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Representation of the European Woman as an Intercultural Agent in the Western Film Genre: Archetypal and Genre Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The Western film genre has long functioned as a marker of American identity, and recent cinematic trends increasingly foreground female protagonists, particularly European women as intercultural agents within frontier narratives. This study investigates the intersection of mythology, archetypes, and Westerns, focusing on the ways female characters embody both classical Greek goddesses and archetypes classified by Carol S. Pearson—the first systematic treatment of these archetypes in scholarly literature on Westerns. Methodologically, the research employs narrative, visual, and semiotic analysis, alongside intertextual comparisons and archetypal theory, to examine how these female figures operate within the genre's storytelling structures. The study also considers the Western diffusion as a genre, including the often-overlooked Australian Westerns, which provide particularly nuanced depictions of female protagonists. The findings demonstrate that female protagonists actively shape the narrative, enact archetypal functions, and mediate intercultural encounters, offering a new lens through which to understand gendered dynamics in Westerns. The main contribution of this research lies in integrating archetypal analysis, visual semiotics, and narrative study to reveal the transformative roles of women in Western cinema, highlighting how historical events, mythological motifs, and cross-cultural interactions inform their representation. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the need for continued interdisciplinary attention to women's roles in Westerns, as these narratives expand and evolve beyond traditional genre conventions.

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1. Introduction

The Western occupies a canonical position within the tradition of American cinema and continues to function as one of the most enduring and recognizable genres in Hollywood's production system. Distinguished by its dynamic morphogenesis and persistent genre hybridization, the Western engages not only with the historical realities of the American frontier in the latter half of the 19th century but also extends its narrative frameworks to encompass events from other geopolitical spaces and temporal contexts. As a genre intrinsically rooted in historicism, the Western simultaneously reconstructs factual historical episodes and figures, while also embedding fictionalized personae within a specific chronotope. This duality enables scholars to examine how narrative conventions shape archetypal constructions of the heroic subject.

Female characters in Westerns hold critical narrative and symbolic significance. Their roles are multifaceted, ranging from moral agents and mediators to intercultural actors navigating social hierarchies and ethical dilemmas. The genre's characteristic landscape of environmental adversity, rigid social hierarchies, and existential threats foregrounds the distinctive challenges faced by these characters, underscoring their agency, endurance, and transformative potential: "Although the experience of male and female heroes is the same on the archetypal level, it differs in important particulars because of the roles and opportunities afforded each sex in western society"^[1] (p. 5).

This article situates itself within contemporary scholarship on female representation in the Western genre, focusing on films in which European women assume central narrative and symbolic roles. Through the interplay of emotional vulnerability and inner fortitude, such figures frequently function as intercultural mediators, engaging with historical realities such as Indigenous cultural experience and trauma. Their screen presence often becomes visually and ideologically charged, transforming into a stylistic device of the genre itself. Positioned as victims of systemic violence yet emerging as moral voices, these women symbolize the potential for reconciliation, diplomacy, and relational ethics:

"communication is a female strength"^[2] (p. 301).

An interdisciplinary approach combining cinema studies, feminism, and cultural anthropology provides a framework for understanding female protagonists in the Western genre as complex and multifaceted figures. Within this perspective, women's roles encompass moral agency, intercultural mediation, and the embodiment of archetypal patterns. This article develops an archetypal and genre-based analysis of female characters, drawing on Greek goddesses, Carol S. Pearson's archetypes, and a combination of visual, narrative, and semiotic methods.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to conduct an archetypal and genre analysis of the representation of European women as intercultural agents in the Western genre. The research employs narrative, visual, and semiotic methods, drawing on both classical Greek mythology and Carol S. Pearson's archetypes to examine how female characters embody symbolic functions and actively shape narrative and social dynamics. The study also addresses underexplored areas, including Australian Westerns, which are often omitted in Western scholarship but provide compelling examples of female agency and professional roles within frontier narratives.

2. Methodological Foundations

Several established methods of cinematic analysis were employed in this study to explore the representation of archetypes and the role of female characters in Western films: narrative analysis, visual analysis and semiotic analysis. One of the primary methods used was narrative analysis, which focuses on the structure of the story and the roles characters play within it. This method allowed me to examine how the plot of Western films unfolds and how female characters contribute to the narrative. Through narrative analysis recurring patterns in the depiction of women and the archetypes were identified.

Additionally, visual analysis was applied to investigate how the visual style and cinematography of Westerns contribute to the representation of female characters. As part of this approach, I examined the works of renowned

painters as visual references that resonate within the aesthetics of Western films. The power of visual art lies in its symbolic depth, and the depictions of women in painting serve as significant touchpoints, enriching the cinematic portrayal of female characters through their timeless imagery and composition.

One of the crucial visual references for this research is

the painting *The Battle between the Romans and the Sabines Interrupted by the Sabine Women* (1781) by François-André Vincent (**Figure 1**). The visual structure and iconographic elements of the painting powerfully articulate the woman's function as an intermediary, positioned between conflicting forces and embodying the possibility of dialogue and transformation.



Figure 1. *The Battle between the Romans and the Sabines Interrupted by the Sabine Women* (1781) by François-André Vincent.

Finally, semiotic analysis was used, which focuses on the signs and symbols present in the film, to explore how certain visual and narrative motifs are used to convey meaning. By analysing the symbols in conjunction with the representation of women, I was able to uncover the deeper cultural and societal messages embedded in the films. This method helped illuminate the ways in which archetypes are constructed and communicated through cinematic language, and how they reflect larger cultural narratives.

The study of female archetypes in cinema is becoming increasingly significant, as it provides a deeper understanding of the role of women in historical and cultural contexts where their portrayal has traditionally been secondary. For the film industry, this research opens up the possibility of creating more complex, multidimensional characters who

not only complement male-driven narratives but also serve as independent agents of change, mediators, or guardians of moral values. From an academic perspective, examining female archetypes helps analyse their reflection in popular culture. In a broader social context, this contributes to the reevaluation of traditional stereotypes, fostering a dialogue on equality and the role of women in conflict resolution—an issue that remains particularly relevant in a world where the pursuit of harmony and cooperation is becoming increasingly vital.

The selected filmography presented at the end of the article was compiled on the basis of a specific narrative and thematic principle: in each of the films, a female character functions as a mediator between white settler culture and Indigenous cultures, dedicating herself to conflict resolu-

tion, cultural negotiation, and the symbolic construction of bridges between opposing worlds. The selection was not guided by an explicit search for a feminist Western, nor by predefined criteria associated with that category. Instead, the analytical focus of the study lies in the examination of archetypal structures rooted in ancient Greek mythology, particularly theogonic and cosmogonic myths. Nevertheless, relevant scholarship in this field was reviewed and is discussed in Section 5 in order to situate the analysis within broader contemporary debates.

3. Conceptual Framework

The relationship between film, mythology, and archetypal imagery is profoundly symbiotic, with cinematic narratives often shaped by enduring mythological structures and symbolic figures. Within the Western genre, these elements are especially pronounced, as its narrative architecture consistently engages with foundational themes such as the conflict between civilizations, the binary of good and evil, codes of honour and vengeance, survival in hostile environments, the struggle between humanity and nature, the pursuit of justice, heroic self-sacrifice, moral ambiguity, and the tension between destiny and autonomy. This dynamic intersection of cinematic language and mythological discourse not only reinforces dominant cultural imaginaries but also introduces a symbolic substratum that operates on an unconscious, archetypal level of audience reception.

This study is grounded in the theoretical frameworks established by Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and Carol S. Pearson, alongside the narrative and structural analyses of cinema developed by Robert McKee, Blake Snyder, and John Truby. The article also extends the author's previous scholarly work on the Western genre and historical cinema, particularly *Western Remakes: Textual and Cultural Aspects*^[3] and *War Film: Morphological and Dramaturgical Analysis*^[4]. Previous research has demonstrated a sustained engagement with the narrative structures, genre conventions, and cultural functions of historically oriented cinema. Continuing in this vein, the present study explores the evolution of archetypal female representations within Western culture.

Carl Jung, a Swiss psychologist and founder of analytical psychology, presented the theory of archetypes as "the transmission of collective contents originally derived

from the unconscious. Another well-known expression of the archetypes is myth and fairy tale"^[5] (p. 4).

Among the limited studies, specifically dedicated to the female hero, one of the most notable is the book *The Female Hero in American and British Literature*. The authors underline: "The great works on the hero—such as Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Dorothy Norman's *The Hero: Myth/image/Symbol*, and Lord Raglan's *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama*—all begin with the assumption that the hero is male. This prevailing bias has given the impression that in literature and life, heroism is a male phenomenon. This work begins with the assumption that women are and have been heroic, but that the culture has often been unable to recognize female heroism"^[1] (p. 4). Psychologist and author Carol S. Pearson is acknowledged in scholarly discussions for her typology of archetypes, which served as a key methodological basis for the present research. Her precise organization and lucid delivery of ideas have attracted attention and appreciation from a broad audience.

Extensive examination was also devoted to methodological literature on film dramaturgy. Robert McKee, a prominent theorist in screenwriting, dissected the underlying structural principles that govern effective storytelling. Blake Snyder, a screenwriter and industry consultant, formulated the "Save the Cat!" methodology, which simplifies screenplay structure into clearly defined narrative beats. John Truby, a respected screenwriting educator, offered a more nuanced approach to narrative construction, focusing on genre-specific frameworks and the dynamics of character evolution.

Referring back to the theories of Carl Gustav Jung, it should be noted that archetypes are deeply connected to mythology, as they originate from timeless symbolic narratives that reflect the collective unconscious and fundamental human experiences. Jung regarded mythology as a crucial framework for interpreting archetypes, which he defined as universal, unconscious psychic structures expressed through collective cultural symbols: "We meet these same motifs in the fantasies, dreams, deliria, and delusions of individuals living today... They impress, influence, and fascinate us... and can therefore manifest itself spontaneously anywhere, at any time"^[6] (p. 847).

Within the framework of art history, sacred prototypes appear in visual works, in which their symbols, movements,

and stories are rendered as pictorial metaphors for timeless ideas—affection, knowledge, conflict, and abundance. In this way, deities operate as philosophical abstractions that preserve ties to legendary heritage while also fostering personal insight through the projection of the subconscious onto hallowed depictions.

Within the Western genre—centred on conflicts among

cultures, social groups, and individuals—the figure of the European woman frequently emerges as an intercultural agent, adept at bridging antagonistic factions. The principal archetype embodying this function is Eirene, the ancient Greek goddess of peace, and Themis—the goddess of justice, embodied together in the painting *Peace and Justice* (1745) by Pompeo Girolamo Batoni (**Figure 2**).



Figure 2. *Peace and Justice* (1745) by Pompeo Girolamo Batoni.

The female intercultural agent in Westerns functions not only as a bridge between different forms of conflict, including those between Indigenous peoples and settlers as well as those related to law and disorder, but also embodies the aspiration for dialogue and cohesion through peaceful engagement. Reflecting on his travels to America and his interactions with Pueblo Indian culture, Carl Jung remarked: “We always require an outside point to stand on, in order to apply the lever of criticism... How, for example, can we become conscious of national peculiarities if we have never had the opportunity to regard our own nation from outside? Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves”^[7]. Through this approach, Jung aimed to identify common ground to facilitate intercultural communication.

4. Archetypal Analysis of Female Characters in Westerns

Deities within mythological frameworks function as potent archetypal symbols, embodying essential dimensions of the human psyche and the collective unconscious. Carol S. Pearson admits: “Spiritual seekers may conceive of archetypes as gods and goddesses, encoded in the collective unconscious, whom we scorn at our own risk”^[8]. Mythic

female deities act as emblems embodying core philosophical and psychological dimensions: natural powers, societal functions, ethical principles, and internal struggles. Such figures shape and arrange human perception, operating as bridges between personal and communal spheres of consciousness.

Rhea is one of the earliest Greek goddesses embodying the motif of protecting offspring. While mythology presents numerous goddesses who save or safeguard their children, Rhea predates them all: she was the first to manifest this archetype, acting in the age of the Titans, which preceded the Olympian pantheon. Her image is formed at a prehistoric, archaic level of mythological consciousness, which corresponds to the idea of archetypes as irrational and ahistorical structures. Jung compares the structure of the archetype with a building: “We live on the upper storey and are only aware that the lower storey is slightly old-fashioned. As to what lies beneath the earth’s surface, of that we remain totally unconscious”^[6] (p. 53, 54).

Unlike later goddesses, who often operate within complex narratives reflecting social and cultural transformations, Rhea fulfils her role in the primordial form of the maternal archetype. She does not merely protect her son Zeus (**Figure 3**)—her actions constitute a fundamental mythological act, establishing the foundation for subsequent variations of this archetype across different cultures.



Figure 3. *Rhea giving the rock to Cronus* (first half of the 19th century) by Karl Friedrich Schinkel.

Thus, Rhea ideally embodies the concept of the archetype as a structure rooted in the prehistoric, irrational psychology of humanity. She represents the most ancient prototype of the protective mother, emerging prior to the rational interpretation of such narratives. Three female characters from Western films (**Figures 4–6**)—Deborah Wright from *Cheyenne Autumn* directed by John Ford (1964), Cresta Lee from *Soldier Blue* directed by Ralph Nelson (1970), and Sarah Ashley from *Australia* directed by Baz Luhrmann (2008) embody the archetype of Rhea, symbolizing motherhood, protection, and the preservation of the future amidst chaos. Rhea, who saved Zeus from death and preserved his life to restore cosmic order, represents care, strategic wisdom, and the ability to overcome threats for a higher purpose. All three mentioned female heroes also embody the *Caregiver* archetype, which symbolizes care, protection, and

selflessness for others.

Carl Jung consistently highlights the multifaceted nature of the mother archetype within mythological narratives: “The concept of the Great Mother belongs to the field of comparative religion and embraces widely varying types of mothergoddess”^[5] (p. 7); “Like any other archetype, the mother archetype appears under an almost infinite variety of aspects... First in importance are the personal mother and grandmother, stepmother and mother-in-law; then any woman with whom a relationship exists—for example, a nurse or governess or perhaps a remote ancestress”^[5] (p. 14). Within the Western films analysed here, the archetype of Rhea is embodied by characters such as the schoolteacher, the nurturing young woman, and the adoptive mother—figures who offer maternal care and warmth to children in vulnerable circumstances.



Figure 4. Deborah Wright from *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964) directed by John Ford, film frame.



Figure 5. Cresta Lee from *Soldier Blue* (1970) directed by Ralph Nelson, film frame.



Figure 6. Sarah Ashley from *Australia* (2008) directed by Baz Luhrmann, film frame.

Portrayed in *Cheyenne Autumn*, Deborah Wright is a teacher who advocates for the Cheyenne people in their struggle for freedom, embodying the archetype of Rhea through her determination to defend the oppressed despite personal suffering and external threats. Reflecting Rhea's role, she perseveres amid violence and injustice, upholding faith in justice while striving to ensure a hopeful future for those she considers her children. Her mission is not only protection but also the restoration of balance between people, which resonates with Rhea's role as the guardian of a new order. Deborah Wright also functions as the Caregiver, seeking to protect the Native American Cheyenne from injustice and destruction. Her care is expressed through compassion and a desire to restore justice, even when it contradicts her own culture. She is willing to sacrifice her comfort and safety for the weak, making her the embodiment of caring for those who are defenceless.

One of the most insightful female heroes in Western cinema is Cresta Lee from *Soldier Blue*. After spending an extended period living among Native Americans, she transforms into an intercultural agent, embodying the Rhea archetype through her profound appreciation for life amid chaos and devastation. In parallel with Rhea, she takes on the protector's role, striving to mitigate violence and save lives during the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864. Her efforts focus on safeguarding human dignity and pursuing justice within a war-torn world, capturing the core essence of the Rhea archetype.

Cresta Lee represents the Caregiver as a determined and wise mediator who defends the Native population, in this case, the Indians, from the brutality of white settlers. Her

courage, pragmatism, and sense of duty make her not only a saviour but also someone striving to bridge two opposing cultures. She acts as a defender of the oppressed, using her intellect and diplomatic abilities. Additionally, she takes care of the main character, soldier Honus Gant, healing him and protecting him from enemies.

Beyond the Caregiver archetype, Cresta Lee's character in *Soldier Blue* also embodies the Sage archetype due to her ability to see the world as it is, her pursuit of truth, and understanding of the broader picture of events. Her behaviour, thinking, and actions in the film highlight a deep awareness of human nature and the tragedy unfolding around her. Deeply aware of the injustice and brutality fuelling the conflict between American soldiers and Native peoples, Cresta Lee stands apart from those blinded by prejudice or blind obedience. Seeking truth and justice, she opposes mass violence and slaughter. Her empathy toward Native communities reveals an ability to transcend superficial stereotypes, recognizing them not as adversaries but as individuals striving to preserve their culture and way of life.

The Rhea archetype is embodied in the character of Sarah Ashley in *Australia*, as she protects Nullah from multiple threats to his life and freedom. Just as Rhea protected her children from Cronus's cruelty, this Englishwoman becomes a guardian within colonial Australia's harsh environment, where racism, inequality, and forced family separation loom large. Serving as an intercultural agent bridging European and Aboriginal Australian cultures, she strives to cultivate harmony and justice in a world fractured by prejudice. Her struggle against discrimination, colonial oppression, and war's devastation manifests the maternal strength and pro-

pective spirit characteristic of Rhea in mythology. Sarah Ashley's character in *Australia* embodies the Caregiver archetype through her transformation from a stiff English aristocrat to a loving mother and protector of the boy Nullah. Her caregiving is expressed in her battle against racism, colonial prejudices, and the dangers of war. She becomes the bridge between whites and Aborigines, not only protecting Nullah but also embracing his culture, making her a symbol of unity and love.

The three described female heroes not only take on the role of mothers (symbolically) protecting those in need of care but also act as creators, preserving hope for the restoration of order and harmony. Their willingness to sacrifice for higher goals and their determination to protect the weak link them to Rhea as an archetypal figure of wisdom, tolerance, and care for the future. In all three cases, the Caregiver archetype manifests in self-sacrifice, the desire to protect the oppressed, and overcoming social and cultural barriers to save others. These female heroes, each in their own way, demonstrate the power of care that can change the world around them.

Sarah Ashley's character in *Australia* combines the archetypes of the Caregiver and the Lover. The Lover archetype is expressed through her strong emotional connection with Drover, who helps her see the world differently,

uncover her passion for life, and overcome the limitations of her former arrogant worldview. Love becomes not only a personal goal but also a motivator for her care of Nullah, strengthening her determination to create a safe and loving world for her new family. Thus, the Lover archetype enhances her mission as the Caregiver, as through love she becomes more humane, profound, and attached to those she protects. The image of Sarah Ashley's hero represents a transition from the Caregiver archetype to the Lover archetype in this study. In the still frame (**Figure 6**), it is evident how these two archetypes combine. The frame includes not only her and the children but also a man. Family becomes paramount value for Sarah Ashley.

As a visual reference for the Aphrodite archetype, Jacques-Louis David's painting *Mars Being Disarmed by Venus* was chosen (**Figure 7**). Aphrodite (Roman Venus) serves as a mediator, capable of reconciling even the most destructive forces. Her influence is not aggressive, but rather, through charm, beauty, and love, she achieves her goal. Typically depicted as warlike and harsh, Ares (Roman Mars) is shown here disarmed and calm, emphasizing his submission to the power of love. This scene symbolizes not only a romantic connection but also a broader idea of reconciliation and peace, where love plays a key role in overcoming conflicts.



Figure 7. *Mars Being Disarmed by Venus* (1824) by Jacques-Louis David (fragment).

The films in which the love story is central are connected with the Aphrodite archetype. The female heroes

Stand With A Fist from *Dances with Wolves* directed by Kevin Costner (1990) and Cora Munro from *The Last of the*

Mohicans directed by Michael Mann (1992) embody both the Aphrodite and Lover archetypes, since their personas embody motifs of affection, fervent desire, profound feeling, and cohesive energy (**Figures 8 and 9**).



Figure 8. Stands With A Fist from *Dances with Wolves* (1990) directed by Kevin Costner, film frame.



Figure 9. Cora Munro from *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) directed by Michael Mann, film frame.

The protagonist of *Dances with Wolves*, *Stands With A Fist*, represents the white adopted daughter of Kicking Bird, the tribe's shaman. Her affection for John Dunbar weaves a vital link between the world of her own people and that of the "outsider." This embodies the archetype of Aphrodite as a goddess who unites and transforms through love. With her communicative disposition, tolerance, and emotional complexity, she becomes a pivotal figure around whom transformation occurs. Additionally, she functions as an intercultural agent by serving specifically as a translator between the Sioux language and English. The Lover archetype in *Stands With A Fist* is expressed through her transformative love. She inspires John to become part of her world, to change, and to learn to understand her people's culture. Her emotional depth and devotion to her feelings demonstrate her willingness to stand by her love, even at the

cost of risk and sacrifice. She seeks harmony and meaning in love, which becomes the foundation of her new life.

Exhibiting qualities akin to Aphrodite, Cora embodies a compelling inner strength that enables her to navigate and unite two conflicting realms—the structured British colonial society and the Indigenous cultures of North America, between familiar civilization and untamed wilderness. Far from a passive observer, she actively engages in the narrative, displaying resilience, empathy, and openness toward diverse ways of life. Her bond with Nathaniel "Hawkeye" Poe transcends romance, symbolizing the fusion of disparate cultures. In the manner of Aphrodite, who wields love as an instrument of harmony and reconciliation, Cora's role cultivates understanding and connection amid a world fraught with conflict and fragmentation.

According to the Lover archetype Cora follows her

emotions fearlessly, defying social conventions and embracing love as a guiding force. Her relationship with Nathaniel is not just personal but transformative—it challenges cultural boundaries and signifies the possibility of unity beyond prejudice. Her willingness to risk everything for love and her devotion to those she cares for reflect the essence of the Lover archetype: the pursuit of profound emotional connection, self-discovery through love, and the courage to defy societal constraints for the sake of passion. Through her dual role as both Aphrodite and the Lover, Cora Munro stands as a symbol of love's ability to transcend divisions, proving that affection, empathy, and devotion can serve as bridges between even the most polarized worlds.

Both Cora and Stands With A Fist represent a love that transforms both themselves and their beloveds, making

love a source of strength and harmony. They openly follow their feelings, even when it puts them at risk. They are protagonists through whom affection emerges as a catalyst for transformation, motivation, and the transcendence of limits.

The female hero of *The Last of the Mohicans*, Alice Munro, embodies the image of the ancient Greek goddess Hebe (**Figure 10**), the goddess of youth, through her purity, innocence, and tragic departure, which leaves her forever young in memory (**Figure 11**). In the film adaptation, Alice Munro is portrayed as a delicate and vulnerable character, untouched by the brutality that permeates her environment. Though not engaged as a combatant or a driving force in the narrative conflict, her role underscores the juxtaposition between youthful innocence and the grim realities of warfare.



Figure 10. *Hebe Feeding the Eagle of Jupiter (Juventas and Jupiter in the Form of an Eagle)* (mid-19th century) by Giuseppe Rambelli.



Figure 11. Alice Munro from *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) directed by Michael Mann, film frame.

Analogous to the timeless nature of the goddess Hebe in mythology, Alice is perceived by viewers as an ethereal figure, embodying a sense of lightness and detachment from the surrounding violence. Her tragic passing at the peak of youth turns her into an enduring symbol of purity and unblemished innocence, much like Hebe, who never ages or declines. Moreover, Hebe's mythological association with renewal and the advent of spring signifies rebirth and fresh starts. Within this framework, although Alice does not experience a literal transformation, she functions as an emblem of enduring memory—representing an unblemished purity and radiant innocence that cannot persist within the harsh realities of cruelty but endure symbolically in collective remembrance, paralleling Hebe's perpetually youthful essence.

The Innocent archetype is expressed in Alice Munro through her sincerity, kindness, and belief in the goodness of people. Alice represents a pure soul who retains her innocence even in the face of a cruel world. As the youngest daughter in the Munro family, Alice unintentionally finds herself at the centre of the conflict between two cultures—British colonialists and indigenous people. The filmmakers present this hero to the audience as defenceless and childishly naive, a very young girl who is constantly protected by her sister Cora or Uncas and seeks to return to the safety of her father. In dangerous situations, she loses her composure and becomes completely helpless.

The reciprocal rapport between Alice and Uncas serves as a cinematic metaphor for the potential coexistence and cultural synthesis between the British colonists and the Mohican tribe. Despite the ultimately tragic trajectory of their relationship, it foregrounds Alice's aspiration for reconcil-

iation and unity amidst a narrative landscape fractured by violence and discord. Alice and Uncas have almost no dialogue in the film, but their mutual attention is conveyed through silent gestures. Uncas shows care for her, protecting her in perilous situations, while Alice responds with trust and gratitude. This creates an impression of emotional closeness between them.

Therefore, the image of Alice Munro combines the traits of the archetypal Hebe, associated with eternal youth and the idea of renewal, and the Innocent archetype, which is revealed through her purity, sincerity, and role as a mediator between two conflicting worlds. Her tragic fate makes her not just a victim of circumstances, but a symbol of youth, harmony, and resistance to evil, which makes her image both profound and meaningful.

Artemis, revered as the goddess of hunting, chastity, and autonomy functions as the guardian of individuals who embrace solitude and self-reliance (**Figure 12**). This mythological archetype finds a compelling cinematic parallel in Josephine Monaghan, the protagonist of *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993), directed by Maggie Greenwald. Josephine is compelled to forsake conventional feminine identity, adopting a male persona to navigate the perils of survival.

Echoing Artemis's defiance of societal conventions, Josephine's narrative embodies themes of resilience, autonomy, and profound personal metamorphosis within the brutal context of the American frontier. Her departure from familiar domestic confines to forge a new existence in the unforgiving landscape of the Wild West highlights her rejection of traditional gender roles and societal expectations. In a manner akin to Artemis's protective role over her wards, Josephine assumes responsibility for others, integrating into and sup-

porting her community despite omnipresent threats.

The goddess's emblematic repudiation of marriage and subservience is mirrored in Josephine's concealment of her femininity and resistance to normative gender constraints. The film notably emphasizes her acquisition of

marksmanship skills (**Figure 13**), reinforcing the connection to Artemis's legendary prowess as an archer. This mastery not only ensures Josephine's survival but also secures her status and respect within a harsh environment where power is contingent on physical competence and self-defence.



Figure 12. *Diana Cazadora* (1896) by Arturo Michelena.



Figure 13. Josephine Monaghan from *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) directed by Maggie Greenwald, film frame.

The Sage archetype represents inner strength, the ability to transform, and the power to create order from chaos. This archetype is reflected in Josephine's actions, as she not only changes her own life but also influences the world around her. She undergoes a literal transformation, adopting a new name and male identity. This metamorphosis requires courage and deep self-awareness, enabling her to turn perceived weakness into strength. The Sage is one who brings harmony to a world of disorder. Josephine establishes her place in society, earns the respect of those around her, and demonstrates that she can be a leader in an environment where women were typically relegated to the lowest social positions.

Thus, Josephine, akin to Artemis, embodies autonomy and self-reliance, challenging conventional expectations of gender roles. Like the Sage, she creates a new reality for herself and others, overcoming obstacles and transforming

her existence within a hostile world. Her journey stands as a motivating illustration of resilience, metamorphosis, and resistance to wrongdoing, reflecting the enduring prototypes of classical myth and shared human psyche.

The central female protagonist of *The Last of the Dogmen* (1995, directed by Tab Murphy) Professor Lillian Diane "L.D." Sloan, an archaeologist and scholar, exemplifies the archetype of Clio, the muse of history, alongside the Seeker archetype. Her characterization and narrative function articulate a profound engagement with the past, a relentless pursuit of hidden truths, and a bridging role between disparate cultures. As both investigator and academic, Lillian Sloan embodies Clio through her dedication to the recovery and preservation of historical memory. Her quest to unearth the lost narratives of extinct civilizations directly aligns with Clio's mythological purpose—to protect and commemorate significant peoples and events (**Figure 14**).



Figure 14. *Clio, Muse of History* (1632) by Artemisia Gentileschi.

Lillian's perception of archaeology as a vocation aimed at deepening humanity's historical consciousness underscores her mission within the film: the restoration of historical authenticity (**Figure 15**). Her informed understanding of Indigenous traditions, coupled with her respect and empa-

thy for the tragic legacies embedded within those cultures, highlights her commitment beyond mere exploration, emphasizing cultural preservation. In this capacity, she functions as a custodian of collective memory, ensuring the enduring resonance of voices from the past.



Figure 15. Professor Lillian Sloan from *Last of the Dogmen* (1995) directed by Tab Murphy, film frame.

Traditional iconography associates Clio not only with books but also with a trumpet, emblematic of renown. While Lillian embarks on a journey to reveal the unknown, she ultimately prioritizes the safeguarding of the culture she uncovers over personal acclaim, choosing peace and preservation above fame.

The Seeker archetype manifests in Lillian through her relentless pursuit of discovery and her desire to push beyond the familiar. Her exploration of uncharted territories and quest to find the lost tribe of the Dogmen symbolize an unquenchable thirst for truth and new horizons. She is willing to take risks, venturing into harsh and dangerous conditions to gain knowledge that will reshape humanity's understanding of history. The Seeker is not just someone who searches for external discoveries but also for inner self-awareness. Through her journey, Lillian uncovers not only the mysteries of the past but also her own connection to the world around her.

Within the film, Lillian functions as an intermediary between the Indigenous community and her colleague Lewis Gates, fulfilling the dual role of translator and intercultural facilitator. Her mediation transcends mere linguistic conversion, as she actively enables Gates to comprehend the cultural practices and epistemologies of the Native people. This intermediary position underscores her profound respect for both cultural spheres and her commitment to promoting

mutual understanding and harmonious dialogue. This quality links her to Clio, who preserves the connection between the past and the present, as well as to the Seeker, who strives for mutual understanding and the pursuit of truth by overcoming barriers.

Lillian Sloan embodies a profound love for history, an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and the ability to unite opposites. Her archetypal connection to Clio and the Seeker makes her not only a scholar but also a symbol of historical preservation, intellectual curiosity, and cultural understanding – one capable of breaking down the barriers that divide people.

FBI Special Agent Jane Banner, the central female protagonist of *Wind River* (2017, directed by Taylor Sheridan), vividly personifies the archetype of Themis, the ancient Greek goddess of justice, alongside the Ruler archetype. Her unwavering resolve to restore justice and safeguard the vulnerable—despite limited experience and the formidable challenges posed by her environment—constructs a complex and compelling character.

Themis, emblematic of justice and legal order, represents the quest for equilibrium, the protection of those whose rights have been infringed upon, and the lawful punishment of criminals to restore social harmony (**Figure 16**). Jane Banner undertakes the investigation into the murder of a young woman from the Northern Arapaho tribe, navigating

unfamiliar local dynamics and the pervasive mistrust toward authorities on the reservation. In this capacity, she operates

as an intermediary between federal law enforcement and a community historically disenfranchised by systemic neglect.



Figure 16. *Justice Punishing Injustice* (*Justice is represented by Madame Adélaïde*) (1737) by Jean-Marc Nattier.

Jane's role as mediator is characterized by her efforts to engage respectfully with Indigenous customs while pursuing legal justice. Her profound empathy for the victim and sincere commitment to aiding the bereaved family, alongside her determination to hold the perpetrators accountable, reinforce her alignment with Themis's archetypal function as a protector of the oppressed.

Additionally, *Wind River*, as a representative of the often overlooked neo-western genre that complexly weaves together elements of past and future, demands critical scholarly attention. The thematic concerns addressed in this film can be characterized as follows: "*Wind River* shows the violent battle between the sexes (sexual abuse and femicide)... The sexually encoded gender struggle here is simultaneously shaped by racist tendencies and a latent class conflict... The Inner frontier in *Wind River* addresses cultural, gender-political, class-political, racism-based and mythical aspects"^[9].

The Ruler archetype manifests in Jane Banner through her willingness to fight for justice despite fear and inexperience. She faces extreme environmental conditions, cultural tensions, and direct threats to her life, yet remains committed to her mission (**Figures 17 and 18**). Like a true Ruler, Jane displays courage when confronted with danger—whether physical threats or systemic injustice. Her alliance with Cory Lambert, a hunter deeply familiar with local realities, highlights her ability to accept help and listen to those who understand the culture better than she does. The female hero of this film stands at the intersection of two worlds: the legal system to which she belongs and the Indigenous community whose culture is foreign to her. Despite this divide, she strives to understand their pain, share their grief, and honour the memory of the deceased. Her empathy and willingness to listen set her apart from those who merely perform their duties without emotional involvement.



Figure 17. Jane Banner from *Wind River* (2017) directed by Taylor Sheridan, film frame nom. 1.



Figure 18. Jane Banner from *Wind River* (2017) directed by Taylor Sheridan, film frame nom. 2.

Jane Banner represents the struggle for justice, combining the qualities of Themis (fairness and balance) and the Ruler (courage and determination). Her deep concern for the murdered girl and her family, along with her role as a mediator between cultures, makes her a symbol of hope—a reminder that justice remains possible even in a world marked by violence and indifference. Another female hero who embodies the Ruler archetype while also reflecting the archetype of the vengeance goddess Nemesis is Clare Carroll, the protagonist of *The Nightingale*.

Nemesis, in ancient Greek mythology, embodies retributive justice, tasked with restoring equilibrium disrupted by human hubris and cruelty (**Figure 19**). Her divine func-

tion centres on punishing wrongdoers who disturb the cosmic harmony through acts of evil. Clare, the female hero from *The Nightingale* (2018, directed by Jennifer Kent), having suffered the devastating loss of her family and the destruction of her former life, emerges as a living incarnation of wrath and retribution (**Figure 20**). Driven by a quest for justice, she endeavours to avenge a world fractured by the brutal actions of British soldiers. Her mission is to re-establish balance by holding the perpetrators accountable. The justice enacted by Nemesis is characterized by its impassive and unyielding nature. While Clare assumes this formidable role, her path is fraught with internal turmoil, as the consuming forces of rage and vengeance threaten to erode her very humanity.



Figure 19. Nemesis (1837) by Alfred Rethel.



Figure 20. Clare Carroll from *The Nightingale* (2018) directed by Jennifer Kent, film frame.

Beyond the archetype of Nemesis, Clare also embodies the Warrior archetype. This is reflected in her determination, resilience, and willingness to fight to the end. Despite enduring immense suffering and trauma, Clare continues forward, proving her strength both through physical combat and unwavering spirit.

A pivotal element in Clare's journey is her interaction with Billy, a local Aboriginal guide, who plays a fundamental role in her internal transformation. Their initially fraught relationship, marked by mutual suspicion, gradually develops into a partnership grounded in respect and a shared commitment to justice. Through Billy's guidance, Clare comes to understand that her quest transcends personal vengeance, reflecting a broader struggle against the systemic violence perpetrated by British colonizers upon Indigenous communities. This revelation profoundly expands her motivation beyond mere retribution.

Clare embodies two potent primal drives: the maternal instinct and the instinct for vengeance. These fundamental impulses are universal, transcending nationality, geography, and historical period. In the film, the Aboriginal woman who is captured and raped by English soldiers—and loses sight of her son amid the trauma—powerfully illustrates how the maternal instinct and the trauma of violence resonate across

cultures. Similarly, Clare not only suffers the loss of her family but also endures this same form of trauma, linking her personal pain to a collective experience of suffering.

Carl Jung's exploration of the connection between instincts and archetypes provides a theoretical framework for understanding these primal forces as foundational components of the human psyche: "What we properly call instincts are physiological urges, and are perceived by the senses. But at the same time, they also manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images. These manifestations are what I call the archetypes. They are without known origin; and they reproduce themselves in any time or in any part of the world—even where transmission by direct descent or "cross fertilization" through migration must be ruled out"^[10].

The female hero of the film *Hostiles* (2017, directed by Scott Cooper)—Rosalee Quaid, embodies the Demeter archetype, the goddess of motherhood and fertility (**Figure 21**), through her deep grief for her murdered children and her determination to preserve her connection to maternal love despite the horrors she has suffered (**Figure 22**). She also represents the Caregiver archetype, due to her ability to retain her humanity, openness, and warmth even in the face of loss and hatred that could have consumed her.



Figure 21. *The Return of Persephone (to Her Mother)* (1891) by Frederic Leighton.



Figure 22. Rosalee Quaid from *Hostiles* (2017) directed by Scott Cooper, film frame nom. 1.

Reminiscent of Demeter lamenting Persephone's absence, Rosalee endures profound sorrow following the passing of her offspring. Rather than fostering resentment, her pain reveals extraordinary fortitude as a parent who persists in pursuing affection and compassion in the face of bereavement. Based on the theoretical framework proposed by Carol S. Pearson: "The challenge of the Demeter archetype requires any of us, but particularly those who have experienced loss, to resist pulling back in fear from trusting the love we have for one another and instead to love more fiercely and fully"^[2] (p. 28).

Rosalee embraces her transformed identity, mirroring Demeter's resilience in the myth of Persephone, where strength is found through acceptance and compromise. She commits to a collective journey, persevering through numerous challenges, and ultimately takes in a Cheyenne orphan

boy (**Figure 23**). This act signifies her capacity to mend her maternal grief and extend compassion and care to a vulnerable child.

Through her humanity, Rosalee Quaid also embodies the Caregiver archetype. Despite her family being killed by a Comanche war party, Rosalee does not harbour hatred toward other nations. She expresses warmth and care toward the Cheyenne family traveling with her and seeks to understand their culture and pain. Her sincerity, compassion, and kindness make her the embodiment of the Caregiver, who maintains faith in human goodness even in a world filled with cruelty. Accepting the Cheyenne boy into her life symbolizes her ability to move forward despite her losses. This act underscores her openness, her belief in the possibility of reconciliation between cultures, and her commitment to creating a new family.



Figure 23. Rosalee Quaid from *Hostiles* (2017) directed by Scott Cooper, film frame nom. 2.

Rosalee Quaid is both Demeter, symbolizing grief and unwavering maternal love, and the Caregiver, who preserves faith in goodness and the desire to care for others. Her tragedy does not make her cruel; on the contrary, she remains a source of warmth and hope, enabling her not only to connect with the Native Americans but also to offer love to someone in need.

Catherine Weldon, the female hero of *Woman Walks Ahead* (2017, directed by Susanna White) and a historical artist, embodies the Persephone archetype—the goddess of transition and rebirth (**Figure 24**), as well as the Creator archetype. Her journey to the Dakota Territory, her dedi-

cation to understanding the Sioux world, and her alliance with Chief Sitting Bull establish her as a bridge between the conflicting realms of American colonizers and Indigenous peoples. Acting as both mediator and catalyst for transformation, Weldon undertakes a profound inner evolution that reflects her role in reshaping perceptions and realities. Her courage and steadfastness exemplify key principles outlined in Carol S. Pearson's theoretical model. "Persephone's ease in moving back and forth between the worlds and the seasons can be a model for our gaining ease in shifting between multiple roles and adjusting to new life stages that require different things from us"^[2] (p. 171).



Figure 24. *Persephone* (1912) by John William Waterhouse.

Mirroring Persephone's role as a figure straddling two realms, Catherine ventures into the unfamiliar environment of the Native American reservation, driven by a desire to comprehend and shed light on the suffering of a people facing displacement and destruction (**Figure 25**). This immersion marks not only a physical crossing but also a profound personal transformation and the revelation of deeper truths. Acting as a vital link between the external world and Indigenous culture, she courageously engages with their hardships, willingly risking both her reputation and her life in defence of their rights. Persephone not only symbolizes transition but also rebirth. Through her connection with Chief Sitting

Bull, Catherine rekindles his belief that his voice can still be heard. She awakens in him the strength to resist injustice and the will to fight for his people's vital needs.

As a Creator, the artist Catherine Weldon is a deeply creative individual driven by a desire to shape and build. She seeks to create a world where Native American culture and rights are acknowledged. Her wish to capture Sitting Bull's image in a portrait reflects her commitment to preserving their history and passing it on to future generations. She sees her mission not merely as creating a work of art but as building bridges between cultures and fostering mutual understanding.



Figure 25. Catherine Weldon from *Woman Walks Ahead* (2017) directed by Susanna White, film frame.

Catherine functions not only as an artist but also as a cultural intermediary. Her connection with Sitting Bull transcends the typical artist-model dynamic, evolving into a partnership of alliance, support, and friendship. Through this bond, she actively fosters communication and understanding between Indigenous communities and the broader external society. Her genuine interest in and respect for Native American culture make her a key figure capable of breaking down barriers of prejudice. As a Creator, she acts boldly against societal expectations, transcending the traditional role of women in society. Her pursuit of creative freedom and her fight for justice embody the spirit of creation.

By entering an unfamiliar world, Catherine Weldon embodies the Persephone archetype, undergoing a transformative journey through which she uncovers new significance and helps another community reclaim hope. She is also a Creator, as through art, mediation, and courageous actions, she seeks to build a new bridge between cultures, preserve a vanishing world, and uphold justice. Her role underscores that through creativity and empathy, transformation is possible—not only within oneself but also in the world around.

5. The Relationship between Genre Conventions and Female Characterization

Western films gained popularity due to their cinematic language, spectacular visuals, and memorable characters. A classic Western has several characteristic features: the setting is most often the Wild West, the frontier zone, isolated regions, and the wilderness; themes often include the confrontation between settlers and Native Americans, locals and

outlaws, with an emphasis on the honor code over the existing legal system; dramaturgy is dynamic, accompanied by numerous shootouts, duels, fistfights, and horseback riding, with a happy ending.

The cinematic language of the Western is characterized by outdoor shooting—wide shots of the wilderness (deserts, mountains, prairies) symbolize freedom, isolation, and danger. The use of characteristic motifs, such as guitars, violins, and dramatic orchestration, enhances the atmosphere of adventure. The sandy, golden, and brown tones create a sense of the authenticity of the Wild West. There is a clear tempo rhythm, with tense shootout scenes alternating with meditative episodes of observing nature or dialogue. A brutal aesthetic is present: harshness, severity, minimalism, and the naturalism of violent scenes.

At the same time, the cinematic language of the Western is directly linked to the genre diffusion of the Western. While maintaining certain primary determinants, the genre acquires increasingly more discrete features. The Western genre dynamically evolves, causing a contradiction between the functioning of new principles of organizing the morphological and dramaturgical systems of the genre and its scientific interpretation. The increasing popularity of this genre dictates the need for further scientific reflection on the morphological transformations of the modern Western.

Some modern authors examine the Western genre in light of numerous literary influences, including *The Bible* and classical epics such as *Gilgamesh*, *The Iliad*, and *The Odyssey*. They note, that “the archetypal patterns that give the American Western transhistorical significance continue to remerge in other guises as we explore new frontiers... The themes of friendship, courage, self-mastery, violence, re-

demption, community, and wanderlust that are the enduring legacy of the American Western are also integral to ancient literary traditions”^[11].

Westerns share a common historical context, which is quite challenging for filmmakers: “the best use of history, and the only legitimate excuse to set a film in the past and thereby add untold millions to the budget, is anachronism—to use the past as a clear glass through which you show us the present”^[12].

The Westerns examined in this article highlight and interpret real events based on shedding light on present-day societal vices. Specifically:

- Events documented by historians: the Cheyenne Exodus (1878–1879) in the film *Cheyenne Autumn*; the Sand Creek massacre (1864) in *Soldier Blue*; events of the French and Indian War (1754–1763), particularly the siege of Fort William Henry in *The Last of the Mohicans*; the bombing of Darwin during World War II (1942) and the issue of the “stolen generation” in *Australia*; the genocide of Aboriginal people in the so-called “Black War” in Tasmania in *The Nightingale*;
- Biographies of real historical figures: American businessman Joe (Johanna) Monahan (1850–1904) in *The Ballad of Little Jo*; Swiss-American artist and activist with the National Indian Defense Association Caroline Weldon (1844–1921) in *Woman Walks Ahead*;
- The era of the colonization of the West, the conflict between white settlers and Native Americans, and Native American culture (*Dances with Wolves*, *Hostiles*);
- Issues of life for Native Americans in modern reservations (contemporary Western *Wind River*), and others.

It is worth noting that the greatest diffusion of the Western occurs with historical dramas or biographical films, epic films, adventure films, melodramas and thrillers. This also affects the cinematic language of the film. In historical drama Westerns, much attention is given to the accuracy of dates, names, locations, and a realistic approach to costumes, weapons, and interiors. The music becomes more classical, emphasizing the seriousness of the events. In adventure Westerns, the focus is on dynamic action scenes: horseback riding, chases, and battles. Bright colours and rhythmic music create an atmosphere of adventure. The musical theme acquires an epic or heroic sound. The fusion

of Western and melodrama deepens the genre’s cinematic language, blending action with intimate close-ups, dramatic lighting, and emotional storytelling. In thriller Westerns, the narrative pace becomes more tense, and the music is dramatic and dark. Surreal accents, night scenes, close-ups of characters’ faces, and the interplay of light and shadow are often used to create suspense.

The genre dictates not only the dramaturgy and cinematic language but also shapes female characters. For example, in historical dramas or biographical films, the emphasis is on realism and historical accuracy, which makes female characters in these films more layered, with a focus on their social and emotional roles within specific historical events (*The Ballad of Little Jo*, *Woman Walks Ahead*). In epic or adventure Westerns, female heroes are portrayed as more heroic and active, with a strong emphasis on their ability to handle extreme situations and physical challenges (*Australia*, *Last of the Dogmen*, *The Last of the Mohicans*). In thrillers, on the other hand, female characters may be more tense and psychologically complex, reflecting elements of survival struggles or moral and ethical dilemmas (*Wind River*, *The Nightingale*).

Archetypes and film genres may or may not intersect equally. The primary task of the genre and its conventions is to meet audience expectations, achieve box-office success, and win prestigious film awards. Thus, it logically follows that some archetypes for female characters are now more prioritized by filmmakers in the era of strengthening gender equality. At the same time, archetypes can manifest in female characters unconsciously, even for the creators of the film. As Jung said: “...it seems to me probable that the real nature of the archetype is not capable of being made conscious, that it is transcendent, on which account I call it psychoid”^[13].

It should be noted that female archetypes in the Western genre play a particularly important role, as the Western often, under the guise of action and editing spectacles, exposes real historical events, sometimes forgotten or even hidden in the mass media.

6. Discussion: On the Question of the Feminist Western

Interdisciplinary approaches are essential for a nuanced understanding of Western films and the representation of fe-

male characters. Analysing these works requires the integration of multiple perspectives: archetypal analysis illuminates the recurring symbolic patterns and mythic structures that inform character and narrative; gender studies and feminist theory provide critical tools for examining power dynamics, agency, and the social positioning of women; film studies offer methods to explore cinematography, mise-en-scène, and narrative construction; and psychology contributes insights into character motivation, identity formation, and audience reception. By combining these diverse frameworks, scholars can generate richer, more complex interpretations, revealing how cultural, social, and psychological dimensions intersect to shape the depiction of women on screen and the ideological messages conveyed by the Western genre. Therefore, it was decided to examine sources that engage with an in-depth study of female representations in Westerns in the context of feminism, gender studies, cultural anthropology, socio-historical dimensions of violence, colonialism, and cultural identity, as reflected in the works below.

So, in her article *Searching for a Feminist Western...*^[14], Maureen T. Schwarz examines three films: *The Searchers* (1956), *The Hired Hand* (1971), and *The Missing* (2003) in order to test her analytical framework and evaluate the applicability of her hypothesis concerning the feminist Western. Through this comparative analysis, Schwarz argues that a Western may be considered feminist only if it meets several criteria: the narrative must actively challenge and rework the conventions of the mainstream Western; the development of the plot should be driven by the actions of a female protagonist rather than merely motivated by male characters; female characters' dialogue must question and disrupt dominant masculine discourse while articulating agency; and, finally, the film's meanings should remain open and multiple rather than fixed and singular.

Although the aim of Schwarz's article and her film selection do not coincide directly with the focus of the present study, her work addresses issues that are highly relevant here. These include the fear of racial mixing among white populations, sexual violence, the formation of white national identity—typically constructed around male characters in opposition to Indigenous peoples—the representation of mixed-race individuals, the marginalization of Native American women, and themes of defection or regency (alignment with Indigenous communities). Similar issues are explored in the

films analysed in this study, such as *Wind River* (2017), *Australia* (2008), and *Dances with Wolves* (1990), highlighting intersections between narrative treatment of race, gender, and cultural conflict across different Westerns.

This unique collection of essays is presented in the volume *Women in the Western*, edited by Sue Matheson, as it offers a study of an extensive filmography, spanning from the earliest Westerns of the 1910s to productions of the 2010s, and is organized into three parts: *Roles on the Range*, examining early portrayals of stuntwomen, melodramatic heroines, and figures negotiating masculine spaces; *Women's Issues in Post-war, Revisionist, and Feminist Westerns*, which explores cross-cultural representation, female agency, sexual violence, and the evolving identity of women in more recent films; *Filmography and Bibliographies*. According to the editor, this volume constitutes the first concerted effort to summarize the data on women in Westerns. One of its main strengths is its historical depth, including extensive references to biographical and historical sources. In her introduction, Sue Matheson outlines the wide range of social statuses occupied by women in Westerns and emphasizes: "These women (like all women in Westerns) transmit complicated cultural coding about the nature of westward expansionism, heroism, family life, manliness, and femininity"^[15], thereby framing the complex and shifting nature of female representation across the genre.

In the context of the present study, two articles from this volume are of particular interest: *Clytemnestra and Electra under Western Skies* by Martin M. Winkler and "*We been haunted a long time*"—*Raped Women in Westerns* by Maria Cecília de Miranda N. Coelho.

The article by Martin M. Winkler is noteworthy in that the author identifies interpretations of the ancient Greek myths of Clytemnestra and Electra in a number of Western films^[16]. The filmography analysed in Winkler's study does not overlap with that of the present research, as it does not involve any analysis of intercultural communication or conflict. Moreover, while Winkler's study focuses on tragic myths, the present article engages with theogonic myths. Nevertheless, the recourse to the mythological origins of each narrative is undoubtedly valuable, recalling Joseph Campbell's work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*^[17], which conceptualizes mythology as a structural framework of any narrative.

Maria Cecília de Miranda N. Coelho, in her article,

extensively draws upon the ancient Greek epics, particularly the Iliad and the Odyssey, to illuminate the issue of violence against women. In the notes to her article, the author cites a comment by J. L. Borges: “I think nowadays, while literary men seem to have neglected their epic duties, the epic has been saved for us, strangely enough, by the Western”^[18]. Overall, the article presents a chronologically broad discourse on the theme of sexual violence, ranging from epic and Shakespearean tragedy, through a considerable number of films addressing this issue, and concluding with the Western *The Ballad of Little Jo*, which is also analysed in the present study. This article constitutes a serious and thoughtful attempt to examine the roots of rape representations, particularly its disturbing heroicization, and to reflect on the possibility of its transformation in the future.

The final study to be highlighted in this paragraph is Mark E. Wildermuth, *Feminism and the Western in Film and Television*. This work provides the clearest criteria for selecting a filmography based on the principle that the central narrative of a Western must focus on a female protagonist in a professional capacity. The term “professional” here refers to a character who moves from the private domestic sphere into public life through the performance of her work and core social function. Wildermuth also establishes a precise terminological framework for the study: he defines the pro-feminist visual Western as a feminist cultural artifact, as well as any cinematic or television Western that, through its plot and characters, presents and implicitly supports progressive concepts of the female subject endowed with political and social agency as a subject in the contemporary cultural environment that produced the Western. There are some overlaps between Wildermuth’s filmography and that considered in this article. The author examines the representation of female characters in films *Soldier Blue* (1970), *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) and provides detailed and insightful analyses of their protagonists.

Notably, Wildermuth highlights one of the most tragic scene is Western history: “The film’s depiction of the horrifying Sand Creek massacre where Native American women are raped and butchered by the cavalymen offers riveting testimony to the devastating effects of racism, misogyny and imperialism on the American West”^[19] (p. 107). In the

present study, this scene is analysed in the context of the main character, Cresta Lee, and her attempts—ultimately unsuccessful—to save Native children, which is interpreted through the archetype of the Caregiver. The character of Josephine Monaghan in *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993) is examined in detail, emphasizing her professional realization as a shepherd and her broader hardships, as well as the psychological tension caused by her need to conceal her female identity. Similarly, the character of Cora Munro in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) is analysed comprehensively by Wildermuth. Although Cora attains professional status only briefly as a nurse in the fort’s hospital, she demonstrates considerable skill and resourcefulness on the frontier, saving her sister’s life in one scene. She also asserts independence and agency in her speech, challenging her father and fiancé who demeaned the settlers as if they were subjects of the Crown.

Overall, Wildermuth addresses themes of colonialism, violence, misogyny, and cruelty, which are also central to the present study. In his conclusions, the author appeals to the reader with a humanistic message: “As violence seems to escalate, these Westerns continue to ask the question of what it means to be civilized in a country that in many ways was founded in savagery. The answer provided by the feminist Western is clear even if it is complex. Civilization is about cooperation more than competition, it is about harmony more than discord, and it is about diversity and mutuality more than blind unity”^[19] (p. 155). Thus, the role of the woman as a mediator is brought to the foreground; this issue is central to the present article.

It should be noted, however, that these sources do not cover Australian Westerns, which deal with similar issues: sexual violence against women, racial mixing, colonization, and the role of women in these complex processes, which often articulated more explicitly than in American Westerns. In this article, Australian Westerns such as *Australia* (2008) and *The Nightingale* (2018) have been included in the analysis. Furthermore, the sources reviewed do not examine female archetypes based on Greek mythology or Carol Pearson’s classification of archetypes. In my view, this topic is of equal interest to both scholars and filmmakers; therefore, the aim of the present article is to provide an archetypal and genre-based analysis of female representation in Westerns.

7. Biographical and Composite Images of Pioneer Women of the Wild West in American Literature and Painting

Archetypes of ancient Greek goddesses are reflected, among other cultural strata, in the formative narratives of the United States. Of particular interest is the figure of Columbia, repeatedly visualized by American artists as a

national allegory. *American Progress* is a 1872 painting by John Gast (Figure 26). In it, Columbia is depicted as a luminous, airborne figure traversing North America while stringing a telegraph wire—an emblem of technological advancement and civilizational expansion. The composition incorporates multiple symbols of agriculture and land cultivation and resonates with the theoretical framework proposed in the works of Annette Kolodny, particularly through its implicit alignment with the archetype of Demeter.



Figure 26. *American Progress* (1872) by John Gast.

The lower right section of the painting presents a carefully constructed agrarian iconography: farmers, ploughed fields, and livestock signify the transformation of land into a productive agricultural space. Within this visual rhetoric, Columbia functions not merely as a passive symbol but as an active agent of progress, guiding the process of cultivation and settlement. She appears to carry with her the instruments of knowledge and culture into territories perceived as “unsettled.” The book she holds signifies education and

intellectual order, while the telegraph wire represents technological connectivity; together, these elements articulate a broader conception of progress in which agriculture serves as the foundational layer of civilization.

Columbia’s trajectory, from the industrialized and urbanized East toward the agrarian frontier of the West, encodes a teleological narrative of expansion. The West is rendered as a liminal space, situated between wilderness and cultivation, where subsistence economies gradually give way to

structured agricultural systems. Thus, *American Progress* operates as a visual metaphor: Columbia brings illumination, knowledge, and agrarian order to the American West, transforming untamed landscapes into farms, settlements, and infrastructural networks. Agriculture, in this context, is not merely a depiction of rural life but an ideological construct integral to the doctrine of continental expansion.

A comparable symbolic nexus between land and femininity is elaborated in Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*^[20]. Kolodny foregrounds the metaphorical convergence of the image of land and the image of woman, drawing upon a substantial corpus of letters, diaries, and memoirs of colonists. These historical testimonies are treated not only as documentary evidence but also as a cultural archive through which experiential metaphors are constructed and transmitted. Within this interpretive paradigm, the land is feminized, fertile, and nurturing—qualities that directly evoke the archetype of Demeter as the goddess of agriculture and sustenance.

In *The Land Before Her Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860*^[21], Kolodny further substantiates this framework by incorporating historical accounts of female pioneers actively engaged in agricultural practices. Figures such as Cornelia Greene, Frances Ann Tasker Carter, Ann Kennedy Wilson Poague Lindsay McGinty, and Eliza Lucas are presented as agents of cultivation and adaptation within frontier conditions. Their documented successes in agriculture reinforce the Demeterean paradigm, situating women not merely as companions in westward expansion but as primary mediators between land and culture.

The significance of Kolodny's scholarship lies in its critical revision of the dominant myth of the Western male hero, within which women occupy only marginal or auxiliary roles. In order to reconstruct a more inclusive mythopoetic framework, Kolodny examines three centuries of women's writings about the American frontier. These texts reveal that the female pioneer imagined the frontier not as a site of conquest but as a space for cultivation and domestication. Alongside the archetypal male figure striving for control over vast territories, the woman-pioneer envisioned a more modest yet symbolically potent goal: the creation of a garden to be tended and sustained. This alternative mythology

foregrounds care, continuity, and environmental attunement.

Moreover, Kolodny raises critical questions regarding environmental consciousness, suggesting that contemporary attitudes toward nature might have evolved differently had female perspectives, centered on cultivation rather than domination, prevailed in shaping the myth of the Wild West. Her work thus contributes significantly to the reassessment of gendered narratives within American cultural history.

In contrast to the richness of literary sources, visual representations of the European settler woman remain comparatively scarce. This thematic marginalization is evident not only in literature but also in painting. Even in the few identified works, the female figure rarely occupies a central compositional role and is more often relegated to a secondary position (**Figures 27–29**).

These works collectively demonstrate a compositional hierarchy in which the narrative emphasis remains on movement, survival, or collective migration, while the female figure is positioned as a stabilizing yet secondary presence. In *Life Saver* (**Figure 27**), the dramatic tension of the scene foregrounds action and rescue, with the woman's presence contributing to the emotional register rather than dominating the narrative. In *Madonna of the Prairie* (**Figure 28**), Koerner introduces iconography with religious connotations, elevating the female figure to a symbolic maternal archetype; however, even here the emphasis lies less on individual agency than on her role as a bearer of continuity and moral order. In *The Road to Oregon...* (**Figure 29**), the woman is embedded within the migratory group, visually subordinated to the broader dynamics of westward movement.

Turning to contemporary American art, one observes a notable absence of the white female pioneer as a central subject. Instead, modern artists tend to focus on male cowboy imagery (Mark Maggiori), landscapes and animals (Lynn Attig), stylized reinterpretations of cowboys in female form (Felice House), representations of Native Americans (Thomas Blackshear), landscapes and historical painting (Steve Atkinson). This selective emphasis raises a critical question: why does the figure of the white settler woman remain underrepresented in contemporary visual culture? The answer may lie either in the persistence of established iconographic traditions or in the limited accessibility of relevant works within the public domain.

In conclusion, the protagonists of Kolodny's studies

possess substantial potential for adaptation into cinematic narratives. Their lives, grounded in documented historical experience, offer a rich foundation for character-driven storytelling that diverges from conventional Western tropes. Unlike the archetypal lone cowboy, these women embody resilience through cultivation, negotiation with the environment, and the creation of sustainable domestic spaces under

extreme conditions. Their stories would enable filmmakers to explore alternative mythologies of the American West—ones centered on endurance, ecological awareness, and the redefinition of heroism. Such adaptations could not only diversify the genre but also restore a historically grounded and gender-inclusive perspective to the cultural imagination of the frontier.



Figure 27. *Life Saver* (1910) by C.M. Russell.



Figure 28. *Madonna of the Prairie* (1921) by W.H.D. Koerner.



Figure 29. *The Road to Oregon (Lone Travel, or Travel in Groups of a Few, as Andy Had Known it, Was Practically a Thing of the Past)* (1933) by W.H.D. Koerner.

Overall, the biographical and composite representations of pioneer women of the American West should be understood as forms of artistic interpretation of historical memory. Individual histories are connected to broader ideas of the frontier, territorial expansion, civilization, and heroism, reinforced by archetypal^[22] and Western genre models^[23]. At the same time, gender representations associated with the frontier are not fixed: studies of contemporary Westerns demonstrate transformations in traditional models of the hero and masculinity within the genre^[24]. In the context of frontier representation, this makes it possible to approach archetypal constructions critically while taking into account their colonial context^[25].

These aspects are also reflected in the ways historical figures are artistically constructed. When an image moves between different media and narrative forms, it may retain recognizable features while acquiring new emphases and functions^[26]. At the same time, the representation of women does not necessarily imply an expansion of female subjectivity: V. Liotz's analysis of contemporary Greek women's literature shows how narrative and discursive strategies may reproduce sexist and anti-feminist representations of femininity^[27]. Applied to representations of pioneer women, this perspective draws attention not only to signs of autonomy but also to the ways in which they are artistically interpreted.

Visual representation is particularly important in this context. It is constructed through composition, posture, clothing, gesture, attributes, and the figure's interaction with space. As J. Hou, X. Tian, and Z. Zhang demonstrate in their study of historical Chinese figurines, visual characteristics of female figures may convey information about status, identity, and forms of agency^[28]. Despite the differences in artistic and historical-cultural contexts, this principle of visual analysis can also be applied to American painting, where visual devices contribute to the construction of the pioneer woman's image. Her representation thus functions not only as a means of preserving biographical material but also as a form of interpreting women's historical experience.

In this context, R. Solik's approach is particularly relevant, as he considers artistic originality through the relationship between existing artistic forms and changing historical and cultural contexts^[29]. In American painting, this makes it possible to view representations of pioneer women as artistic interpretations of their biographies, in which the selection

of visual characteristics shapes the image of the woman as a historical figure and participant in frontier life.

8. Conclusions

The Western stands as one of the earliest cinematic genres, serving not only as entertainment but also as a visual and narrative articulation of American history and identity. Within this framework, female characters emerge as significant intercultural mediators, often functioning as narrative agents of reconciliation between opposing social, ethnic, or moral forces. An analysis of the genre reveals a consistent recurrence of archetypal patterns embodied by female protagonists. Many of these archetypes align with figures from ancient Greek mythology, particularly goddesses, whose symbolic resonance transcends temporal and geographical boundaries. The visual genealogy of these archetypes can be traced through European art of the 16th to 19th centuries, where depictions of mythological goddesses provide a rich iconographic reservoir that continues to inform cinematic representations. Such intermedial correspondences underscore the persistence of archetypal imagery across centuries, evolving from one form of visual art to another while adapting to new cultural contexts.

François-André Vincent's *The Battle Between the Romans and the Sabines Interrupted by the Sabine Women* (1781) serves as a primary visual reference in this study, foregrounding the role of women as mediators who intervene to halt conflict and restore social order. The visual method employed emphasizes cinematic imagery in dialogue with historical visual culture. In Westerns, the female figure often embodies this mediator function, reconciling opposing parties and fostering balance. The principal archetypes representing this role are Eirene, the ancient Greek goddess of peace, and Themis, the goddess of justice, famously depicted together in Pompeo Girolamo Batoni's *Peace and Justice* (1745) (**Figure 2**). These paintings provide both conceptual and aesthetic models that inform the depiction of the female peacemaker on screen, illustrating how classical iconography continues to shape narrative and symbolic roles within the Western genre.

In the Westerns analysed, several archetypal figures corresponding to classical Greek goddesses have been identified, including Rhea, Aphrodite, Hebe, Artemis, Clio, Themis,

Nemesis, Demeter, and Persephone. These divine prototypes serve not merely as symbolic references but actively shape the narrative and character dynamics, illustrating the multiplicity of female roles within the genre. The presence of such diverse archetypes underscores the capacity of women in these films to mediate, transform, and create—functioning as agents of moral, social, and cultural change. Far from passive, these figures embody both continuity and innovation, linking mythological motifs with the active construction of identity and the reconfiguration of traditional gender paradigms in the Western frontier. In several Westerns (*Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), *Soldier Blue* (1970), *Australia* (2008)), the female protagonist assumes the role of an intercultural mediator, bridging the divide between settler and Indigenous communities. Acting as a protector and advocate—particularly in the defense of Indigenous children—she embodies the archetype of Rhea, the nurturing mother and guardian figure, whose interventions preserve life and foster social harmony. Through this archetypal function, the character not only mitigates conflict but also actively participates in the reconstruction of ethical and cultural frameworks, demonstrating the potential of women's roles in the genre to effect both symbolic and practical transformation within the frontier landscape.

Furthermore, the roles of female characters in Westerns frequently correspond to the archetypal personae identified by Carol S. Pearson, such as the Caregiver, the Lover, the Innocent, the Sage, the Seeker, the Ruler, the Warrior, and the Creator. These archetypes serve as psychological blueprints that deepen character construction, enabling filmmakers to infuse narrative arcs with symbolic depth, emotional resonance, and universal human significance. Pearson's framework thus offers a valuable lens for interpreting the enduring appeal and recognizability of these characters, as it situates them within a cross-cultural continuum of mythic storytelling. The formal properties and narrative conventions of the Western significantly shape the portrayal of female characters. In historically oriented narratives, the emphasis on realism and accuracy fosters the depiction of socially and emotionally complex women whose agency emerges through engagement with the specific historical and cultural context. In epic or adventure variations of the genre, female protagonists are often rendered more heroic and physically resilient, actively participating in the central conflicts. In thriller-inflected

narratives, their portrayals tend toward heightened psychological intensity, reflecting themes of survival, moral choice, and internal conflict.

The historical dimension of the Western genre provides a particularly fertile ground for the development of complex female characters, as films grounded in real events often allow for richer, more nuanced portrayals. In productions such as *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993), *Woman Walks Ahead* (2017), *Soldier Blue* (1970), and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964), etc. women are positioned at the intersection of social, cultural, and political tensions, navigating conflicts that arise from colonization, racial violence, and frontier lawlessness. Such films reveal how women negotiate power and survival in moments of crisis, illustrating that the closer a narrative adheres to historical realities, the more effectively it can explore the layered identities, ethical decisions, and transformative potential of its female protagonists within the Western frontier. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that female characters in the Western genre are not merely secondary narrative agents but complex embodiments of enduring archetypes—mythological, psychological, and cultural—that transcend medium, period, and geography. Through their evolving cinematic manifestations, they continue to negotiate the intersections of myth, history, and gender within one of cinema's most enduring narrative traditions.

In conclusion, the analysis of biographical and composite images of pioneer women in the cultural discourse of the Wild West reveals a significant discrepancy between literary and visual representations. While scholarly sources, particularly the works of Annette Kolodny, recover women's voices and foreground their role in cultivating the land, constructing domestic space, and shaping an alternative, agrarian-centered mythology aligned with the Demeter archetype, painting largely marginalizes the female figure, relegating her to secondary or symbolic roles within male-dominated narratives of expansion. Even in those rare visual examples where women appear, their agency is subsumed under broader themes of migration, continuity, or moral order. This imbalance persists in contemporary art, where the image of the white female pioneer remains strikingly underrepresented in favour of male cowboy iconography, landscapes, or reinterpreted identities. Such absence points either to the endurance of established visual conventions or to limited accessibility of relevant works, and underscores the need for further schol-

arly and artistic engagement with this neglected subject. At the same time, the historically grounded narratives collected and analysed by Kolodny offer substantial potential for reinterpretation in modern visual culture, including film, where the figure of the woman-pioneer could serve as a compelling alternative to traditional Western archetypes, emphasizing resilience, cultivation, and ecological consciousness.

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