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'A woman's face and a child's body': Brooke Shields and child sexuality

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ABSTRACT

In the 1970s, child actress and model Brooke Shields became a flashpoint for the crisis over child sexuality and paedophilia. Shields's disturbing marriage of a child's body with a womanly face disrupted the iconography of childhood that had flourished since the Enlightenment and pointed towards a new paradigm that has become more prominent in the decades since. This article examines how child liberationist views that children are sexual beings helped to shape Shields's public image as an object of adult male desire, even as her celebrity became a vector for the emerging feminist argument that children must be protected from adult desire. Through discourse about Shields, artists, journalists, and others articulated opposing logics for understanding the newly sexualised child and helped lay the foundation for contemporary debates about children in visual culture.

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Introduction

Early in Brooke Shields' career, before her body was transformed by puberty, the pre-teen model and actress was defined by her disconcerting appearance. Whether she posed in pigtails and rompers or satin and furs, the little girl looked like an adult woman, though her body was unmistakably that of a child. Journalists described her as having 'a beautiful woman's face on a child's body' and of being 'twelve-years-old-going-on-woman' (Hanauer 1977, p. 14, Haskell 1978, p. 128). When French director Louis Malle cast her in his first American film, *Pretty Baby* (1978), he told reporters, 'There's something disturbing about her . . . with this face of a woman, the body of a child' (Anon 1978c, p. 101). A photograph by fashion photographer Francesco Scavullo captures what was so unsettling about Shields when she was a child. Photographed nude from the waist up, her face is that of an adult fashion model, but her undeveloped breasts signal her status as a pre-pubescent girl. A cropped version of the photograph appeared in advertisements for an NBC news show that asked in bold type, 'World's youngest sex symbol?'

Shields disturbed audiences because she conveyed a sexual knowingness that is antithetical to the longstanding Western association of white girlhood with sexual innocence. While her body was 'a child's, thin and gawky,' her 'smouldering' eyes, looking directly into the camera from beneath heavy brows, seemed to beckon viewers with

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a 'come-hither look' (Anon 1975, p. 109, Midday Live with Bill Boggs 1977). Her 'direct gaze is full of ambivalent sexuality,' one journalist reported, while another noted that her affect was 'sullenly sexual' (Anon 1978a, p. 41, Braudy 1978, p. 28). Photographer Steve Mills attributed her unsettling effect to an air of knowingness at odds with her status as a child; 'She possesses a quantity of that undefinable whatever, perhaps detached awareness' (Shields 1978, n.p.).

As a child, Shields was fascinating to audiences because she projected a sexuality that challenged the ideal of innocence that has been foundational to Western definitions of childhood since the eighteenth century. A number of scholars have examined the continuities between the nineteenth-century cult of the child and the eroticisation of childhood in the twentieth century (Kincaid 1992, Lebeau 2008, Studlar 2013). This article will contribute to the important project of understanding the historical shifts in the ideal of childhood innocence, particularly in relation to commercial images of children. While belief in the ideal of childhood innocence once encouraged the dangerous delusion that white, middle-class children were safe from sexual exploitation and abuse, the controversies arising from the sexualisation of children have led to moral panics and draconian laws that go so far as to police adult fantasy but do little to better the lives of children (Higonnet 1998). This analysis demonstrates that Brooke Shields' early career marked a key moment when the terms of these debates were established and a new figure, the sexually knowing child, began to take form.

The attribution of 'awareness' to Brooke Shields resonates with art historian Anne Higonnet's (1998, p. 12) argument that a new image of childhood emerged in the late twentieth century, one that centres around what she identifies as the 'Knowing' child. In her foundational history of images of children in English and American art and photography, Higonnet traces the emergence and evolution of what she calls the 'Romantic child' and the shift towards this new paradigm in the 1980s and 1990s. Higonnet (1998, p. 28) argues that portraits like *The Blue Boy* (Thomas Gainsborough, c. 1770) and *The Age of Innocence* (Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1788) helped to create a visual iconography of childhood that identified the child with prelapsarian innocence, which was signalled by the child's absence of sexual knowledge or desire.

In my own work (Hatch 2015), I have traced the ways in which early Hollywood repurposed this iconography of childhood innocence, adapting practices that developed on the nineteenth-century stage to perpetuate an ideal of innocence that was celebrated for its perceived ability to transform audiences into innocent subjects, if only temporarily. The Romantic child was imagined to inhabit a realm separate from adults, as evidenced by the child's obliviousness to such adult concerns as sex and commerce. Images of children provided a means for audiences to recapture their own prelapsarian past. In this sense, child stars were imagined to serve a disciplinary function. Rather than the child's being corrupted by the male gaze, men's spectatorial pleasure in little girls was understood to have a transformative effect, conferring, if only temporarily, the child's innocence onto the adult spectator (Hatch 2012, for a historical analysis of the ways in which the white child's innocence functioned in relationship to race see Bernstein 2011). For example, men played a central role in the publicity for child stars like Shirley Temple because their love for little girls was imagined to be socially productive rather than perverse; men's child loving signalled their willingness to indulge in sentimental pleasures rather than sexual ones. Similarly, Lori Merish (1999) has demonstrated that commercialised images of

children developed in tandem with advertising techniques designed to lure women into the marketplace. Advertising and commercial amusements spoke to maternal desires by producing images of cute and cuddly children. Merish (1999, p. 186, emphasis in original) writes, 'the cute *demands* a maternal response and interpellates its viewers/consumers as "maternal"'.

However, the ideal of childhood innocence, the paradigm of the Romantic child, has always been unstable and contradictory. Not coincidentally, its emergence was accompanied by the intensification of efforts to curtail children's masturbation, which would suggest that parents, doctors, and others concerned with child rearing were well aware of children's capacity to experience erotic pleasure (Foucault 1976). Higonnet (1998) argues that photography, with its promise of realism, further destabilised the Romantic child. In the photographs of children taken by Lewis Carroll and Julia Margaret Cameron, Higonnet argues, we see not a perversion of the Romantic child, but a manifestation of erotic elements that were present from its inception. The impact of these images shifted due to the photographer's reliance on actual children to produce the image. Sigmund Freud's theories of childhood sexuality, repression, and the unconscious, which he developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, further destabilised the ideal of childhood innocence, even as the Romantic child proliferated on Hollywood screens (Freud 1949, Hatch 2015). At the same time, child performers are inherently contradictory, enacting the Romantic ideal of innocence while circulating as commodities and labourers in the public sphere, at once representing innocence and its corruption (O'Connor 2008, Hatch 2015).

Higonnet argues that the Knowing child, who exhibits an awareness of the adult world that was antithetical to the ideal of the Romantic child, began to appear in art and commercial photography of the 1980s and 1990s. She cites, for example, album covers for bands like Metallica, Hole, and Nirvana as well as the photography of Sally Mann and Jock Sturges. Unlike the Romantic child, who seemed to exist in an Edenic realm removed from adult knowledge, the Knowing child is aware of sexuality and desire and, therefore, possesses their own subjectivity and interiority. However, the ideal of childhood innocence persists, giving the image of the Knowing child the power to disturb, as evidenced by the controversies surrounding Mann and Sturges's photographs and various ad campaigns featuring children (including Brooke Shields's ads for Calvin Klein jeans in the 1980s). Writing in the late 1990s, Higonnet is interested in understanding the relationship between this new paradigm of the Knowing child and late twentieth-century legal efforts to define and police child pornography.

Building on my previous work on Shields as a 'fille fatale' (Hatch 2002), in this article, I am interested in understanding how Shields' star image as a knowing child was used by artists, feminists, and the American press to formulate emergent ideas about child sexuality in the 1970s and early 1980s. Shields prefigured the Knowing children that Higonnet discusses, and her image helped to set the terms of contemporary debates about childhood and visual culture. Through discourse about Shields, artists, journalists, and others articulated opposing logics for producing and interpreting images of children. Shields' image was built on the child liberationist idea that children's sexuality should be nurtured and celebrated. However, it also upended the assumptions about the child's status in visual culture and produced a new crisis over the circulation of images of children. Shields' status as a seemingly knowing child, produced through the

unnerving marriage of a sexy woman's face with a child's body, created a problem. How should audiences respond to her image? One industry trade magazine (JT 1978, p. 1) alerted exhibitors that the film *Pretty Baby* would require 'special handling' in part because the child 'has a beauty that is precocious, breathtaking, and hypnotic'. Shields' 'smouldering' eyes and 'sullenly sexual' affect belied the cuteness and innocence associated with childhood. Rather than inviting audiences to indulge in an imagined Edenic innocence or calling forth a maternal desire to cuddle, Shields' knowing gaze interpellated the viewer as a sexually desiring subject. Shields thus sparked a crisis that, not coincidentally, corresponded with a larger crisis over child sexuality in 1970s America.

Liberation vs. protection

Brooke Shields emerged as a celebrity at a moment when the ideal of childhood innocence was in crisis. On the one hand, child liberationists, drawing analogies to Black and women's rights campaigns, argued for an expansion of children's rights, including children's right to sexual expression. On the other hand, child protectionists argued that children's vulnerability called for expanded protections, including protection from adult sexuality. Shields' star image helped to shape the discourse that would resolve these debates in favour of protectionist views. While concerns over her sexualised image drew attention to children's vulnerability to sexual abuse, they also lay the groundwork for the moral panics around children and sexuality that erupted in the 1980s and continue to this day.

In 1974, two popular liberationist books – John Holt's *Escape from Childhood* and Richard Farson's *Birthrights* – argued that the civil rights revolutions of the mid twentieth century should extend to children. Among other rights – the right to vote, to work for money, sign contracts, and form their own families – many in this amorphous child liberation movement also advocated for children's sexual freedom (Minow 1995, p. 271). At a time when parent-child incest was often defined as consensual and sexually abused children were commonly punished for 'seducing' adults, child liberationists worked to destigmatise intergenerational sex and free children from guilt and shame so that they might grow into sexually 'liberated' adults. Just as the sexual revolution had lifted prohibitions on adult sexuality, liberationists argued, so children should learn to understand themselves as erotic beings. Child psychologists advocated for early sex education that would teach children about sexual pleasure as well as disease prevention and birth control. Some went so far as to argue that sex between adults and children might not be damaging to the child, particularly if the child had not yet reached adolescence and learned to associate sex with shame (Angelides 2004). In this context, incest was considered not an admirable practice but at least one that offered children an opportunity to learn. In her popular guide to raising sexually liberated children, *Sex without Shame* for example, Alayne Yates (1978, p. 121), writes:

> There is an important lesson to be learned from noncoercive father-and-daughter incest. Early erotic pleasure by itself does not damage the child. It can produce sexually competent and notably erotic young women. Childhood is the best time to learn, although parents may not always be the best teachers.

For child liberationists, then, it was more important to destigmatise children's sexual experiences and nurture a healthy erotic life than it was to protect children from adult desire, which was understood to be harmful only if it involved coercion and violence or occurred when the child was old enough to understand the incest taboo. For this reason, when Michigan rewrote its rape laws in 1974, incest was defined as rape only if the child were between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. Sexual relations with children younger than 13 carried a lesser penalty (Connolly 2015).

This Liberationist discourse was challenged by lawyers and feminist activists who worked to redefine adult desire as inherently harmful to children. In doing so, they drew on a history of child protectionism that dates back to Progressive-era efforts to relocate children out of the labour force and into schools and to institute laws to protect children's health and safety, including by raising the age of consent. In the late nineteenth century, children as young as seven were permitted to marry, though in most states the age of consent was between ten and twelve. Progressive-era reformers succeeded in raising the age of consent to between sixteen and eighteen for much of the country. These reformers also sought to protect children from early knowledge about and experience of sexuality, though their efforts were limited to regulating working-class and immigrant families because it was assumed that the middle-class family was itself a bastion of innocence. Indeed, Lynn Sacco (2009) has demonstrated that these reformers were obstinately blind to evidence of incest within middle-class families.

In the 1970s, radical feminists challenged the fallacy that middle-class families were immune to sexual abuse. White, middle-class women began to discuss their own abuse at the hands of their fathers and other men, making it clear that they did not experience this as a 'learning opportunity' but as an assault. In 1978, Louise Armstrong's *Kiss Daddy Goodnight: A Speak-Out on Incest*, Susan Forward and Craig Buck's *Betrayal of Innocence: Incest and Its Devastation*, and Karen Meiselman's *Incest: A Psychological Study of Causes and Effects, with Treatment Recommendations* all pointed to the emergence of a new discourse on incest that reframed children as victims rather than seducers and redefined their experience as traumatic.

Between 1975 and 1978, as these debates over the very definition of child sexuality and intergenerational sex were being played out, Shields captured national attention first as a child model and then as a film star. Images of Shields and the controversies that they engendered became a site for working through these conflicting ideas about the child. Two sets of visual texts became vectors for the controversies surrounding Brooke Shields in the 1970s and early 1980s: Garry Gross's photographs of 10-year-old Shields, which were commissioned by Playboy Press, and *Pretty Baby*, a film about a photographer who becomes enraptured by a pre-teen prostitute (Shields) in turn-of-the twentieth-century New Orleans. Both draw on Shields's preternatural appearance to propose new ideas about girlhood sexuality. In doing so, they lean on liberationist discourse that insists on destigmatising childhood sexuality even as their eroticisation of Shields made protectionists' warnings about children's endangerment seem all the more necessary.

'The woman in the child'

Garry Gross was a commercial photographer who hired Shields and other young girls to pose for a photo essay commissioned by Playboy Press to be published in a book entitled *Sugar and Spice* (Anon1976). According to the book's flap copy (Anon 1976, n.p.), *Sugar*

and Spice featured photo essays from fourteen prominent commercial photographers that 'focus on the sugar and spice, naughty but nice duality that is frequently an element in the creation of sexual attraction between men and women.' Inspired, perhaps, by the nursery rhyme that gave the book its title, Gross's contribution, which he called 'The Woman in the Child,' consisted of erotic portraits of young girls, including several of 10-year-old Brooke Shields.

Gross claimed that his goal in making these photos was to capture something that he felt was present in all young girls: their nascent sexuality. In this regard, he drew upon liberationist calls to recognise and nurture children's sexuality. The text accompanying Gross's photos (Anon 1976) explains,

> Garry's premise in creating [these photographs] was simply to demonstrate his feeling that a little girl often projects an identifiable sensuality, into which she grows as she becomes a woman. Obviously, a child's and woman's expressions of that sensuality will differ, but Garry is intrigued by the fact that it so clearly exists in both: inside that little girl there's a sexy woman hiding.

Gross's children conform to the liberationist definition of childhood as a period in which sexual expression should be celebrated. The text suggests that there is a continuum between the girl's sexuality and that of her adult self, that her sexuality is fully formed (something 'into which she grows') but difficult to perceive ('inside that little girl there's a sexy woman hiding'). In this regard, his photographs are on a par with the *Playboy* project of legitimising voyeuristic pleasure in the pornographic examination of the 'girl next door'.

In his attempt to reveal the sexy woman hiding within the little girl, Gross conflates female sexuality with the girl's availability to the male gaze. The photographs are carefully staged to connote female eroticism. Shields poses in a marble bath surrounded by miniature bronze nudes. Her face is heavily made up, her hair falls down her back, and she wears nothing but a beaded necklace. Her body is oiled to reflect the light as she emerges out of a bubble bath like Venus emerging from the sea. In several of the images, she holds a shower nozzle or a loofah, with the suggestion that she has been or is on the verge of caressing herself. In others, a large peach-coloured rose is artfully placed over her vulva.

There was nothing novel about photographing children within eroticised settings. Anne Higonnet (1998, p. 33) identifies 'children unconsciously prefiguring adult gender roles' as one of the five subject types that were common to nineteenth-century paintings of children. And numerous Hollywood films from the first part of the twentieth century restaged scandalous films with casts of children to the delight of critics. In 1917, for example, seven-year-old Virginia Lee Corbin impersonated silent star Theda Bara in a scene that recreated the censored images of Cleopatra at her bath in the 1917 film *Cleopatra* (Figure 1). Rather than suggesting the child's sexuality, however, Corbin's awkward movements and rounded cheeks assured audiences that the scene was charming and wholesome. According to the logic of the day, the Romantic child's innocence had drained the scene of its sexual meaning.

Gross's photographs, by contrast, mark a significant moment in the emergence of what Higonnet calls the Knowing child. The Romantic child existed on a separate plane, oblivious to the concerns of adults. Paintings, photographs, and films featuring the

Figure 1. Virginia Lee Corbin impersonating Theda Bara's Cleopatra in *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* (Chester and Sidney Franklin, 1917). The child's awkward movements and rounded cheeks made her performance seem charming and wholesome rather than erotic. (Production still from *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp*, Author's Collection).

Romantic child invited adults to put aside their cares and indulge in the child's imagined innocence. In Gross's photographs, by contrast, the child is very much a part of the adult world not only of sexuality but of pornography. Rather than staging her obliviousness to adult concerns, these photos stage the child's awareness of her effect on an imagined male viewer.

In Gross's photographs, the child's sexuality is apparent to the degree that it produces an imagined male gaze through the combination of an eroticised setting and the child's adult visage. Even more than her nakedness, it is Shields' 'smouldering,' 'precocious,' 'sensual' gaze that makes these photos so arresting. Rather than asserting sexual ignorance, her signature pout and direct look into the camera suggest that she is aware of her

effect. Looking directly into the camera, she seems to invite the viewer to take pleasure in her image. As her modelling agent (quoted in Peer and Gelman 1981, p. 80) recalled, 'We'd say, "Do your no-smile face," and the sex just oozed from her.' In his description of one of these photographs, the artist Richard Prince (2014, n.p.) recalls, 'It was as if the "look" on Brooke's face knew secrets I would never begin to understand. She knew. What did she know? It didn't matter. It was enough that this photograph knew everything.' Conveying knowingness rather than innocence, she disrupted the relationship between the child as object and the adult viewer as innocent.

Pretty baby

Louis Malle, too, drew on Shields's remarkable image with the liberationist goal of complicating our understanding of child sexuality only to produce the child as an object of an erotic gaze. In justifying his decision to make a film about a child prostitute, Malle explicitly drew on liberationist language. 'Children's sexuality is either ignored or exploited,' he told *Newsweek*, 'both of which are wrong' (Kroll 1978, p. 106). Malle echoed the sociologists who identified intergenerational sex as an unspoken norm. Though he claimed not to be 'sexually titillated by children' himself, Malle (quoted in Cott 1978) also asserted that 'this strange impulse of man's being sexually aroused by children has been part of every civilisation. That's a fact, I'm sorry to say, a sociological fact.' While Gross used the camera to capture something that he believed was already there – the woman in the child – Malle's film offers a more complex view of childhood sexuality, asking us to consider what sex might mean to a child growing up in the brothel. At the same time, however, this exploration rendered Shields the object of a sexualised masculine gaze, which, combined with the controversy over Gross's photographs, prompted a feminist backlash against the film.

Pretty Baby argues that the child's experience and understanding of sexuality will be shaped by her environment. Within the brothel depicted in *Pretty Baby*, women and girls enjoy a greater degree of autonomy than they could hope for within the patriarchal family. Like the child liberationists, the film argues that sexual shame is a product of the bourgeois family. A child born and raised in a brothel, *Pretty Baby* suggests, will experience no such shame. The house is run with an iron hand by an ageing madame, Nell (Frances Faye), who has no patience for sentiment or middle-class mores. Violet (Shields) admires and envies the other sex workers, including her mother. In this milieu, Violet has learned that sex is a commodity, a means of earning the right to sleep in late and to be catered to by the brothel's staff of Black servants. She resents participating in 'mother/daughter acts' only because they inhibit her play.

Posters for *Pretty Baby* promise that the film will offer 'the image of an adult world through a child's eyes,' and initially we see the world of Storyville from the child's point of view. The film opens with a close-up of Violet looking impassively off screen and the sound of a woman rhythmically moaning. Given the film's setting, we naturally assume that the child is observing a woman engaged in sex. The reverse shot, of Violet's mother Hattie (Susan Sarandon) crying out with her head thrown back on the pillow, seems to confirm this until the camera pulls back to reveal that she is not experiencing sexual

pleasure but the pains of childbirth. Hattie is giving birth to Violet's younger brother, Will. With this reversal, the film puts us on notice that our assumptions about what it might mean to grow up in a brothel will be challenged.

For Violet, sex is an eagerly anticipated rite of passage, though she is not portrayed as sexually desiring. In one of the film's most controversial scenes, Violet's 'virginity' is auctioned off in a lively bidding war. First, she is presented to the assembled male bidders as a rare commodity, 'the finest delicacy New Orleans has to offer'. As she stands on the auction block, close-ups of the men looking at her convey that they see her as a desirable object indeed. When the bidding is over, Violet appears momentarily afraid. She stumbles, flirting awkwardly. But then her face hardens and she takes control of the transaction, telling the man, 'I can feel the steam, inside me right through my dress'. We are not meant to think that Violet is describing her sexual response to the man. Rather, she is parroting the women who feign desire for their clients. Already, the child has learned that sex is a commodity rather than a source of pleasure. Later, after the john has left, Violet lies face down on the bed, unresponsive. Hattie rushes to her daughter, who appears to be unconscious. But Violet is only play acting, piqued that her mother and the other women are ignoring her. Once again, our assumptions about her have been overturned. Rather than suggesting that sex with a man will destroy her, the film suggests that her response will be shaped by the cultural milieu in which she was raised. In a patriarchal family, sex is destructive to the child. In the bordello, it's all in a day's work. And Violet is thrilled to join the labour force and enjoy the privileges conferred on the working women despite the pain of this initiation.

At the same time that the film supports the liberationist argument that a child's experience of sexuality will be shaped by their environment, *Pretty Baby* centres around a fascination with the child as erotic image. The film is, after all, inspired by the work of photographer Ernest Joseph Bellocq (1873–1949), and eventually the fictionalised Bellocq's (Keith Carradine) point of view displaces Violet's. Violet is jealous of Bellocq's attentions to the older women. She astutely recognises that Bellocq is more enamoured of his camera than he is of the women he photographs, and she breaks his glass plates in a bid to draw his attention. A battle ensues between the man and the child. He works to transform Violet into a photographic image, but she resists his efforts to capture her. Initially, Bellocq photographs Violet alongside Hattie, and Violet becomes jealous when he is fascinated by her mother's breasts. After Hattie gets married and deserts Violet, the child runs away to Bellocq's house. There he photographs her first in the image of innocence, dressed in white and clutching a doll. However, she cannot sit still. Soon she is chasing a lizard and her white clothes are dirty. Bellocq then puts her in an erotic odalisque pose, reclining naked on a divan. As he lovingly dusts his camera lens, she grows impatient with the pose and disrupts the shot by standing up before he can press the shutter. She cannot be captured or contained by Bellocq's camera, though Malle captures a much more obedient Shields posing nude (Figure 2). Eventually, Violet succeeds in drawing Bellocq's attention to herself rather than her image, and the two are briefly married until Hattie returns with her own husband and insists that Violet leave Bellocq for a new home with her stepfather.

Figure 2. In *Pretty Baby*, Brooke Shields recreates one of Bellocq's portraits of an adult sex worker (Untitled, 1911–1913). The image is also reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's photograph of a reclining nude child, Evelyn Hatch (1879). While the film examines the child's subjectivity, it also produces the child as an object of a sexualised gaze. (Frame enlargement).

Rather than celebrate Violet's removal from the brothel or from her underage marriage, the film suggests that the patriarchal family is no place for this child. In the final scene, Violet's stepfather holds the camera, pointing a hand-held Brownie at his new family. The film ends on a freeze frame of Violet dressed like a school girl, looking uncertainly into the camera. Where Violet was able to maintain her autonomy in the brothel and in her marriage to Bellocq, this frozen image suggests that she will be subjected to her new father's power and that the patriarchal home will be oppressive to her.

Like Gross's photos, *Pretty Baby* was dangerous less for its revelation that children are desiring subjects than for its potential to produce paedophilic desire. While it seems patently obvious today that adults should not have sex with children, in the late 1970s this wasn't entirely self-evident. Writing on *Pretty Baby*, a reviewer for the *Hollywood Reporter* (Anon 1978b) expressed a surprising degree of uncertainty as to how to feel about a film in which a 12-year-old prostitute marries an adult man; 'I don't think I'm being totally puritanical when I say that there is something distasteful about sexual relations between a child and an adult, no matter how tastefully – and discreetly – that relationship may be presented'. The *New York Times*' film reviewer, Vincent Canby (1978, p. II 17), assured readers 'while I've no doubt that the movie will delight a lot of Humbert Humberts among us . . . I don't know that it will create any new ones.' However, *Playboy*'s reviewer (Anon 1978c) was less sanguine, arguing that the film 'forces' audiences 'to deal with our own responses to a prematurely wise nymphet whose seductive beauty and screen presence may very well disturb the peace.' Shields' unnerving beauty combined with Malle's refusal to portray the child prostitute as abject threatened to tip the film into child pornography.