258-260)³ Zanuck provided the key to the unusual emotional depth of this Shirley Temple vehicle that made it so appealing and popular at the box office: “My idea about doing this picture is to forget that it is a Shirley Temple picture. That is, not to forget that she is the star, but to write the story as if it were a *Little Women* or *David Copperfield*....All the hokum must be thrown out. The characters must be made real, human, believable....And it must be told from the child’s viewpoint, through her eyes.” Film critic Andrew Sarris observed what this creative decision produced, along with the choice of John Ford as director: “Despite the monstrous mythology of Shirley Temple, *Wee Willie Winkie* contains extraordinary camera prose passages from the wide-eyed point of view of a child.”^(McBride 260)

Set in 1897 at a British army post in “Raj Pore”, India, the film is very loosely based upon the Rudyard Kipling short story about a six-year old British boy named Percival William Williams, who wins acceptance as a fellow Scottish Highlander by performing a heroic rescue. Percival is nicknamed “Wee Willie Winkie” after a Scottish nursery rhyme. But 20th Century Fox ordered screenwriters Julien Josephson and Ernest Pascal to perform a sex and nationality change on the central character, so Shirley Temple, then widely popular, could assure the film’s financial success.^(Bagott 31) She now stars as Priscilla Williams, an American girl traveling with her young, widowed mother, Joyce (Julia Lang), to join her paternal grandfather (C. Aubrey Smith), a gruff British army colonel who is very female-challenged, at the post that he commands, “Raj Pore”. Upon arrival, they witness the capture of Khoda Khan (Cesar Romero), the leader of the rebel faction and described by the colonel as a “thieving Pathan”, or Afghan. Priscilla disarmingly plays at being a soldier and is even given a uniform and allowed to drill by the genial but tough Sergeant McDuff (Victor McLagen), much to the chagrin of a young drummer boy who thinks girls should not be soldiers. Also disapproving is her grandfather who insists that she remain apart from the troops. She eventually charms him, along with everyone else on the post, including Khoda Khan, whom she wins over by returning a talisman he has lost. Along the way Joyce, her mother, becomes involved with attractive Lieutenant Brandes (Michael Whalen), and the two go riding up to the frontier, at which is posted a sign that reads: “It is absolutely forbidden to go beyond this point into un-administered territory”. Brandes then explains to the naive Joyce how “all of Asia lies beyond that sign. Bagdad, Samarkand..., “and the stronghold of Khoda Khan.” When Brandes deserts his post to take Joyce to a dance, Khan escapes, and Brandes is arrested. Ford decided at the last moment to add a death scene...”We’ve got everybody here—let’s bury Victor! (McLagen).”^(McBride 261) In a death scene of epic proportions that somehow avoids being completely maudlin, Priscilla, choking back sobs and tears, comforts Sergeant MacDuff as he lies dying from his wounds. Temple recalls that so emotional was the take that “When the cameras had stopped, McLagen raised on his elbow and placed one massive hand over mine: ‘If I wasn’t already dead,’ he said, ‘I’d be crying too.’”^(McBride 261, 262) With hostilities with the rebels mounting, an

obsequious servant Mohammed Dihn (Willie Fung)—actually a spy for Khan—takes Priscilla to Khoda Khan’s stronghold (in reality Chatsworth, California) in hopes that her presence will draw the British into an ambush. But the irrepressible Priscilla charms Khoda Khan and his war chiefs into abject submission through a relentless assault of defiance and cuteness. Ford’s biographer Joseph McBride remarked that, “If there were any real justice in Hollywood, Ford would have won an Oscar for a film such as this one, whose truly superior craftsmanship is all the more impressive for seeming so effortless.” As for Shirley Temple *Wee Willie Winkle* remains her favorite of all her movies: “I was marched, drilled, did the manual of arms, and had a wooden rifle. It was wonderful”.^(McBride 262)⁴

If one likes this sort of thing then this film is indeed the perfect Temple vehicle, but this time her mother is alive, she is not an orphan, so she can act as matchmaker.. But in typical fashion she softens the heart of her grandfather, forms a tender bond with MacDuff, convinces the ruthless Pathan leader Khoda Khan to make peace, and even charms the cranky John Ford off-camera. If only we had little Shirley to deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan today. Much of the film, especially her relationship with MacDuff with both of them wearing kilts, is pretty hard to take for today’s more jaded and cynical filmgoers. On closer analysis, however, the intrusion of Temple into the child- and women-phobic societies of the British army and Khan’s Muslim rebel forces raises some interesting gender and sexual complexities that revolve around an apparent innocent child’s loving relationship with four adult men, if one includes Ford himself. These complexities were not lost on the novelist Graham Greene who in a review of *Wee Willie Winkie* wrote:

....Now in *Wee Willie Winkie*, wearing short kilts, she is completely tootsy. Watch her swaggering stride across the Indian barrack square: hear the gasp of excited expectation from her antique audience when the sergeant’s palm is raised: watch the way she measures a man with agile studio eyes, with dimpled depravity....Her admirers—middle-aged men and clergymen—respond to her dubious coquetry, to the sight of her well-shaped and desirable little body, packed with enormous vitality, only because the safety curtain of story and dialogue drops between their intelligence and their desire....^(McBride 263)

Such a vehement review probably reveals more about Greene’s psycho-pathology than it does about the film itself. The studio sued Greene over the review and he was forced to pay a settlement and apologize to, as he called her, “that bitch Shirley Temple.”^(McBride 263) But Greene would not be the first, nor the last, to point out the sexual undercurrents of Shirley Temple’s precociousness.

Mervyn LeRoy of MGM was preparing for the production of the *The Wizard of Oz* and very much wanted Shirley to play Dorothy. LeRoy’s enthusiasm

convinced Zanuck that Shirley was still a valuable property and that she would “go on endlessly.” He turned LeRoy down, and the role went to Judy Garland, while *Susannah of the Mounties* was prepared for Shirley.^(Edwards 110) Her co-star would be Randolph Scott. Early in her career she had worked with Scott in a western called *To the Last Man* (1933) where she had a small role as the daughter of Barton MacLane and Gail Patrick and did a cute bit with a Shetland pony that provided the film with one of its few laughs.^(Nott 35) Now the head liner she teamed with Scott again in *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and the studio hoped that *Susannah of the Mounties* would have similar success. Shirley finds herself in a similar situation as *Wee Willie Winke*. She is on an imperial frontier, but not in India, rather Canada, with hostile tribesmen, not Pathans, but now Blackfoot, intruding into a masculine world, not the Black Watch, rather Canadian Mounties this time, and in the process again forming bonds with adult males, having a semi-romance with a young Indian boy, and quelling a Blackfoot uprising in 1880s Canada. However now moving into pre-adolescence she has also clearly grown and physically changed. She also wears pants now and a vest, all leather, but as with the kilts in *Wee Willie Winke* they are especially designed and sewn for her by a gruff Sergeant, whom she tells that “sewing is women’s work.” Muriel Dennison, author of *Susannah: Little Girl of the Mounties* (1936), upon which the film is based, was the daughter of the Minister of Education of the Northwest Territories and she lived for some time near an Indian Reservation in Regina, Saskatchewan. In the book Susannah at the age of nine during the absence of her parents in India, is sent out to stay with her bachelor uncle, a captain in the North West Mounted Police.⁶ In the movie Susannah (Shirley Temple) is the sole survivor of a wagon train massacre, circa 1882-1884, the period of the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which makes no sense since wagon trains were all but non-existent in Canada, because there were no settlers or homesteaders in the far west before the police arrived and no evidence exists that any wagon train was ever attacked by any Canadian band of Indians. Nor did Canadian Indians ever attack the Canadian Pacific Railway, although the opening subtitle of *Susannah of the Mounties* declares, “The Indians resented the coming of the railway and only the vigilance of the North West Mounted Police forestalled open warfare.”^(Berton 105-106)⁷ These small details aside, Inspector Angus Montague (Randolph Scott) finds the traumatized dyke, and now orphan, Susannah. She quickly becomes the mascot of the local Mounted fort, first capturing the heart of stiff and formal Sgt. Pat O’Hannegan (J. Farrell MacDonald), getting a crush on Montague, and then cutely sleeping in his pajamas. Enter Vicky Standing (Margaret Lockwood) daughter of upright Superintendent Andrew Standing, the post commander. Susannah becomes very jealous of Vicky and hopes that she will leave soon. But in the meantime she teaches “Monty” to dance in the only musical number in the film “I’ll Teach You a Waltz” with Scott dancing with Shirley on his knees with a book on his head, arms all akimbo. It comes off not as cute, but as very awkward, almost embarrassing. Appropriately schooled by Shirley, he can now dance with Vicky at the officer’s

ball. All very sweet and harmless, but unfortunately the film contains an absolute offensive portrayal of the Blackfoot, despite the fact that real Blackfoot appeared in the film as extras.. As Robert Nott so pungently put it: “The Blackfeet in this film are portrayed as child-like simpletons who utter phrases like “Ugh!”, “Me go,” and “Catchem fast!” Victor Jory, made up to look like a zombie, plays the Chief’s hot-headed son, and his half-hearted efforts to join a line of real Blackfeet extras in a war dance are unintentionally hilarious. Nor does it help to have Maurice Moscovitch playing Big Eagle, leader of the tribe, as a Charlie Chan wannabe.”^(Nott 77-78) ⁸ In a particularly grim moment of condescension, Scott chides Temple for not acting like an adult around the Indians: “We’re supposed to be much more grown-up than they are.” Big Eagle meets with Superintendent Standing and promises to find out which Indians attacked Susannah’s wagon train and leaves Little Chief (Martin Good Rider) as a hostage for his promise to find the renegades. Little Chief rides his pony and says “Ugh!” a lot, frustrating Shirley who wants to make friends. He calls her papoose and makes Susannah walk behind him as befitting a “squaw”, all of which leads to a great deal anger and petulance on Susannah’s part as she attempts to bridge the cultural divide between them.

Eventually she makes a peace treaty with Little Chief, but smoking the peace pipe makes her groggy as she exclaims: : “This isn’t bad—anybody can make a treaty like this!” But Shirley smoking tobacco caused concern about the impact of such behavior on her public.^(The New Pictures) ⁹Susannah in a motherly way tells Pat—who has a very funny scene later where his toupee keeps getting shot off-- that they must take care of Montague. Susannah then peevishly asks “Monty” if he is going to marry Vicky, but Vicky has had enough of the pioneer life and says good-bye to Montague. Meanwhile Big Eagle had dispatched Wolf Pelt (Victor Jory) to bring in the Indians who attacked the wagon train. He brings them in but dead, not at all sporting, proper, or legal for Montague. Wolf Pelt then gets into a dispute with the railroad manager over some stolen company horses. He then complains to Big Eagle demanding war. Now Little Chief and Susannah become “blood brothers”, and she fears “it might turn my skin red....Oh, it won’t? Well, that’s good.” Little Chief then reveals that Wolf Pelt stole the horses from the railroad. The Indians now burn a bridge and attack the railroad camp. The railroad manager appeals to Standing for help, but the Indians attack the fort and capture Montague. Shirley now gets on her little pony and an Indian takes her to Big Eagle’s camp, where Wolf Pelt has tied Montague to a stake in preparation for burning. This embellishment particularly upset the technical director Bruce Carruthers, an ex-mounted police corporal who consulted on many American movies about Canada who never heard of an account of the Blackfoot doing any such things. (Berton 145) And Montague would have burned at the stake too if it had not been for Shirley Temple who appeals to Big Eagle assuring him that the redcoats will not come. Susannah and Little Chief now finger Wolf Pelt as the horse thief, and Big Eagle also learns of the peace treaty between the two of them. The tribal Medicine Man then makes the final determination that Wolf Pelt lied

about the horses. Big Eagle orders Wolf Pelt taken away and frees Montague. Susannah now becomes Golden Hawk, the Little Spirit of the Sun. The conclusion shows the Mounties, Susannah and two Indians sitting beneath the Union Jack making a treaty and sharing the peace pipe. A little girl has bridged two cultures or little Miss Fix-It is at it again.

Upon the release of *Susannah of the Mounties* the *New York Journal-American* observed: "It wasn't so long ago that one of Shirley Temple's pictures showed her saving the Khyber pass for England, so it seems perfect that, as *Susannah of the Mounties*, she should help the Royal Mounted police keep peace with the Indians and permit the Canadian Pacific to be built."^(Nott 78) The film was neither a flop nor a critical success, never really escaping the "*Wee Willie Winkie* among the Indians" charge, although it made money. Ten years later Scott would be involved in an even worse perversion of Canadian history called *Canadian Pacific* (1949). *Susannah of the Mounties* didn't work as either a musical or a western. It does have a message of racial unity, but a seriously compromised one. Although the director William A. Seiter gave Shirley Temple as much footage as possible in the film, 20th Century Fox canceled plans for a sequel, *Susannah at Boarding School* based upon yet another Dennison novel.^{(Nott 78)¹⁰} The movie really marked the end of Temple's career as a child actor. There are only one or two places where the former child actor comes out. One is the initial scene where the Mounties find her hiding under a barrel after the wagon train attack, she screams realistically, "Don't touch me! Don't touch me!". However, the pushy, cute little girl that was so charming, now does not play so well as she gets older. Quite frankly at times she comes off as whining, grating and downright annoying. Her stint as America's favorite "cutie pie" was over. (Interestingly Temple's demise occurred at the same time as the end of the Hollywood British Empire cycle.) Kind reviewers wanted to blame this all on the "unsympathetic mini-squaw" character she played, but it was really Shirley herself who was not appealing anymore as an actor, at least as a child actor. All of which goes far in explaining why she could never translate her enormous popularity into a career as a young adult. But Shirley Temple was not just a character in a movie, rather she represents a fascinating, fantastic, complicated, perhaps even grotesque, journey through American psychology.

In A&E's *Biography* of Shirley Temple, former President Gerald Ford declared that she "made all of us feel good about ourselves." And her celebrity biographer Anne Edwards attributed her "universal appeal" and enduring popularity to the fact that as a child she was "everything parents want their children to be....Everything about her was perfect. Perfect. Perfect 10".^(Biography) But a close examination of *Wee Willie Winkie* and *Susannah of the Mounties*, in company with the rest of her films, reveals much more subtle, nuanced, and layered qualities to her appeal which, by the way, may not have been universal. Much of the critical debate on Temple and her films has centered on the issue of

her sexuality. Graham Green in his review of *Wee Willie Winkie* was so explicit about it that 20th Century Fox sued him for libel claiming that Greene had accused the studio of “procuring “ Temple for “immoral purposes”.^(McBride 262) Film historian Jeanine Basinger wrote in her 1975 book on Temple:

Beneath the surface of her screen image lurked hidden, disturbing messages. That she was an out-and-out baby sexpot was pointed out even in her own day, as her constantly kissing little mouth unquestionably held an adult’s promise...Her little body was roundly formed, with a pair of smooth thighs always visible beneath the short, short dresses which barely grazed the bottoms of her ruffled underpants....She had an adult’s control over her body and a definition to her gestures that were beyond her age. For nearly six years she managed to make time stand still, as she miraculously maintained a balance between adorable child and vamping coquette.^(McBride 264)

While these sexual undercurrents certainly existed beneath the surface of many of her films—playing wife to widowed or single film fathers, sitting on their laps, nestling against their chests, expressing jealousy toward older women in their lives, and singing them alluring love songs—Basinger in a later work *A Woman’s View* (1993) argues that too much can be made of Temple’s sexuality and she chides Green for his “sinister interpretations”. She insists that all Temple “really did was tap her guts out in a series of well-made, unpretentious, and entertaining little films designed to lift a Depression audience out of its worries.” Too young to be married, she had to be cast with older men who played father figures.^(ducille 15) Are charges of overt sexuality and exploitation of children, and Temple in particular, based upon a contemporary mentality rather than the mentality of the 1930s? In the same book Basinger views Temple’s films as “...woman’s films. She is the center of the universe in them, and her concerns are always related to love, family, choices, and other usual things.” June Sochen interprets this appraisal as placing “...the emphasis on Shirley as a little mother, a prototypical female fulfilling woman’s traditional role in life. The child as child disappears, overtaken by the child as female because she performs functions similar to those of adult women.”^(Sochen 120-121) This is particularly true for *Wee Willie Winke* and *Susannah of the Mounties* where Shirley acts as the “little mother”, “prototypical female”, and “adult woman”, who plays wife to her father, yet as a child she poses no overt threat to the masculine domain either through overt sexuality or marriage that could cause a destruction of masculine bonding in these imperial frontier films. In *Wee Willie Winke* she performs these functions perfectly, which are brought out even more by John Ford’s deft direction, while in *Susannah of the Mounties* she starts to grow up, and fill out, so it is harder now for her to get away with playing wife to her “father”. Ann deCille writes, “Shirley Temple made for a safer sex kitten when she was a kitten. When the little girl grew up, the virginal vixen was left without vehicle, and her Hollywood career fizzled.”^(ducille 29) deCille also sees

Temple as the personification of “whiteness” where her films “work to incite, excite, and satisfy a paternal white gaze” and “further a patriarchal ideology of white supremacy, an ideology that equates whiteness with beauty and makes true white womanhood a prized domestic ideal.”^(duCille 13-14, 16) While there exists a veil of kindness in the British -Afghan / Canadian-Blackfoot peacemaking, orchestrated by Temple of course, the imperial frontier films *Wee Willie Winke* and *Susannah of the Mounties* project a “patriarchal ideology of white supremacy” with crude, ignorant racial slurs about other cultures who fall outside the white is beautiful, white is right category to go along with Temple’s own pliant, indulged, but not threatening white female sexuality. As deCille notes, these factors, and not just Temple’s talent, go far in explaining not only the popularity of these two films, but indeed of all her films.^(DuCille 17)

No doubt new audiences will extract new and unexpected meanings from Shirley Temple’s relentlessly cheerful, optimistic, and suggestive movies, now readily available on DVD for a new generation. Future scholars will no doubt relentlessly continue to study and deconstruct those same movies. Shirley Temple Black was once asked how she wanted to be remembered. She said only that she hoped “people will remember that I lived, that I didn’t just exist.”^(Haskins, 57) Shirley Temple does exist as more than a character, her life and work continues to be a fascinating phenomena of unprecedented celebrity, commodification, and influence that will go on revealing new aspects of American popular culture, psychology, and society.

Notes

¹ For a revelatory if anecdotal account of these years from Shirley Temple’s perspective see Shirley Temple Black, *Child Star: An Autobiography*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1988. A Disney made for television biopic entitled *Child Star—The Shirley Temple Story* was based on this autobiography. For a complete bibliography, filmography, and biography see Patsy Guy Hammontree, *Shirley Temple Black, A Bio-Bibliography*, Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1998. The author indicates that Ms. Black has remained in control of her personal papers: “perhaps she will give her personal papers to a research library upon her death. Until that time, scholars will have to work largely with secondary material.” P. 236.

² See Robert Windeler for a full discussion of all the Shirley temple films. For video clips see *Biography: Shirley Temple, The Biggest Little Star* and the documentary *Shirley Temple: The Biggest Lil' Star in Hollywood* DVD, 2000.

³ For a discussion of how the making of *Wee Willie Winkie* influenced John Ford's subsequent westerns, particular his cavalry trilogy, see Kathleen A. McDonough, "Wee Willie Winkie Goes West: the Influence of the British Empire Genre on Ford's Cavalry Trilogy" in Peter C. Rollins and John e. O'Connor, *Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television & History*, Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005. Shirley Temple starred in Ford's *Fort Apache* (1948) with then husband John Agar remarking that it elevated her career "to no new heights, but did 'little damage.'" Black 413.

⁴ For a fuller discussion of films dealing with the Indian Frontier and Afghanistan see Richard A. Voeltz, "Rambo, Kipling and Shirley Temple: From Hollywood to Afghanistan With Love", *The Mid-Atlantic Almanack*, Vol. 13, 2004, 47-59.

⁵ For Randolph Scott in addition to Nott see Jefferson Brim Crow III, *Randolph Scott: A Film Biography*, Madison, NC: Empire Publishing, Inc., 1987. For a short treatment of Scott see John H. Lenihan, "The Western Heroism of Randolph Scott" in Archie P. McDonald, Ed., *Shooting Stars: Heroes and Heroines of Western Film*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 1987, 42-59.

⁶ A special Shirley Temple edition of the book came out with stills from the film and renamed *Susannah of the Mounties*, New York: Random House, 1936. There were several sequels to the book including *Susannah at Boarding School*, *Susannah of the Yukon*, and *Susannah Rides Again*.

⁷ Berton presents a thorough examination of how Hollywood has distorted Canadian history, especially the "Mounties". Bruce Carruthers, formerly of the RCM Police, served as technical director for *Susannah of the Mounties* meeting mostly with frustration trying to keep "Americanisms" out of the film. But he did manage to get the uniforms right complete with a pill box hat rather than the more customary "Mountie" big, brimmed hat. More recent studies include William Beahan & Stan Horrall, *Red Coats on the Prairies: The North-West Mounted Police 1886-1900*, Regina: Centax Books/Print West Publishing, 1998 and Michael Dawson, *The Mountie from Dime Novel to Disney*, Toronto: Between the Lines, 1998. For an older history of the Mounted Police see A.L. Haydon, *The Riders of the Plains: A Record of the Royal North-West Mounted Police of Canada 1873-1910*, London: Andrew Melrose, 1910. For a history of the myths about the RCMP and the Hollywood treatment of them go the very useful website for the Virtual Museum of Canada, <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca?Exhibitions/Force/en/myths>. For a very detailed study of the film *Northwest Mounted Police* (1940), a story of the ridiculous collision between a Texas Ranger (Gary Cooper) and a "Mountie" (Preston Foster), as well as a useful bibliography, see Ron Smith, "Mistaken Images in Serge: Cecil B. DeMille's *Northwest Mounted Police* (1940), 49th Parallel, Vol. 24, Spring 2010, pp.1-25 (Online). For a history of the settlement of the Canadian west see Douglas Hill, *The Opening of the Canadian West: Where Strong Men Gathered*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. For some provocative

comments about American misconceptions about the treatment of the Indians by the Mounties see Ward Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of American Indians*, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998, 178-179.

⁸ Temple (Black) in *Child Star* remembers that each of the 12 Blackfoot extras from Montana as being "...a picture-book Indian, leathery skinned, hawk-nosed, regal beyond expectation. During introductions they stood quietly looking ahead, arms folded, avoiding eye contact." (Black, 266.) There is also a certain irony to the condescending treatment of the Blackfoot in the film. According to Temple (Black) the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, "threatened to impose a fine on the studio for any abuse to the Indian sense of pride. To protect themselves, the studio had purchased a \$25,000 bond, assuring each Indian would be presented to the movie public in a manner consistent with their traditional dignity, and meanwhile treated by the Studio in the same fashion." (Black, 267) Given the result what could they have been thinking.

⁹ Temple (Black) relates the fate of "her blood brother" in the film, Martin Good Rider: "Much later, in the 1960s, I heard he had become an airplane pilot, then a religious mercenary in Africa helping Biafran rebels fight against the central Nigerian government." (Black 272).

¹⁰ Angela Aleiss in her book *Making of the White Man's Indian: Native Americans and Hollywood Movies*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2005 argues that in *Susannah of the Mounties* "...the political tone was noticeably one of racial tolerance." She attributes this not so much to Darryl Zanuck's fondness for Indians—their demeaning portrayal in the film belies that idea—as to his pro-British sympathies where he wanted to portray the message: "...that Canada, England, and the Blackfoot are all united in the national welfare" during the present European conflict. (Aleiss 69) For other perspectives on the portrayal of Native Americans in film see Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor, Editors, *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film, Television & History*, Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998. For the specific portrayal of Canadian indigenous people in American films see Berton.

¹¹ For an insightful study of Shirley Temple's brief career as an adult film star in movies such as *Kiss and Tell* (1945) and *The Bachelor and the Bobby-Soxer* (1947) see Ilana Nash, *America's Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Culture*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006. Nash sees Temple as the character Corliss Archer in *Kiss and Tell* "...as the apotheosis of the diminishment and fetishization of teen girls in the bobby-soxer genre. Because she is not thoroughly sexualized, she suffers the most egregious lack of full personhood; her boundaries are entirely penetrable. Old enough for troubling sexuality, young enough for discipline, she invites a complex desire and anger." (Nash 164).

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Richard A. Voeltz is Professor of History and former Chair of the Department of History and Government at Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma where he teaches courses in the Humanities, Film and History, British history, and Modern European history. He received his BA in History from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and his MA in History from the University of Oregon, and his PhD from UCLA in 1980 and has written *German Colonialism and the South West Africa Company*. In addition he has published reviews and articles in such journals as *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, *European Review of History-Revue Europeene D'Histoire*, *The History Teacher*, *American Historical Review*, *The Historian*, *Popular Culture Review*, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, *Connecticut Review*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *The McNeese Review*, and the *Journal of Social History*. He has published articles dealing with the British Boy Scouts, Girls Guides, and the Jewish Lad's Brigade as well as in film and history.

. Shirley Temple passed away a little over a week ago. Now that some time has gone by, though, I thought I would take this opportunity to repost a hilarious 1937 review written by Graham Greene of her movie Wee Willie Winkie. Greene, one of the great British authors of the twentieth century "and there were many" wrote with such searing cynicism and shocking innuendo that Temple's guardians ended up suing him. He was practically forced to leave the country. This reposting should not be seen as some sort of final dig at Temple shortly after she died. Indeed, it's more of commentary on the whole Susannah of the Mounties was Shirley Temple's last successful film for 20th Century Fox. See more ». Goofs. Shirley's box-office appeal was on the wane by the time Fox put her in SUSANNAH OF THE MOUNTIES and obviously they were aware of this when they decided not to shoot this one in technicolor. Not sure, but I recall seeing a sepia tone version of this at a kiddie matinée revival years ago. However, all TV showings are in standard B&W. Once again, Shirley starts the story as an orphan when Indians kill her parents and she's rescued by none other than Randolph Scott, a handsome mountie who, with his sweetheart (Margaret Lockwood), takes Shirley under his wing. is now SOLD. Change Background. "Shirley Temple In "Wee Willie Winkie" A 20th Century Fox Production Authorized Edition No 1769". This vintage book was published by the Saalfield Publishing company in 1937 and tells the story of little girl headed to India to her grandfather. Movie stills in black and white are sprinkled throughout this delightful movie memorabilia soft-cover book. This movie was directed by John Ford, Produced by Darryl Zanuck and was based on a story by Rudyard Kipling. There is mild yellowing of the pages and a page or two where the ink was not printed as heavily (although this is a manufacturing defect and not a condition issue.) The staples are intact and tight. A fun piece of movie history.