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Mémoire de Master 1

Native Women's Agency in Selected Western Films (1950-2015)

[1]

Mémoire rédigé sous la direction de M. Jocelyn Dupont, maître de conférences
en études anglophones à l'université de Perpignan

Mémoire soutenu en 1ère session en juin 2021

[1] 1 Sacheen Littlefeather, Indigenous actress and activist, photographed during the ceremony of the Oscars in 1973. Marlon Brando refused to stand up for his Oscar in *The Godfather* so she used this moment to stand up and make a statement about the representation of Indigenous people in Hollywood. She later released a documentary called "Reel Injuns" in 2019, on the same subject.

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Abstract

The Native American woman as a character in westerns films has undergone different types of characterisations since the beginnings of the genre. Due to a lack of consideration, indigenous characters operate as passive agents in the narrative strategy of a film and their role often alters and – at the same time – depends on the white male character's evolution for the sake of the storyline but also for the viewer's enjoyment. The role of a character is essential as it allows for identification and projection for the viewer. Unsurprisingly, in westerns films, male characters are the protagonists in the narrative, and they tend to fill up the whole scenic space. This genre was at first created by men and was mostly targeting men. Male filmmakers have constructed and perpetuated the myth of the indigenous woman presented as a figure of Otherness due to the process of characterisation from a white-oriented perspective. Hence, there is still a space left for women and Native women characters in western films, however the most recurrent ones are the victimized white woman, the saloon prostitute, the "Indian Princess" and the "squaw". The characterisation and the agency of Native women vary and depend on the film's period and on the filmmakers' world-view on their place and role in a film and to a further extent in society. Previous research has shown the influence of the colonial heritage, of racism and of sexism in the characterization of the Native Woman in westerns. Based on the choice of five films, from the classic period to the twenty-first century: *The Searchers* (1956), *Broken Arrow* (1950), *Little Big Man* (1970), *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972) and *The Revenant* (2015), this study will examine the agency of the Native woman as a character and the different levels of Otherness in the characterisation of the woman as an Object, a Subject and an Agent in western film narratives.

INTRODUCTION

The western genre has been a subject of academic research for many years. As anchored in the American culture, scholars and US specialists put their interest in films and stories that evoke the beginning, if not the foundation of what is nowadays one of the most powerful nations economically and politically. The US, as we know it today, is a new country, built by European settlers in the Renaissance period. Before the skyscrapers and industries, the Americas were mostly 'virgin' lands that were inhabited by different peoples. North America, the United States of our present day, was mostly occupied by indigenous people (or faultily called "Indians"). There were many tribes living in the US and in Canada, as well as in South America, more commonly known as aboriginal and Amazonian peoples. The diversity of these peoples was enormous, each of them having different cultures and traditions, different languages and codes. The encounter between the Europeans and the indigenous peoples (who were the Algonquians) was the starting point of myths and beliefs on indigenous tribes, and the start of a one-side story that is still taken for granted.

American studies academics have taken great interest in the mythological dimension in the building of the nation, and how stories and beliefs have constructed an imagery of what America was before settlement, during and after. Myths are much more present in the field of anthropology, historiography, and religious studies[2], scientists try to deconstruct the mythical approach in the quest of factual truth. Nevertheless, as Daniel Henry Pageaux writes in *Littérature Générale et Comparée* "Myths are, above all, schemes that are structured as [oral] tales and fables, from which already stems the first version of written texts". Still to quote the latter author, a myth that is a 'living story" can evolve and change through times.[3] Yet, we notice a tendency to acknowledge certain myths as factual truth, that are unquestioned or left unrevised for a long time, depending on who wrote, spread and anchored them in a collective imaginary. Due to a lack of knowledge and interest in indigenous tribes and their specific cultures, myths and beliefs resulted, and were often based on

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[2] PAGEAUX D. H., *La littérature générale et comparée*, A. Colin, 1994, p.16.
[3] *Ibidem.*

what a writer or a reporter saw with their subjective eyes. The reports made upon these peoples must not be taken as a one-truth story. Yet, it is a recurrent pattern to take a story that is transformed by a subjective point of view and acknowledge it as a truth. Most of the writers of the Renaissance period who visited and travelled overseas to see the New World, wrote about it and its peoples. The writing process is somehow tainted by the writer's subjectivity, which is neither a historic nor an ethnographic writing. Unsurprisingly, most of the reports on the New World were written by writers and poets who joined the expeditions in the quest of the exotic, a feeding material for stories and images. The reception of the New World through literature and travel narratives was positive. European readers were aroused and appealed by the curiosity and the exotic dimensions of the stories written 'on location' by writers like Francis Drake or Walter Raleigh (two authors that I will mention again later in the dissertation). Yet, most of the stories are based on the "been told" or "been seen" which demonstrates the unreliability of the discourse and the beginning of the circulation of myths. Beyond that, there is a tendency in travel narrative to embellish and amplify the exotic dimension in order to create a catchy story for the audiences.

The first images of the indigenous peoples were transmitted through writings and drawings, which created a fixed representation (or a stereotype) that has circulated as such since the colonisation era. The myth of the fringe suede, the feather headdress, the savagery and uncivilized aspect of the "Indians" are examples among many other stereotypes that are "so deeply rooted that [these myths] become basic constituents of linguistic meaning and of the process of both personal and social "remembering""[4] as Slotkin writes in his book *Gunfighter Nation, the myth of the Frontier*. The western genre, as a west-oriented narrative, cannot be approached without dismissing the First Nations which are represented or not. It is a tendency that was found in the late 30's and 40's westerns which used representation by abstraction. Native characters are spoken about, mentioned, but often lack agency as characters or do not own a time on screen at all. If they do, they will appear

[4] SLOTKIN Richard, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-century America*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

as a group, unidentified, screaming with a bow and arrows in their hands. Racism on screen, not considered as such back in the Golden Age of the western, created a gap between the representation of Native people as 'Indian' characters and the reality of indigenous people as living beings. There have been many academic writings on the classic western as a 'controversial' genre in which representations are more or less subjective and imbued with racism. The classic genre praises mostly a nationalist point of view and promotes violence against what is not 'American', considered as a threat to the nation. The stereotypes also concern Native women, who are categorised in many different ways. As characters, they become personified stereotypes of savages, the exotic prey of a male's fantasy, 'squaw', 'Indian Princess' or whore. These characterisations stem from the origins of the myths and beliefs from the Renaissance travel narratives I mentioned earlier, which validates the discriminatory aspect and unrevised representation of Native women on screen. Beyond representation, Native women's characters suffer from a weak or total absence of agency that cannot position them as agents of the actions, but more on the verge of object-subject positions, which is rather limited.

The subject of my dissertation outlines this notion of agency as in the ability to take action inside a filmic space and the way in which each Native woman's character comes up on-screen in a selection of five western films, depending on the filmmaker and the period. The place of women inside western film narratives has recently generated interest among feminist writers and scholars. Academics like Elise Marrubio, Maryam Oshanna or Debra Merskin, have helped me strengthen my research on agency, thanks to their works which are referred to several times in this dissertation.

The five films of the corpus are in chronological order**:** *Broken Arrow*, directed in 1950 by Delmer Daves, the first western film categorized as 'revisionist'. It also sets a lonesome cowboy, Tom Jeffords, who becomes the medium between the US army and the Apache people. He meets the « Indian-like » character Sonseeahray (Debra Paget) and falls in love with her. *The Searchers*, directed by John Ford in 1956, which is part of a series of western films that belong to the classic age, or

Golden Age of the genre, sets the film star John Wayne in the role of the lonesome cowboy whose quest is to find his abducted niece Debbie (Natalie Wood). On his journey, he meets Look (Beulah Archuletta), a Native woman whom his sidekick Martin marries without knowing it. *Little Big Man*, directed by Arthur Penn in 1970 and based on the novel of the same title by Thomas Berger, recounts the life of Jack Crabbe, a white man raised by the Cheyennes, called the Human Beings in the film. He meets the Native woman, Sunshine (Aimee Eccles) in the middle of the film. He has known other women before her, but he will stay with her and live among other Native people, she gives him a son who will die during the *Washita Massacre* in the arms of his mother. *Jeremiah Johnson,* alongside with *Little Big Man* is a 1972 revisionist western, directed by Sidney Pollack. The film is based on the true story of the mountain man, Jeremiah Johnson, who escaped civilisation to find refuge in the wilderness in the 19th century America. He trades scalps to the Flat-Head chief who offers him his daughter Swan (Delle Bolton) in exchange. The two of them live together with an adopted boy Jeremiah found on his way. *The Revenant,* directed in 2015 by Alejandro Iñárritu, is a contemporary western film that sets an expedition of French and English soldiers on Native soil. Hugh Glass (Leonardo Di Caprio) lost his wife during an Indian War, and he has rescued a little Native boy that he will consider as his son. During a quarrel his son is killed by one of the members of the camp. The film portrays a man in his journey towards revenge, and on his way, he meets a Native woman, Powaqa (MelawNakehk'o), daughter of the Arikaras' Chief, captive of the French soldiers. Alongside with his own narrative, Powaqa is also set on a rather short journey towards revenge.

The dissertation falls into two parts, the first part is dedicated to the place of Native women's characters as objects. Then, the second part unveils the characteristics of a subject inside a filmic space and its transition towards agency.

1. NATIVE WOMEN AS OBJECTS

The starting point of this study is the characterisation of the Native woman as an object. Creating a character is to reproduce life and emotions. In the case of the woman as an object, the character is just composed of elements pertaining to sex and gender, culture and stereotypes. The objectification is manifold and has several extensions in the western genre.

1.1 Looking at Look[5]

In *The Searchers* , the Native character called Look (Beulah Archuletta) appears in four sequences, a limited time in comparison with the other female characters in the film. She meets Martin and Ethan, the white protagonists, during their journey towards finding Debbie, the young woman abducted by the Comanches. The encounter is located at 59'18 in the film. She is seated on the floor; Martin wants to buy a blanket. The latter is the extension of Look's clothes and her body , ultimately. Buying the blanket, Martin has bought a wife without knowing it. Her character is objectified as a commodity, merchandise that can be traded for horses or weapons as it is the case in *Jeremiah Johnson* or in *The Revenant*. Except for the fact that here Martin "bought himself a wife", as Ethan says later, in exchange for hats. Look's exchange or purchase is similar to a mundane transaction where the buyer (Martin) and the seller (Look's father) undertake negotiations. The action of "buying a wife" exemplifies the process of reification of the Native woman and to a further extent testifies to the level of humanity John Ford chose to give to a Native character. Indeed, she is an item in the film and a prop to the filmmaker, besides allowing for a comic twist in the narrative.

[5] LEHMAN, PETER, RICKMAN Gregg et KITSES, JIM, « "Looking at Look's Missing Reverse Shot: Psychoanalysis and Style in John Ford's The Searchers" », *The western reader*, 1998.

Look's characterisation is weak, and she does not operate as a *round* and complex character according to the definition given by E.M. Forster in his book *Aspects of the Novel*. She appears seemingly *flat* since she is not built as a complex character with a specific personality, dialogue and feelings. Due to her only role as comic prop we can say that she is a flat character with one task. Forster writes that "flat characters were called 'humours' in the seventeenth century, and are sometimes called types, and sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed round a single idea or quality"[6] She certainly fits in the category of a caricature then as she has been given the role of the funny-looking bride that cannot be taken seriously as a human, a woman and a wife.

The lack of transitivity[7] enhances the status of object she inherits in the film. Look is not taken as a fully-fledged human because of her racial heritage which also cancels the womanly aspect of the character, in comparison with Laurie or Martha who own a space inside a presupposed man's space. As a result she is shown on screen with little interactions and emotions to share with the other characters and the viewer, more generally. Subsequently, when she is violently pushed by Martin down the hill[8], the viewer cannot feel any sort of sympathy since she seems unaffected by the situation. This scene may be considered as a violent scene nowadays but in the reality of the late fifties it was not shocking for white audiences, who were used to seeing that kind of treatment against "Indian" characters on screen in previous westerns films. Because of the misunderstanding of Native culture and the lack of acknowledgement of Native bodies as human bodies, the identification process between Native women charactersand the mainstream viewer is almost impossible. Look's character is one of the most explicit examples of the Native character's mistreatment on screen, to which the viewer cannot feel any sort of closeness because she thus becomes an 'other'. This notion

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[6] FORSTER EDWARD MORGAN, *Aspects of the novel / E. M. Forster*, London, Penguin books, coll. « Pelican book », 1963, p.26.

[7] "Transitivity specifies the different types of processes which are recognized in the language and the structures by which they are expressed. In this model, the central participant roles are actor and goal, and the interest is on whether or not the process is directed by the actor towards a goal. Transitivity structure can be characterized as agent + process + goal configuration that represents the function of language expressing the speaker's experience of the external world or his own internal world."CUNANAN Bonifacio T., « Using Transitivity as a Framework in a Stylistic Analysis of Virginia Woolf's Old Mrs. Grey », vol. 54, 2011, p. 11.

[8] See 1'04'26 in *The Searchers,* John Ford, 1956.

of Otherness plays a major role in Look's characterisation. According to the definition given by post-colonial scholars Griffiths, Aschroft and Tiffin, Look might be identified as an 'other'[9]: "[this other] can refer to the colonized others who are marginalised by imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre and, perhaps crucially, become the focus of anticipated mastery by the imperial 'ego'". Here the "mastery" is embodied by the two American cowboys who represent the US imperialism over Look, as a Native woman, ultimately an 'other' in the white male's gaze. She cannot trigger the viewer's sympathy and her character was not created in this aim. Consequently, her plain characterisation prevents identification and closeness which draws a threshold between what is morally acceptable to do on Native bodies and what is not on white bodies. Martin pushes Look whereas he could not dare argue with his white fiancé Laurie.[10] There are more remorseless acts from men towards Native characters – especially women – than to white ones.

Indeed, her character can be the equivalent of what is called a "missus": a white woman who is undesirable to men, and possibly annoying. Look embodies all these traits in her character, epitomizing each characteristic of the unwanted and rejected other. Beyond that she frees the viewer from remorse as her character is derided and was created for a comical aim. She is above all a comic prop. Ethan (John Wayne) laughs ostentatiously as she rolls down the sandy slope. Martin has expressed his annoyance towards Look since the beginning of their union, all under Ethan's cynical remarks and scoffing, turning the couple into ridicule[11]. In that way her character offers an uninhibited moment of laughter for the audience which reveals a relaxed racism and sexism, as conveyed by the sequence.

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[9] other' as opposed to 'Other' which can be translated as "grand autre", meaning the Empire centre from the colonised's point of view, in a post-colonial context. The capital O enhances the form of power exercised on the colonised others "in whose gaze the subject gains identity"ASHCROFT BILL, *Post-colonial studies: the key concepts / Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin*, 2nd edition., London New York, Routledge, coll. « Routledge key guides », 2007,p. 155.

[10] See 49'47 in *The Searchers,* John Ford, 1956.

[11] See 1'04,39 in *The Searchers,* John Ford, 1956.

The process of creating a character is essential as, in the final form, the latter has an impact on the viewer. The more a character is constructed and loaded with information and emotions, the more it allows the viewer to identify with it. Characters are an open door to identification because of their degree of agency and humanity which mirrors reality. In the case of Look, she is built upon the stereotypes and myths around the Native woman who cannot be taken seriously in the dominant discourse: the status of "Squaw" which is a generic motif for Native women characters in western films plays a major role. Her lack of American codes and culture and her language which is unintelligible to white people are the characteristics of the derided other who does not own an individual space within the space of the Other, full of others.

1.2 "The Squaw" and the issues surrounding the word.

Look is referred to as the "squaw" along the film. The term is derogatory, even more today than it already was in 1956. According to Debra Merskin in her essay "The S-Word: Discourse, Stereotypes, and the American Indian Woman" the term derives from the colonial discourse in which a squaw is a woman, a Native wife, but the etymology and the real origins of the word have never been confirmed and it can have several meanings. First, as cited in her work, we can give the theory elaborated by E. Sanders: "squaw [is] turned into a slur on the tongues of white settlers, who used it to refer derisively to Indian women in general or a part of their anatomy in particular." (E. Sanders (2004, p. A12).[12] This nomenclature as the association of the sexual part of the woman was made by non-Native men and used against Native women. It demonstrates the hybrid body of the Native women considered un-woman, or inhuman when it comes to having rights and being acknowledged but at the same time reduced to her intimate parts which are fully acknowledged as female parts and exploited by white men.

[12] MERSKIN Debra, « The S-Word: Discourse, Stereotypes, and the American Indian Woman », *Howard Journal of Communications*, vol. 21, n° 4, 29 octobre 2010, p. 348.

In *The Searchers*, Look is not sold for her ability to have sexual intercourse with Martin. She does share certain characteristics of the "Squaw" as a film character. Ultimately, the "Squaw" is a silenced character since she does not speak the dominant language. Look's passive role as a woman/object is likewise exemplified by her lack of dialogue. She is not supposed to talk since her language is not fully understandable by Martin and Ethan. The lack of communication between the Native woman and the two white cowboys reinforces the concept of otherness: she becomes the one that is fully other to them, and to the viewer. Language as a system of its own creates a connection between individuals, in the case of the dominant and dominated relationship, as in the law of the fittest, the dominant figures encroach the dominated one's space of speech. In that sense Look cannot communicate with Martin or Ethan, as if she were deprived of social and individual action of dialogue because of her gender, their ignorance of her culture and her racial heritage which do not permit it inside a Hollywood-style mainstream narrative. Instead, the only element of her communication is voiceless. Before her departure she traces an arrow on the ground to indicate the two protagonists the way to Scar's camp. She makes another attempt to talk to Martin but she is soon turned into ridicule by Ethan who tries to translate what she says in her mother tongue: *"She says her name is Wild Goose Flying in the Night Sky but she will answer to Look if that pleases you."*[13] We do not know whether he is translating right or if he just made up this name, under the presupposed idea that each Native name is systematically long and composed of natural elements. Even though her name might mean "Wild Goose Flying in the Night Sky", her naming is a translation in English, the dominant language, not even in Look's language.

[13] See 1'03'50 in *The Searchers,* John Ford 1956

Twenty years after *The Searchers*, Sydney Pollack, in *Jeremiah Johnson,* portrayed a silenced Native woman, Swan, the daughter of the Flatheads' chief. According to the importance given to spoken beings in Eurocentric perspectives, speechlessness confirms the status of non-lively beings. It brings the idea that a being who is devoid of language is also devoid of consciousness according to the naturalist ontology displayed by Descola in his work *Par delà Nature et Culture*: In classic western Enlightenment ideology anyone deprived of the ability of human – and understandable – language is thus unable to share human characteristics. In other words, any being deprived of language is an object. Hence the definition of what an object is as opposed to what is human is the foundation of European theory.[14] In that way, the representation of Native women in a state of speechlessness demonstrates their status as objects – still in a Eurocentric perspective –. Swan, being silent, is also a silent bride. The latter feature in the portrait of the Native bride stems from the colonial heritage and is carried further in the characterisation of Native women's characters on screen. Thus, the trading of Native brides is the result of the male gaze upon women which tends to objectify them for economic, political, or sexual purposes. It is the case with Look, Swan and Sonseeahray. Most of the time they are to be sold without having a word to say on it. On the other hand, as Elise Marrubio writes in *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native Women in films*, the trading of Native women "enhances the historic accuracy of the depiction of the fur traders who married Native women to forge alliances."[15] Native women were a tool both for tribes and for the colonisers through interracial marriages which eased the fur trade and business relationship between the European settlers and the Native tribes. Nevertheless, Native women were on the extreme side of the liminal[16] space between Native and white, encompassing a double objectification:

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[14] DESCOLA PHILIPPE, *Par-delà nature et culture / Philippe Descola*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Bibliothèque des sciences humaines », 2005, chapitre "Naturalisme".
[15] MARUBBIO M. Elise, *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*, University Press of Kentucky, 2009, p.189.
[16] From the notion Liminality ASHCROFT BILL, *Post-colonial studies [Texte imprimé]*, *op. cit*, p. 117

> In the course of developing commodity production, which led to the destruction of egalitarian relations, mercantile capitalism was compelled both to exploit and destroy Indian women's egalitarian role within the society. They were exploited in the sense that Indian women were found to be an important commodity in themselves in order to gain access to the particular societies. Since the relationships between Indian women and men were reciprocal, the colonial exploitation of society created a transformation in the social relations over the years resulting in a particular subjugation of Indian women[17]

This image is epitomized in *Jeremiah Johnson* since Swan is offered as a gift to Johnson. She encompasses the feature of the voiceless Native, speechless and sees herself being sold to a white man. And indeed, the historical inaccuracies in the film show the limits of the Native women's characterisation since they were not sold only because the white man came over with horses and scalps to please the Native chief but because they were strategically useful for the trade market and had tasks as women inside the tribe and outside.[18]

Sixty years after *The Searchers*, the objectification of the Native as a character is still present in westerns. The scene of camaraderie[19] in *The Revenant* (2015) reveals, in a historical approach the abduction and objectification of Native women. It is in a festive and amicable atmosphere that the viewer sees the white soldiers, laughing in their drunkenness, each of them with Native captives turned into whores on their side, as if they were the reward the men had won inside the wilderness. These women are rendered passive and voiceless, only a few of them, eased by the effect of alcohol, are sharing a moment of complicity with their recent husbands. For the others, the close-up shots on their closed, livid and inexpressive faces are a clue: the objectification process is still on-going. The intention of Iñárritu is definitely not tantamount to John Ford's intention with the objectification of

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[17] BOURGEAULT Ron G., « The Indian, the Métis and the Fur Trade Class, Sexism and Racism in the Transition from "Communism" to Capitalism », *Studies in Political Economy*, vol. 12, nº 1, janvier 1983, p.55.
18DEUR Douglas, UNITED STATES, et NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, *Empires of the turning tide: a history of Lewis and Clark National Historical Park and the Columbia-Pacific region*, 2016, p.71.
[19] See 1'45'55 in *The Revenant,* Alejandro Iñárritu, 2015

Look, the filmmaker tries to come closer to historical authenticity about the Native women's condition. Still, they remain secondary, flat characters that merely appear as extras in this sequence.

Undoubtedly, Iñárritu displayed the image of the "squaw" accurately: Powaqa (Melaw Nakehk'o), The chief's daughter from the Arikara tribe accentuates the objectification of the woman as sexual merchandise. When the main character Hugh Glass (Leonardo Di Caprio) discovers the French soldier camp, he witnesses Toussaint, a lieutenant, raping Powaqa. Since the terminology of the "squaw" is an equivalent of the English word cunt in the coloniser's language, Native women treated as "squaws" ultimately suffer from a reduction of their identity to their sexual organ. As the process of colonisation is from land to body, men overpower this part of the Native's body. As Maryann Oshana argues in her essay "Native American Women in Westerns: Reality and Myth", "Indian Women are "just like animals" and as such are the object of just a "little fun."[20] She quotes another scholar and adds "The women are the victim of a conquered culture, and therefore their bodies are conquerable". Native women's bodies are the kind of bodies that lose their owners: they become the dominant figure's property with all the traumatic effect that is generated from that process: a dissociation from one's body and an internalisation of the reification process.

The different perspectives applied to the native women character as objects depend on the film's period: Look, as merchandise in the role given by John Ford who was influenced by the racism and sexism of the fifties, Powaqa as a sexual object, a position denounced by Iñárritu. Although we can recognize these two examples as somehow radical, after the classic period, western films became more subtle in the characterisation of Native women, these characters are doubtlessly more alarming as they tend to reflect historical reality, but still encompassing implicit stereotypes that the audiences take as presupposition. The characterisation becomes more subtle, so are the stereotypes which are not considered as such anymore. Filmmakers like Delmer Daves or Arthur Penn got

[20] OSHANA Maryann, « Native American Women in Westerns: Reality and Myth », *Frontiers (Boulder)*, vol. 6, nº 3, 1981, p. 46.

involved in the representation of Native characters on screen but it is a double-edged game. There are still some dark shadows and limits in the Native woman's agency as a character.

1.3 The Queen, The Squaw and the Princess

Objectified women are a typical trait of classic Hollywood films from the fifties, and this goes hand in hand with the situation of women in society. The Western genre does not stand out from that pattern. In *Broken Arrow*, a revisionist western of the early fifties, the Native character Sonseeahray is another objectified woman. She is played by Debra Paget who was not a Native but a white American actress. Starting from this point, we can already point out the limit of the revisionist aspect of the film. The character she embodies is the "Indian Princess", even though she is not referred to as such but as a "virgin" in the film. The myth of the "Indian Princess" is typically Eurocentric and carries along with it a heavy colonial background. Indeed, this representation appeared after the creation of the Native American Queen's figure, described by colonisers when they landed on Native lands back in the period of Amerigo Vespucci's discovery of America[21]. As Elise Marrubio writes, the Queen was the representation of indigenous women as "warrior women", bare-breasted leaders and highly sexualised through the colonisers' minds. They embodied the wilderness of an untamed and virgin Nature, the unconquered America. In the end the parallel between the land and the women is drawn easily in the colonisers' view and their vision of the real inhabitants of the land is just a projection of their fantasy. America, rendered feminine as a SHE, is the personification of the Native Queen. As a matter of fact, as Marrubio observes, this image of the Queen who was eroticised but also threatening and violent faded away as "as the conquest and taming of the wild land continued […] to be replaced in Western literature and art by the Princess figure."[22] Thus, the "Indian Princess" is a softened version of the Native Queen, more approachable, reachable and accessible by the white man. She now epitomizes the land that has been tamed by the settlers, a docile and conquered woman-land. Indeed, this representation applies to Sonseeahray's character:

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[21] MARUBBIO M. Elise, *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film*, University Press of Kentucky, 2009, p. 10
[22] *Ibid*, p. 11

she is soft, gentle, and physically made attractive for the viewer. Her objectification is on a second level, she is part of a constructed male fantasy and her appearance is just the result of that projection.

Sonseeahray encapsulates all the traits that American culture wants to project into women. Her characterization is conveyed by the classic codes of Hollywood glamour, a young woman, with long straight hair, she is not brown-skinned as the role is played by a white woman wearing dark tan. She embodies the exotic Native, which is a social myth, a construct made upon the objectification and sexualisation of the Native woman. She ultimately represents the ideal Native woman that most of Hollywood's audiences want to see on screen. The fact that she is not a Native actress also facilitates the degree of agency given to the character. We can see an evolution and a different point of view in the characterisation of the Native woman promised to the white man. Look does not have any past or family, she is just traded as a commodity, whereas Sonseeahray has a background and she has been given a voice.

Still, Look's character limits the identification process because her otherness is defined as radical, she is the opposite of what a man desires as a bride and her projection as the Native 'squaw' widens the gap between the image of a fully "feminine" woman, constructed according patriarchal rules and her representation of what a Native woman is. Thus, her objectification is indeed necessary as she cannot fully be considered as a woman because of her racial heritage. Her otherness cannot allow men to project her as any woman, whereas Sonseeahray is not a radical "other", she becomes one under the mask[23] of a Native woman. Ultimately, she is other "as different from one's self"[24] as opposed to the older man. Marrubio evokes a "childlike" attitude of the "Indian Princess" who

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[23] The notion of "mask" concerning identity was approached by Frantz Fanon, a Martinican psychiatrist and writer, in his book *Black Skin, White Mask* in 1967. He approaches the concept of double identities, the interiorizing of one's identity inside a colonized and assimilated mind. In the case of Sonseeahray, the mask I refer to is the one that "real" Native women wear with all the disadvantages it implies because of racism. Here, Sonseeahray can wear the mask only for the good reasons, leaving behind the real problematic behind assimilation and colonisation.

[24] ASHCROFT BILL, *Post-colonial studies [Texte imprimé]*, *op. cit, p.155.*

yearns to learn from the white male – so is Sonseeahray's character with Jeffords. Above all, she is younger than him. In most western films the women are younger than the white hero[25]. It is, for instance, the case in *High Noon* by Zimmermann (1952). Gary Cooper (who is supposed to be thirty years old in Kane's character) was fifty years old when Grace Kelly who was supposed to be in her twenties in the role is twenty-one years old at the time of the shooting of the film. The union between a mature man and a young woman was common in Hollywood's codes of romance, and beyond the Western genre (see *Casablanca,* for example[26]). The age gap characteristic is important since it demonstrates the infantilization process of women and especially Native women as "children of the empire".[27] When the white hero comes to meet the Native woman – keeping in mind the missionary Manifest Destiny – he positions himself as the paternalist figure bringing knowledge and science to the "uncivilized" an "ignorant" Native woman.

A character is constructed to be self-sufficient but also alters the other characters' place and status in a narrative. In the case of the young Native woman marrying an older white man, she becomes other as she helps the white man to construct himself through her. Her youth contrasts with the man's maturity. Her skin colour contrasts with the white man's skin, and her gender contrasts with the male's one. She is other because the white man cannot identify with her, although she alters his own vision of himself. Beyond this, the character of the white man is valorised thanks to the relationship he has with a "young Indian bride character", the latter being shaped by stereotypes that confirm the domination of the white man. She is a curiosity that arouses and excites because she does not look like a white American or European woman. She has something new, interesting and she is ultimately sexualised because of her "exotic" traits.

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[25] VOGUER Gildas Le, « Mathieu Lacoue-Labarthe, Les Indiens dans le western américain . Paris, Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne/Collection Mondes Anglophones, 2013 », *Amerika. Mémoires, identités, territoires*, , n° 9, 20 décembre 2013.
[26] Curtiz Michael, *Casablanca*, 1942
[27] ASHCROFT BILL, *Post-colonial studies [Texte imprimé]*, *op. cit*, p.156.

Sonseeahray's role as a character remains minor, she has more dialogue than Look but she still carries stereotypes in her characterisation, such as the myth of the exotic and desirable Native woman, a myth that stems from the encounter between Matoaka (Pocahontas) and John Smith.

1.4 Pocahontas: the birth of a myth

Like most encounters between a white man and a Native woman, *Broken Arrow* is influenced by John Smith and Pocahontas' relationship. Pocahontas as a myth is the utopist and rather abusive encounter between a white English settler and a young Native woman. The two of them meet and fall in love instantly. This myth of interracial love has been written about in many ways but the first writer who fantasied about the romanticization of their relationship was John Davis in his book *Farmer of New Jersey* and short stories *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802*[28].20 According to Paul Eiken, he was the first author to write about a fictional love story between Pocahontas and John Smith. Indeed, the myth of Pocahontas is deeply anchored in American popular culture, it epitomises love and acceptance between the two worlds : the world of the Natives and the world of the whites.

Nevertheless, Pocahontas remains a liminal character who played a major role in the downplaying of colonisation. Her story written by a white man such as John Davis is shaped by the dominant's discourse of the coloniser and imbued with stereotypes and male fantasy about women. According to Mattaponi's oral history[29], Matoaka was not more than twelve years old when she first encountered John Smith. Here, we can question the love story narrative since it is not possible for a child to consent love an sexual intercourse with an adult (See, *Lolita*, Nabokov 1955). The relationship between a man and a child is difficult to picture. That is why Pocahontas, the character, is portrayed as an adult in the different films where she appears throughout decades, or slightly

[28] PAUL Heike, « Pocahontas and the Myth of Transatlantic Love », *The Myths That Made America*, Transcript Verlag, coll. « An Introduction to American Studies », 2014, p. 103.
[29] SCHILLING Vincent, *The True Story of Pocahontas: Historical Myths Versus Sad Reality*, [https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/true-story-pocahontas-historical-myths-versus-sad-reality], consulté le 17 mai 2021.

younger than Smith or Rolfe, so the age gap is not shocking for the viewer. As much as this love story can be a pure invention of writers like John Davis, it can also be a euphemism for the rape and abduction of a child. Paul Eiken who quotes William Strachey, the Secretary of the Resident Concil in Virginia, giving a description of Matoaka: "the before remembered Pochahontas, a well featured, but wanton yong girle, Powhatan's daughter, sometimes resorting to our fort, of the age then of eleven or twelve yeares,".[30] We notice how the writer uses the adjective "well-featured" to describe a twelve-year-old child, a subjective comment that carries a sexualisation and then pertains an erotic imagery that will reach many readers in Europe. This subjective description also triggers the fantasy of other writers who project the ideal bride in Pocahontas, the exotic wife that each white settler can earn as a trophy. The story of Pocahontas is thus anchored in what Paul Eike calls "The Myth of Transatlantic Love", resulting mostly from rewritings of the factual encounter between Matoaka and Smith.

More recent films like *The New World,* directed by Terence Malick and released in 2005, sets up the life of Pocahontas.[31] It tends to render more faithfully the encounter between settlers and Native people during the foundation of Jamestown back in 1606.The story of Matoaka and the love triangle between John Smith and John Rolfe in the film is a blend of historical facts and the supposed love story that never really happened. The opening credits specify the non-factual aspect of the love story between Pocahontas, but was scenarized for its poetic aspect, intermingling love, nature and the discovery of the other. Moreover, interviews of the local people who participated in the film production have approved this representation of Native people. There was a long and deep research made on Algonquian traditions and costumes so the film is as close as possible to historical accuracy. In that way, the film -not a western- does not belong to the long list of films –and mostly western films– that reinforce stereotypes about Native people. Similarly, Pocahontas is no pictured as an

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[30] PAUL Heike, « Pocahontas and the Myth of Transatlantic Love », *op. cit*, p.95.
[31] MALICK TERRENCE, *The new world Le nouveau monde / Terrence Malick, réal., scénario ; James Horner, mus. ; Emmanuel Lubezki, dir. photogr. ; Colin Farrell, Christopher Plummer, Christian Bale [et al.], act.*, Paris, Metropolitan Filmexport, 2006.

exotic creature to the viewer, arousing a male's appeal. Nevertheless, we tend to swing between her point of view, John Smith's point of view and Rolfe's point of view. In the latter's she becomes the subject of desire and curiosity. Rolfe, more than Smith, is rather puzzled by her, fascinated as if she was more than a woman, more like a woman-land, spiritually connected to the land, nature and others, a sort of living goddess.

The representation of the Native woman as an exotic object is part of the western's genericity. As we saw with Sonseeahray's portrait, one may notice the idealized physical traits given to the Native woman, so that she should appear desirable to the white man. This is a simple example among many others, but in any case, the result of these writings of myth like Pocahontas' one tells more about the fantasy animating readers and writers about the Native woman as an object of desire. She is a curiosity, a pleasant creature, or more a "noble-savage."[32] Like Sonseeahray, Sunshine (Aimee Eccles) in *Little Big Man* (Penn, 1970) is described as "a hippie-like child/woman of nature enmeshed in the landscape around her"[33] by Elise Marrubio. And even though she is not as sexualised physically as Pocahontas by Walt Disney for instance, she is associated with sexuality. Her character personifies the myth of the beautiful Native who offers herself to the white man, supposedly, like sixteenth century writers and travellers Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake testified in their overseas travel narratives:

> "[…]saving only the women, which danced and kept silence. The General permitted them to enter within our bulwark, where they continued their song and dance a reasonable time. When they had satisfied themselves, they made signs to our General to sit down[...]"[34]

> "But I protest before the Majesty of the living God, that I neither know nor believe, that any of our company, one or other, did offer insult to any of their women, and yet we saw many

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[32] PAUL Heike, « Pocahontas and the Myth of Transatlantic Love », *op. cit.*
[33] MARUBBIO M. Elise, *Killing the Indian Maiden*, *op. cit*, p.180.
[34] *Sir Francis Drake's Famous Voyage Round the World*, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2991/2991-h/2991-h.htm , consulté le 10 mai 2021.

> hundreds, and had many in our power, and of those very young and excellently favoured, which came among us without deceit, stark naked."[35]

The comments made upon these Native women the travellers had encountered are not purely descriptive. As a reader we understand a sexual connotation behind the "dances" epitomised by the sentence "When they had satisfied themselves". The narrative of the sensual Native dancing and offering intercourse as a sign of welcoming is very much a fantasy that stems from a male-dominated and colonial mindset. These unrealistic depictions are a way to sell an imagery of what is exotic outside Europe, and ultimately to attract a certain readership censored and restrained by the Renaissance's prudishness. Those images were conveyed through travel narratives at first but were carried along century after century in films and animated films. Women as exotic objects are defined mostly from a male's point of view; none of these works, films or writings uplift women's voices about their conditions and ideas about their own bodies. Thus, we feel the lack of agency of women who are being written about and not rendered as fully fledged individuals capable of speaking for themselves, which is actually not the subject of a traditional western film. Nevertheless, the sexualisation of the Native characters pertains to a certain ideal in collective imaginary: Pocahontas being the must-see Native woman who shaped the ideal Native wife to such an extent that her representation transcends the possible (*Pocahontas*, Walt Disney 1991):

> Visually, the film depicts Pocahontas as "an historically impossible multi-ethnic body," a body that was manufactured by Disney animator Glen Keane as "an ethnic blend whose convexly curved face is African, whose dark, slanted eyes are Asian and whose body proportions are Caucasian[36]

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[35] *The Discovery of Guiana, by Sir Walter Raleigh*, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2272/2272-h/2272-h.htm#link2H_4_0002], consulté le 10 mai 2021.
[36] PAUL Heike, « Pocahontas and the Myth of Transatlantic Love », *op. cit*, p. 124.

In that case, the image of the sexualised Native woman is not a comprehensive depiction of a Native woman as a real one, but more of a blend of ethnicities that is considered as exotic features by the dominant discourse of the white man in his fantasy about women and the very idea of what an exotic is or should be .As with Pocahontas' impossible blending, the notion of replacement of the other: Debra Paget as a white woman tanned to act as a Native character and Sunshine interpreted by Aimee Eccles who is not a Native woman but of Chinese descent. In other words, the ideal Native woman is anything but Native in the quintessence of her character but shaped under a presupposed "exotic" resulting from a European fantasy.

1.5 From object to subject, Sonseeahray as Pocahontas in *Broken Arrow*

John Smith and Pocahontas' encounter became a symbol of love union between white and Native, and Pocahontas' character became more than an object but the subject of love, a character that own a role in the white man's narrative. Eiken quotes a passage from John Davis' book that resonates with many scenes in *Broken Arrow*:

> The acclamations of the crowd affected to tears the sensibility of Pocahontas; but her Native modesty was abashed; and it was with delight that she obeyed the invitation of Captain Smith to wander with him, remote from vulgar curiosity, along the banks of the river. It was then she gave loose to all the tumultuous ecstasy of love; hanging on his arm and weeping with an eloquence more powerful than words. (Travels 278)[37]

[37] *Ibid,* p.103.

More than once in the film, Sonseeahray and Jeffords meet by the riverside, first when he shaves, then after their wedding, when they are sharing a moment of intimacy. During that second scene[38], she demonstrates acts of love towards Jeffords, they are in each other's arms and they talk about their feelings and future together. It is supposed to be a strong moment of intimacy, in the same way that John Davis describes it in the passage quoted above in which she becomes the subject of her own feelings and emotions.

The mirror scene[39] appears as a chase around between the two protagonists. She becomes the subject of Jeffords' love: he declares his love to her, assuming she turned him from a lonesome cowboy of the West into a softer man, fulfilled by the love she offers him. In that way, Sonseeahray allows for Jeffords's introspection. This phenomenon is translated by the use of the mirror in the first place. In the age-gap union, the young woman's position flatters the older man, unconsciously or not. His ego is boosted while he asserts his seduction power as transcending age and social status. Besides, their romance displays the patriarchal concept of the never-ending charisma of a man: regardless of whether he is young or old, his fertility is infinite in the physiological way, allowing him to give children to a woman whatever his age. In any case being with a younger woman proves he has enough energy in addition to experience, to make a woman happy: opening her to the knowledge of the fact of life. During the mirror scene, Jeffords positions himself as the bringer of civilisation into wilderness: He shows Sonseeahray a mirror : a tool from Western tradition. She positions herself as the ignorant girl who has a lot to learn from the white man. She, unlikely, does not know the concept of shaving, so he explains how he proceeds as a tutor would to his student. She is amazed by the mirror and he explains to her how to use it so she can see herself instead of looking at her reflection in the river. Ultimately, the one who has learned more about himself is Jeffords, thanks to Sonseeahray. The mirror is a tool for self-reflection, but ironically, the real mirror is Sonseeahray who allows Jeffords to meet his true self. It certainly echoes with Ovid's

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[38] See 1'19'25 in *Broken Arrow,* Delmer Daves, 1950.
[39] See 32'24, in *Broken Arrow*, Delmer Daves, 1950.

metamorphosis's tale of Narcissus contemplating himself in the river. Sonseeahray impersonates the role of the river naiad, the forest nymph welcoming the man who is imbued with the western tradition of narcissism whereas she embodies the image of purity and virginity, along with the image of the child-like-woman epitomised in her character. She changes him from the inside thanks to her pure feelings towards him, her innocence and kindness. In that way we can see that Sonseeahray becomes more than an object for the white man since she has a part herself in the construction of the man in connecting himself with Native culture (here the Apache tribe) enabling him to leave behind the white society to start his life in a Native society, siding his beloved one.

2. NATIVE WOMEN AS SUBJECTS

2.1 From Characters to true identities

Since the early age of the western genre, indigenous women have suffered from a weak characterisation and role as subject in films. Nevertheless, one may recognize the identity of women as part of their characterisation, from real life to characters. It is, indeed, an interesting point to look at, the influence of the actress on her character. This dissertation outlines the aspect of women as objects for filmmakers and audiences. Yet under the character is a real woman, an actress with origins and true identities: for instance, Look, starred by Beulah Archuletta has a filmography and is recognized as an actress. There are about thirty films in which she acts in minor characters, but she has only been credited for John Ford's *the Searchers*[40]. In terms of biography, popular online sources are very weak about her life and identity. Her nationality remains unknown, intertwining Mexican and Native origins. Besides, she played many Mexican women's roles alongside with Native women's ones. Her role in *The Searchers,* as we saw above, is clearly stereotyped and influenced by the bias of the period but she was paid and credited. We can recognize that she had a career as a coloured woman between the 1940's and the 1960's which was not very common at the time. The process of subjectification goes alongside with the relationship between the Native characters and their actresses. Indeed, the women in the selected westerns I have chosen to discuss are real persons with a life's background and career.

Here we are going to examine the different careers of the different actresses who acted in a Native's role, in a comparative way, in order to reveal the process of their characterization and degree of agency. This dissertation outlines different types of women like Beulah Archuellata (Look)a who remains close to her identity and her origins. She never performed in a way a white woman would have, with all the privilege that the title includes, as a woman from a higher rank in society. She also mostly acted in western films because it was a genre in which her identity would fit.

[40] https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0033815/

Unfortunately, the only medium that represented Native people at the time of *The Searchers* was western films. There are no such things as roles for indigenous people outside the western genre in the cinema of the 1950's. It contributes to the representation of indigenous people as characterised with the stereotypes white people have made upon them. Native people could only play Native roles, with a distorted vision of their character coming from a dominant gaze. Nevertheless, this tendency applies only to minoritized women since actresses like Debra Paget (Sonseeahray) are more likely to incarnate different types of characters. Paget's filmography is more versatile : her career is longer, half of the roles she played were white women's characters and in the other half she played Native, Indian, Spanish and Arabic characters. She is well-known as the Indian princess, or dancer "Seetha" in a series of India-inspired films. She started her career with the role of the Spanish bride in *House of Strangers* (1949). She had three important Native roles: *Broken Arrow (1950)*, *Rawhide* (1959) and *the Last Hunt (*1956)[41]. Debra Paget is a fair example of the process of othering and subjectification of the 'other', in other words, minority people, a group from which Native women are part of. The roles she played were not meant to show a white woman on screen but "exotic" ones**.** She is a dominant figure who replaced the role of the "other", thus not allowing this other to take its filmic place. While Debra Paget could impersonate many other identities, Beulah Archuletta, as a coloured woman, never played the role of the white woman. There is a different way of shooting and centring the character inside the narrative depending on their true identities. It certainly reflects with their filmic space inside a film. Debra Paget is central to the narrative of *Broken Arrow,* but also in the various films she played in and her characters always have a name. On the contrary, Beulah Archuletta is only credited for *the Searchers* and her role remains minor. She played in other films as "uncredited", playing roles without names, owning just a title like "Mexican girl" or "Indian squaw".

[41] https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0656428/?ref_=nmbio_bio_nm

In the seventies, Aimee Eccles as Sunshine in *Little Big Man* is also an example of the replacement of the other by 'another other', so to speak. She is an Asian actress of Chinese descent. She played mostly Chinese women's roles but she has two Native roles in her filmography. There is, as with Debra Paget, an issue and a limit of the geo-cultural identity since the actresses are hijacked from their real identities to impersonate women who could have played the role: Native actresses acting in the role of Native women in western film such as in *Jeremiah Johnson* and *The Revenant*.

Yet, there is something interesting concerning Swan in *Jeremiah Johnson* (Delle Bolton). This actress is somewhat unknown, she has not online data concerning her life, she has only played in *Jeremiah Johnson* and some episodes of the TV series *Monk*.[42] She is an absent actress with no online trace of life, which is rare. Just like her character Swan who seems very discreet and shy, she appears on screen but always from a distance, and not "showing-off". Some unavailable sources declare that she was part of two hundred Native women to have participated to *Jeremiah Johnson's* casting for Swan's role.[43]

Finally, Melaw Nakehk'o (Powaqa) is certainly the only Native woman to impersonate a Native woman in the films selected alongside with Beulah Archuletta. It is very interesting as both western films *The Searcher*s and *The Revenant* are the extreme opposite in terms of characterisation of the two Native women. Yet they are the only ones to feature a real Native woman in the role of a Native woman. Powaqa is the chief's daughter, not depicted as the "Indian princess" like Sonseeahray but more like a subject, she is part of the tribe as a fully-fledged member, with rights and power of decision within her people. It somehow echoes with the life of the actress : Melaw Nakehk'o fights for the survival of indigenous culture and tradition in Canada, she works and teaches at the Dechinta centre where she focuses on the recognition the stolen lands and the identities of

[42] https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0093386/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm
[43] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremiah_Johnson_(film)#cite_note-AMC-6

Indigenous people[44]. In *The Revenant* she owns a similar position in which she has to fight backs and take revenge upon a white man who have abducted her and raped her.

2.2 The filmic subject

A. The subject

The word 'subject' has several meanings and is used in many different fields such as psychology and linguistics. According to some definitions found in the *Merriam Webster* dictionary, we may focus on two different meanings. Firstly, a subject can be described as a person who is placed under control or a certain authority. It was commonly used among royal institutions in statement such as: "The king's subjects". It conveys an idea of inferiority since the origins of the expression means literally the submission of oneself inside a hierarchy in which he, she, it, appears as an object. The subject, in French, *les sujets* also refers to small inanimate objects such as statuettes. This first meaning ultimately contradicts the important definition of what a subject is in psychology and psychoanalysis: a living being capable of thoughts, feelings and *in fine* consciousness.[45] The subject, as in psychology or linguistics, applies also in the field of cinema. Indeed, a character can be defined as a filmic subject, to such a degree in which he or she owns a specific space inside a narrative. Each filmic subject has a different degree and importance in the story line, that is why we differentiate the main character (or protagonist) from secondary characters and extras. The filming techniques, ultimately, are a key element to spot and recognize the main characters from the others. For instance, there are two elements that appear on screen which can tell if a character is central to the narrative or not: presence on screen and dialogue.

[44] https://www.imdb.com/name/nm7506216/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm
[45] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subject

In this section, the visual techniques operated to frame and shoot the characters will be discussed. The main characters occupy a certain space, predominant in the frame. The protagonist is centred in the frame, often in the foreground. Sometimes there are characters around or sometimes only the background, a landscape most often in western films. The medium shot remains a reference in terms of shooting technique among other types of shots. It has long been defined as the "American shot" (plan américain) and it takes its name from the way filmmakers used it to shoot characters in western films: close enough to centre them but far enough to let the gun, the cow-boy outfit and the landscape appear in the frame altogether.[46]

Nevertheless, close-ups and extreme close-ups are also present in western films. Ultimately, the use of close and extreme close-ups is relevant in order to give a degree of importance to a character. The viewer needs to know which character is speaking, from where, to whom. Close-ups also establish a proximity between the viewer and the actor, allowing for identification. In the end, a character who is important in the story line will have more numerous close-ups and will be more centred inside a frame. These techniques also vary depending on who the character is interpreted by. The filmic space of an actor/ actress inside a shot in a sequence indicates to the viewer their degree of agency. Many close-ups are used to reveal important characters in a narrative along with important actors and actresses who deserve the right exposure under the lights because of their fame and dominance in the Hollywood industry. A film star such as Debra Paget will not have the same exposure as an uncredited actress like Beulah Archuletta. The subject of the frame thus depends on many criteria, such as the character's role inside the narrative and the actor/actress playing that role in the film. In order to analyse the Native woman's character as a subject inside a frame, some shots from the selected films will be analysed starting chronologically with *The Searchers*.

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[46] TOUSSAINT, BRUNO, *Le langage des images et des sons*, Dixit., Paris, 1999.

B. Look's space

As we saw in the first part of the dissertation, Look as a character is mostly reified, nevertheless she does occupy a certain space inside the frame so that her role can exist and be part of the story as a whole. The first time she appears on screen is important in the way it is shot. She is not alone, and not centred inside the frame although there is a close-up on her face. She is framed on the right-hand side of screen, thus revealing other members of the tribe in the background[47]. She never appears alone in the frame, only when she is found lifeless by Ethan after an attack. The latter shot is very interesting since it lasts for twenty seconds and the viewer sees Look for half a second before Ethan, who is kneeling, hides her face by standing in front of the camera, Look disappears behind Ethan's silhouette and once the blanket has been put on her, Look will never appear on screen again.[48]

Look definitely owns a filmic space as a subject since the camera is focused on her many times. Nevertheless, those shots are tantamount to the role she plays as character in the film and ultimately the space she owns as a Native woman inside an American filmic system. Although she remains a subject, she does not have yet the status of agent since the only action she undertakes -drawing the arrow- is not visually present in the narrative. The shot in which we can see her using the stone to form an arrow is lacking, and so it is not possible to claim she owns agency in the film. She remains a filmic subject as many other characters in the film such as her father or the extras who play dead Natives after an attack.

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[47] See 59'19 in *The Searchers*, John Ford 1956.
[48] See 1'08'52 in *The Searchers,* John Ford, 1956.

C. Sonseeahray's space

Sonseeahray as a filmic subject is a complex case since the actress who is incarnating the "Indian Princess" is not a Native woman, which influences her presence on-screen. Ultimately, she is more centred as Debra Paget, the actress, was one of the most famous names of the Hollywood industry of the fifties, alongside with other names such as Natalie Wood (Debbie in The Searchers). The "Indian Princess" character needs more coverage as she will be directly dealing with the male protagonist. Here Jeffords, who is pivotal in the narrative, needs a partner who happens to be Sonseeahray. She owns a specific place in the narrative, somewhat privileged, by the side of the white hero. Beyond that, as her role is also the embodiment of the ideal Native, half woman, half child, sexually attractive but not outrageously so. While politically correct for the period, her appearance on screen is extremely useful for coverage and money making. She arouses the interest of the male audience who projects her as the ideal bride, unconventional, partly exotic, but tamed. The appeal for exotic women profits indirectly Hollywood industry which counts on audiences and the craze they generate among the male public sells. However, it leaves out the people who are concerned by these representations, minoritized people who are misrepresented. In the end, the profit filmmakerin terms of money making is going further since they use a representation with a mask to attract a certain audience but on the back of the people who could have impersonated the role and could have been rewarded for it. Since Sonseeahray is not a real Native woman it accentuates this process of excluding the other. Even though she impersonates a Native woman, she is not one : her costumes and make-up are ostensibly shown on screen. It gives the audience the sense that it is not real so that it is more than acceptable for Jeffords to have a relationship with her. In terms of visual techniques she owns some reverse shots for herself which position her as a filmic subject, but again, reverse shots show the dependency of her character on the others. Implicitly, it also demonstrates the limits of her space as a filmic subject. She owns one full frame for herself when she is introduced and there is a handful of more shots in which she appears fully-framed, independently from Jeffords.

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The other shots are mostly she and Jeffords sharing the frame, revealing the lack of independence of the character as a subject of her own. Thanks to the subjective camera angle, there is always a part of Jeffords' body in the frame, most of the time his shoulder or the side of his face.

Just like Look, Sonseeahray dies at the end of film. Making the Native character disappear on screen is a recurrent pattern in western films. In that way, one does not have to deal with her anymore. It is the easy way out so the narrative can end in a morally acceptable way, avoiding thus 'miscegenation', which is an important point in the relationship between white and Native. As Elise Marrubio points out in her essay:

> On a deep level, the potential for genetically passing such inferiority and immorality plays into the fear that miscegenation produces offspring that are degenerative to society as a whole—particularly to white racial purity.[50]

In order to avoid that process of hybridization between two worlds that are also seen as incompatible, the Native woman has to be wiped out of the narrative. The disguise as "Indian Princess" works enough to let out some fantasies from audiences, it also sticks faithfully to the role which is obviously doomed to die.

The generic pattern of the Native woman's death is present in the five films at stake for this dissertation. It is also the case with Sunshine, Swan and Hugh Glass's dead wife who never appears

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[49] See 29'51 and 32'44 in *Broken Arrow*, Delmer Daves, 1950.

[50] MARUBBIO M. Elise, *Killing the Indian Maiden*, *op. cit*, p.92.

alive on screen. Powaqa, the chief's daughter, is the only Native woman character from all the corpus to stay alive.

D. Sunshine and Swan's spaces

Sunshine and Swan are somehow related characters since *Jeremiah Johnson* and *Little Big Man* belong to the same period, the early 1970's. The context of this decade plays a major role in the representation of women in society, and also in the Hollywood industry. We see the emergence of female-focused films such as *Diary of a Mad Housewife*, adapted by Eleonor Perry and her husband in 1972. It focuses mostly on a female protagonist called Tina Blaster, who is shown on screen as the subject of her abusive husband. The whole film is centred on her life and emotions and how she decides to deal with them. Female-focused films were not so common the previous decades. The 1970s were a decade sprinkled with feminist films, going hand-in-hand with the ongoing activist feminism. It had an influence on how women were shown on screen, as subjects of the camera. Nevertheless, even though western films evolved after their Golden Age to turn into 'revisionist' westerns, we can notice a deficiency concerning women of colour, and especially Native women.

Concerning the two movies at stake in this part, we surely see an improvement in terms of representation but a weak one concerning space. Their spaces may be tantamount to Sonseeahray's: they both own space inside the frame as subjects: the camera is more often shooting them in close-ups, reverse shots, thus allowing for *dialogue* (see 2.4). The shots are longer, and they appear more often 'alone' in the frame.

Still, the real improvement made in the subjectification of the Native woman character mostly concerns how she is portrayed rather than her filmic space. Sunshine and Swan's characterisations are less picturesque as Sonseeahray's for instance, which is somehow a revision of the previous presuppositions on how Native women should look. *Broken Arrow* was released in 1950 : we notice that there was not much change twenty years later in female subjects on screen. They will have more independent shots than Sonseeahray's but their presence on screen still depends on the male protagonists for the sake of the narrative. Swan, as a character, is the other part of the couple; ultimately she depends on the male character Jeremiah. The same goes for Sunshine who is the other part of the couple and ultimately depends on Jack Crabbe. They both function as the sidekick of the male protagonist but do not possess a narrative dedicated to them outside the man's narrative.

Sunshine's space, as Elise Marrubio writes, is different from the other characters: she has a deep connection with the land and is most of the time pictured as an element of nature within the landscape:

> The sound of her breath precedes her, and we first see her lying in the brush along a river, giving birth to her child in the middle of a massacre. This scene integrates Sunshine with the land itself: establishing shots (close-ups and high angles) frame her within the underbrush, against the rocks, or isolated within the frame, holding her new-born. These tightly composed shots full of leaves, grass, dirt, and water ensure that the viewer associates her with the earth […][51]

If we consider the fact that she is pictured that way, as Elise Marrubio said before, it is only to remind the viewer of the "virgin" lands and the notion of woman-land, mother earth. Back to the times when travellers landed on Native American lands during the Renaissance, they had voluntary depicted the landscape as a feminine space in which fertility is the key element to grow and provide life. Sunshine here is a filmic subject within the feminine landscape she epitomizes. This aspect is nonetheless not independent from a white male's point of view since the encounter – and the whole story too – is told by Jack Crabbe who is hypnotized by her giving birth in the wilderness: "It is this experience of Sunshine's giving birth that first binds Jack to physical aspects of the natural world—in a sense, he is reborn with her child."[52]

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[51] *Ibid,* p.180.
[52] *Ibid*, p.181.

Moreover, her role in Crabbe's narrative is first serving Crabbe for the protagonist. He takes her under his arm only in the idea to trade her for Olga, the white wife he had lost. In the original novel by Thomas Berger, Jack Crabbe is more violent than what he appears in the film by Arthur Penn. He menaces Sunshine with a gun and explicitly says he will trade her and her child for his own wife and son.

> "Now", I says, "I am going to shoot you and your child if you don't listen. Shadow That Comes in Sight was killed by the Pawnee. That was the shot you heard, and then you heard him ride away. If you are related to Shadow then maybe you have heard of Little Big Man which is what I was called when I Loved with Old Lodge Skins's band. I was a friend of the Cheyenne until they stole my wife and son. That is why I am here now. I am going to take you along with me and trade you for them."[53]

Besides the violence, Arthur Penn faithfully conserved the line in which Crabbe explicitly does not want Sunshine as a wife but will trade her for his white family. It ultimately demonstrates the first motive of Crabbe's rescue and preference for the white woman he longs to find again. However there is a turning point in which he changes his mind. When he comes back to the Human Beings with Sunshine and he discovers that the "white man" wiped out all his beloved ones. We may guess it is a transitional moment in which he refuses the colonial violence and decides then to side with the Human Beings, the people who raised him. Olga becomes a distant memory reminding him of his whiteness, that he wants to erase.

[53] BERGER Thomas, *Little Big Man*, Delta/Seymour Lawrence, 1989, p.158.

Yet, there is something different in the portrayal of Swan. She is a transitive character since she is to evolve throughout the narrative. She first appears as a silent bride. Her face is mostly hidden, there is no real direct shooting of her face. She keeps her eyes down and there is no direct shot showing her facing the camera as if she was avoiding the look of the other characters and the audience.

[54]

Nevertheless, this state is mostly introductory, and as the narrative goes on, we can see a change in the way she is framed. She passes from the stage of silent and erased to fully-framed, in action of smiles and small talks that are the demonstration of her agency. She answers with emotions, her feelings are captured on screen. This is how she is portrayed as a filmic subject on the verge of complete agent, that evolves and is seen from one point of view, and here it is mostly from Jeremiah's point of view.

[54] See 45'33, 46'21 and 1'02'08 in *Jeremiah Johnson,* Sidney Pollack, 1972.

E. Powaqa's Space

In terms of filmic techniques, the Native character Powaqa in *The Revenant* does not feature in a lot of shots. The film starts without her. She is the missing piece of the frame as she has been captured. Indeed, she appears only three times in the film, for rather short moments. Yet, she does have a main role since she leads the plot around her abduction. The character is introduced by her father at 12'01 in the film when he explains he lost her. Twelve minutes into the film is quite introductory: alongside Hugh Glass's narrative, she leads the other part of the film's narrative. Due to her short appearance one can say she is a filmic subject by mention. She is mentioned many times until we are to see her immobile on the ground next to the French camp.[55] The repetition of her name being uttered is indeed a tool so that she should not be avoided or forgotten in the plot. The film is composed of many dramatic lines, the viewer might lose track of what is happening in each narrative. That is why the scenes in which she is mentioned are sprinkled, like punctuation, in the film so the viewer will not forget about her.

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[55] See 1'43'01 in *The Revenant,* Alejandro Iñárritu, 2015.
[56] See 1'44'57, 2'23 and 1'48'01 in*The Revenant,* Alejandro Iñárritu, 2015.

Nevertheless, we ought to notice as viewer, that she has short but intense and symbolic moments on screen. In most of the sequences in which she appears, she is shot in the middle of the frame, becoming thus the centre of the attention for the viewer, the only focus. Unlike Look, she does have extreme close-ups on her face. It is a way to identify her, to acknowledge her presence as a Native woman and character in a contemporary western film. Most of the time she appears alone in the frame, which is a symbol of total independence from male characters. It is a relevant element since no other character in the previous films mentioned represents the Native woman character as independent inside a shot, or even less owning a narrative for herself.

As a subject, she is clearly on the opposite side of what Sonseeahray, Look or Sunshine represent. In an article[57] dedicated to the representation of Native characters in The Revenant, Leo Killsback, Professor at Montana State University, said: "The Revenant sets a new bar in film making as it achieves what most films fail to do—it fairly represents Indians. After all, fairness in representation is all we are asking for". There is no distorted vision or fantasy behind the creation of Native characters inside the film. Ultimately, there is no 'male gaze' behind Powaqa's character: she is not sexualised, presented as an exotic woman for the viewer. On the contrary she is the subject of forced intercourse since she is shown on screen enduring rape by a French soldier. The scene also shows that one-time act on screen but as viewers, we already know it is not the first time soldiers have sexually abused her. By representing this act of violence on screen, the filmmaker Iñárritu is intent on drawing a parallel between historical accuracy and what has been said in the dominant discourse for a long time. The reality of the relationships between white men and Native women were mostly abusive, but that is something filmmakers from the fifties failed to mention. Sonseeahray, incarnating Pocahontas' myth, is another downplaying of what happened between a young Native woman and an adult white settler.

[57] Original source not found, only excerpts from a website : https://www.indianz.com/News/2016/01/14/leo-killsback-the-revenant-tre.asp

2.3 The subject as Topic

The focus on each female character's visual space as filmic subject is essential to measure the degree of agency. Moreover, the as the word subject suggest, it is also possible to measure a character's agency in the way he/she is related to the different subjects – or themes – in the narrative. The Western genre tackles several subjects. By taking into account the fact that the Western genre is mostly a male genre directed by men for a male audience, the subjects at stake are often oriented towards male characters and situations in which they are involved. Many western films raise different themes in the narrative such as war, revenge, weapons, politics. Male actors are offered various types of characters: they play a sheriff, a cowboy, an outlaw, a farmer, a soldier, and so on and so forth. Each of those characters epitomises one or several themes: the sheriff represents authority and politics, the cowboy is a figure of freedom and violence, the soldier embodies the theme of war and also politics. These figures, as part of the themes, own an agency inside the film narrative. It is not the same for women. The roles offered to female actresses remain limited: the housewife, the bride, the schoolmistress/teacher and the whore. Ultimately, these characters are also related to certain themes: love, marriage and sex. Subjects of romance, household and sex are not independent, and they need interaction with the other subjects to be part of the narrative. The themes linked to women are necessarily creating a bond between men and women. In the issue of marriage for instance, both men and women are central. When Jeremiah Johnson marries Swan, both characters are involved in this relationship. It demonstrates the lack of independent agency of the woman as a filmic subject. Women cannot have theme or a subject dedicated only to them that is not dependent on men. They orbite around predominant themes that concern mostly men. Likewise, they act in roles such as daughters, housewives, and nieces which are subsequently linked and useful for the male characters and the narrative. Women characters are theme-related to what is supposed to attract female audiences, allowing thus identification. Indeed, women should be part of the audience as Susan Hayward exposes in *Cinema Studies : Key concepts*:

> The idea was that the film screenings would attract not just audiences but also customers. Film, then, was very early identified with consumerism. Because it was seen as an integral part of selling consumer culture, it quickly became evident that it was necessary to address a female audience as much as a male one since the woman is supposedly the arbiter of taste in the home – as opposed to the male who is the arbiter of justice outside the home (as in Westerns for example).[58]

Presupposed female themes should be intertwined in the western story line so they feel included and become a potential audience. Love stories are said to interest mostly women whereas men prefer violence and weapons. Subjects such as romance and the household are never central themes but more on the verge of male-related themes. In any case, a western film in its classic genericity includes women as part of the general male-oriented themes. They are more on the verge of the 'melodrama' aspect of the film which conveys topics such as love, family, household as Susan Hawyard explains in the section 'Melodrama':

> The intervention of psychoanalysis and feminism now brought melodrama and women's films into the critical limelight, focusing on the discourses that construct the symbolic place of 'woman and the maternal'. The western too was investigated. The dominance of male-defined problematics within the narrative, the role of women as mere triggers (sic) to male action and choice.[59]

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[58] HAYWARD Susan, « Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts, Second edition », p.215.
[59] *Ibid, p.118.*

To illustrate my point, we are going to take the four female characters in the selected western and see what themes are related to them.

A. Love and Marriage

Swan and Sonseeahray are both related to the theme of Love and Marriage. They both get married to a white man who has come into the wilderness. They act in a role that is mostly classic for women during the 1950's; doing home chores in a domestic space. Sonseeahray is meeting Jeffords for the third time, when he returns, she is pictured near a river with a basket of clothes and she says : "Waiting for you, I have washed my hair twice and my clothes three times"[60]. The spirit of the 1950's concerning women's place at home when the men are away is appropriately contained in the sentence quoted above. This is a strong but common stereotype, thinking that women's interest aside love and men is cleaning things and themselves. It also a way to remind the viewer, and female viewer that women should wash themselves to be perfectly clean, and be prepared when the man returns home. It is also a way to allow the female viewer to identify with Sonseeahray who is a housewife in becoming.

Swan is also shown on screen doing many dutiful household tasks. The contrast between the two is that Swan is helped by Johnson who knows a little better the codes of wilderness thanks to his way of living, more so, in any case, than Jeffords who comes directly from the American society. In any case, the place of women at home inside the western genre is definitely anchored since it echoes the background of the period – especially for *Broken Arrow*'s case. We notice also the historical inaccuracies in the role of women within Native tribe: they used to hunt, construct, and trade. In the film, and most westens, Native characters are given many Euro-american cultural habits. They are just doing basic chores that women in the domestic space do. They are reduced to doing European tasks that women do at home in real life. While the man lifts heavy objects, makes a fire, hunts, the Native woman is only represented doing the dishes, taking care of the children and cooking.

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[60] See 51'15, ,*Broken Arrow,* Delver Dames, 1950.

Swan, however, has several shots of herself doing 'a man's work'. In the context of Native tribes, women did the equivalent of what a man does. Since there was no 'gender roles' established within most Native peoples, jobs like hunting and cutting wood were not considered as an act of masculinity. Sidney Pollack tends to render a real aspect of what a Native woman does at home, clashing then with the western tradition of women doing the cooking and the cleaning. Both *Little Big Man* and *Jeremiah Johnson* belong to the same period of 'revisionist' westerns and yet, Sunshine is more pictured as a "western" assimilated housewife than Swan who conserves her Native knowledge and reflexes.

Marriage is also an important theme since it involves the interdependence of the two characters. Swan and Sonseeahray occupy the other half of the couple, without them the couple could not exist in the narrative. Sunshine is also a subject related to the theme of Marriage and Family life: the character is introduced by a childbirth scene and she is mostly represented accompanied by her children all along the film. She impersonates the role of the young and desirable mother:

> "Sunshine is present on screen for a total of thirteen minutes, during which she has either just given birth, is pregnant, or, "Indian style, [is] going off to have her baby." Through this constant connection of her with children and birth, and thus also sexual activity, the film renders Sunshine as a young earth mother whose fertility and beauty leave an indelible impression on Jack." [61]

[61] MARUBBIO M. Elise, *Killing the Indian Maiden*, *op. cit*, p.181.

Ultimately, it demonstrates the limits of the Native character's agency as a mother only. The womanly aspect is swapped for what is considered as the first function of women on Earth according to Christian religion and most European beliefs: her reproductive task to perpetuate the human cycle.

According to the general themes conveyed in western films, women appear to be "off-topic" when it comes to representation and characterization. Nevertheless, a space has been delimited for them in which the viewer can identify the themes and ideas linked to women such as love and sex: in the corpus, each Native woman is linked to a subject which more or less echoes the presupposed themes offered to the female audience : life, the couple, wedding, love etc. Notwithstanding, one remains out of these subjects: Look is off-topic. She may embody the subject of marriage, but it is not the aim of her presence in the film. She is not "theme-related" to women since she is not considered as one. Nor is she male-related as she is repulsed, and the character is directed to die in the end.

B. History

In *Little Big Man*, the theme of war overlooks the other themes of hybridity and miscegenation. The Native character Sunshine plays the role of the historical subject. She is present during the 7-minutes shot of the Washita massacre under General Custer's supervision: her death is extremely violent and echoes the reality of Indian wars in the US at the time: she is an important figure at that moment because she allows a process of remembrance. She epitomizes the plight of the US army's victims. The historical subject permits the audience to remember the violence carried out against indigenous women, children and men. Thus the character is no longer only an object of desire or a fantasy but a deep subject of reflection on historiography and how war narrative changed through times: a subject towards rethinking the hegemonic discourse of the winner as opposed to the defeaters of the Washita Massacre.

In his will to question the dominant discourse of wars against the Native people Arthur Penn chose an Asian actress to play the role of the Native. Due to the context in which the film was released, we may guess that his intention was to denounce not only Indian wars of the 18th century but also the on-going Vietnam War, considered as a second genocide, after the indigenous one. Through the sequence of the Washita Massacre in the film one may recollect the reference to the My Lai massacre that took place in 1968 during the Vietnam War. The dislocation of the subject contributes to the implied filmmaker's opinion denunciating the endless US violence perpetuated on minoritized peoples and how, two centuries after the wiping out of indigenous people, the issue of American use and abuse of violence has not been reviewed or questioned to avoid its repetition.

The Washita Massacre in the film is one of the most remembered scenes in *Little Big Man*. It is a seven-minutes long succession of shots of the shooting, the killing and erasing of the Native people that were on 'Native land given by the Congress'[62].The scene is accompanied by a nationalist themed music, a sort of triumph hymn for the US which clashes with the murdering. The same music is heard when the US armies enter the Native village in *The Searchers.*[63] Arthur Penn might have tried to make a reference to John Ford, since the scene takes place in the same condition. The soldiers are pushing Native people in with their horses and arms in hand.

In the middle of the rumblings and the shootings, Sunshine is running away with her children but cannot escape the bullets. She is left dead on the snowy ground alongside with other Native bodies. At that moment there is a strong and deep silence. The music goes on after with more shots on the many left-dead Natives. These shots are significant since they remind us of the photographs taken by the photo reporter Ronald l. Haeberle during the My Lai massacre. Ironically, Custer in the film says, no children and women should be killed unless they resist, which is a subjective way to say that everybody should be killed, including women and children. Likewise, Evelyn Theiss, writes for *Time* in 2018 in an article dedicated to Haeberle's reporting:

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[62] See 1'26'30 in *Little Big Man,* Arthur Penn, 1970.
[63] See 1'09'49 in *The Searchers,* John Ford, 1956.

> Women and girls were raped, and then killed. At least one soldier later confessed to cutting out villagers' tongues, and scalping others. My Lai was hardly the only instance of rape or and murder by U.S. troops in Vietnam. But in terms of intensity and scale — and because of Haeberle's photographs — it remains the emblematic massacre of the war.[64]

We can easily draw a parallel between the photographs below and the shots Arthur Penn directed during that sequence.

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[64] THEISS, EVELYN, *My Lai at 50: Ron Haeberle Recalls Photographing a Massacre | Time*, [https://time.com/longform/my-lai-massacre-ron-haeberle-photographs/], consulté le 10 mai 2021.
[65] Ronald l. Haeberle, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/mylai-massacre-evidence/

C. Revenge

Revenge and justice are two leading themes in *The Revenant's* narrative. They both are a result of excessive violence which needs to be extinguished. Contrary to the other films of the corpus, we notice a change in how women are integrated inside a "male-related" theme. Revenge does not concern women of the fifties inside a mainstream Hollywood narrative, especially in western movies. They are more the subjects of male revenge but they never perform acts of revenge themselves. Thus in The *Revenant, the Native character Powaqa brings something new inside the original western narratives as Leo* Killsback says in his article:

> Powaqa is a paragon of justice and becomes a hero in her own right. With the help of Glass, she is able to inflict a swift and just punishment upon one of her persecutors and escapes captivity. The sequence emphasizes—in a manner that few Indian-themed films have done before—that kidnapping, trafficking, and violating Indian women is a crime, immoral, and is to be met with swift and severe punishment. Powaqa is a character that single handedly dismantles the stereotypes reinforced by earlier films that exploit Indian women as easy prey for sexual violence.[67]

From Look in the fifties, rendered passive and non-responsive to brutal acts to Powaqa who handles an act of revenge with her owns hands, we can observe a considerable gap in terms of representation but also delay. It took the film industry sixty years to picture a Native woman as a character that is not reified anymore, or built upon stereotypes.

[67] Original source not found, only excerpts from a website : https://www.indianz.com/News/2016/01/14/leo-killsback-the-revenant-tre.asps

In between these two films, there are scarce cases of western films dealing with the theme of revenge that concern women taking the power over a male domination. We saw the Native character Powaqa which is the subject of revenge of her father because he lost her, but she also takes revenge on the soldier who rapes her. Just as Glass seeks revenge against Fitzgerald who killed his son. Movies like *Shane* or *Outlaw Josey Wales* are also instances of revenge films that portray one man seeking revenge for the loss of his wife and family. Thus, it shows the woman as the subject of male revenge which most of the time is the reason for revenge but never the agent of that latter. In *The Revenant,* each character is driven by the feeling and the need for revenge, whether it is done directly by the protagonist himself or indirectly (See the final scene in *The Revenant*). More precisely, we see the revenge from a woman, and a Native woman who is definitely in the process of becoming an agent. There is a change of status of the Native woman's character. In the latter film, she is no longer pretty and loving (Sonseeahray) or undesirable and funny (Look) she is part of the subject of the film, part of the topic, and she plays a major role in the narrative. She is the subject of an investigation. She is the subject of murder, revenge and ultimately she becomes agent of her own revenge.

2.4 Owning the *I*

Visual techniques are one of the most important tools to determine the character's agency inside the narrative. The last meaning of 'subject' is the grammatical subject, the pronoun that the characters will use as the 'I' in a sentence. In this part, I will discuss the grammatical subject 'I', as uttered by each Native character and how its use can be representative of the process of becoming an agent. From Look to Powaqa, through Sonseeahray, Sunshine and Swan and meeting finally the feminine voice that leads Hugh Glass into his revenge journey in *The Revenant.*

The power of the first-person pronoun, the subject *I*, is psychologically related to the *ego*. When one uses the pronoun *I* there is a process of individuation[68], or a recognition of 'oneself' as a fully fledged individual, in contrast with the *you* that is not *me.* To go further into this theory, the *I* is said by the linguist Benveniste to be stronger in terms of individuality than the third singular pronoun *she* or *he*. The third pronouns *he/she* are rather more passive than the second and first singular pronouns. A character that is referred as a *he* or *she* while she/he is in the scene cannot process individuation. Normally, the addressee of the *I* is *you* and *vice-versa*. There is no direct addressee in an utterance that involves the third-person singular. So a character who is not considered as an addressee seems spaced out from the sequence, even rendered 'invisible' since the characters are talking about him/her in the passive voice as if he/she was not there. In the end, it validates the position of the agent who can own a first person singular, a direct demonstration of agency as opposed to the second-person singular which is more of a responsive pronoun. Then, the third-person pronoun cancels the process of owning oneself through the other characters dialogue, and ultimately to the viewer.

[68] DESCOMBES Vincent, « A Philosophy of the First-Person Singular* », *Communication Theory*, , 2007, p. 7.

As I have demonstrated earlier, Look, due to weak characterisation, does not have much dialogue inside the narrative. She is referred as *she* by Ethan even though she is next to the two protagonists. He never addresses her directly with a *you* that could make her a subject.

Moreover, the total absence of Look saying *I* is a strong point that demonstrates the lack of "individuation" and the process of owning oneself through language. If we measure her agency on this scale, we can say that she definitely has no 'self' because she is inaudible saying *'I'* for the viewer or for the other characters.

Oddly enough, Swan does not pronounce the subject *I* in English. She has no line in English but in Salishan language[69]. She does not have to adapt her language to Jeremiah's but on the contrary he has to learn her language to establish a communication within the couple. We can say that her dialogue is thus a resistance act. In fact the only word she knows how to pronounce is "Yes". She has been taught this word by Jeremiah but he says explicitly that "it is the only thing she needs to know". But in fact she never uses it outside this sequence[70]. She has not dropped her mother-tongue, directly linked to her cultural heritage to learn and assimilate the white man's language. From a postcolonial point of view, we may say that it is a strong move by Sydney Pollack who refused to let a Native character speak the coloniser's language inside a western film narrative, unlike what happens in *Broken Arrow*, for instance.

Sonseeahray, Sunshine, and Powaqa own a speaking *I* that demonstrates the individuation process, namely the recognition of oneself through language since the three of them are able to speak and express a first-person singular on several occasions.

Sonseeahray's *I* is mostly responsive. If we are to count how many times she uses *I* and *you*, one may notice that she uses more the pronoun *you* in the dialogues with Jeffords. Just like Jeffords uses much more the pronoun *I*. The discussions are mostly oriented around Jeffords' feelings, hence Sonseeahray's use of *you* which is more frequent than her personal *I.*

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[69] « Salish-Spokane-Kalispel language », *Wikipedia*, 2021.
[70] See 51'07 in *Jeremiah Johnson*, Sydney Pollack, 1972.

Even though Sunshine's narrative is quite related to Jack Crabbe she does have her own dialogues. It can be a slight detail, but we can hear her pronouncing sentences such as "I think", "I believe" "I don't think that…". The ultimate action of a subject is to think. "I think therefore I am" as Descartes explained. Sunshine is a demonstration of a thinking subject. If we focus only on these subjective sentences, we shall notice that she is the only one of the corpus to use words that refer to her and her mind.

When she talks to Jack while preparing the meal[71], she uses many times the pronoun *I* and the possessive adjective "my" as in "my husband", "my sisters". It shows her as the owner of the *I* and thus as the owner of herself, as any other human being is able to process. On the contrary, when she talks about her children, she uses the pronoun "your", talking about Jack's infant as if she did not own them at all.

Powaqa owns an *I* that is unique, singular: once she has reversed the power position with Toussaint she distinctly says "I will cut off your balls"[72]in her mother tongue, which a powerful sentence coming from a Native woman character in the western genre, if not the most powerful *I* of the corpus. This unique sentence is an attempt to allegedly set a woman in action on revenge, not only on Toussaint (mostly since he tried, or has raped her), but on the general phallocratic society that uses and abuses women. She definitely can own herself through the *I* and take position during this vengeful act, as if she were to take revenge, not only for her, but for every Native person who suffered from the mischiefs of colonisation.

[71] See 1'14'58 in *Little Big Man,* Arthur Penn, 1970.
[72] See 1'47'54 in *The Revenant,* Alejandro Iñárritu, 2015.

2.5 Naming in the wilderness

From characters to real identities, we notice the importance of the true self of these women as actresses and characters in western films. Thus, the process of naming a character is part of the character's construction, whether it is a pejorative or meliorative name. The name Look is interesting; here we can ask ourselves the famous question "What's in a name?" Look up at Look, looking at look, *look* is a verb initially which means *watch*. This is highly significant of the character since she is reified in the narrative, thus she is looked upon, as an object. To a certain extent, *look* also means to "consider" which may appear surprising for a character which is not taken into consideration at all. Yet she could also have no name, since she is not considered, but oddly enough she has one, in total contradiction with her character. The very idea to give a name to a character is to subjectify, and not reify like it is the case for Look's case.

Like Look, in the corpus, the three Native women's characters are given a name: Sonseeahray, Sunshine, Swan. Each name starts with an S at the beginning which tends to echo the *S-word*[73] that I mentioned earlier. Nevertheless, the given names resonate with a positive idea: Sunshine and Swan are two names that are related to nature. It goes back to the idea of the woman-land connected to the different natural elements like the animals, the sky, the water and the air.

As an echo with Look's position, Swan, who is called *Cygne* in French, (Translated into English by Jeremiah's translator) just as Look can be renamed if her husband wishes to do it. Indeed, when her father introduces her, he does also mention that "she is called Swan, but she will answer anything you want". We have the same line concerning Look in *The Searchers* which was made twenty years before Sidney Pollack's film. It may be a hint to draw a parallel back with the context of constant renaming indigenous people once dislocated and assimilated. Just like enslaved people in the Americas could bear a name given by the slave owner, often a funny and ridiculous name, in order to erase their true self and humiliate them at the same time. We recall Kate Chopin's famous short

[73] MERSKIN Debra, « The S-Word », *op. cit.*

story “Desiree’s baby” in which one of the enslaved man is called “Coton-Maïs”, in direct link with his task in the field.[74]

2.6 Towards Agency

The transition between the characters defined as objects or subjects is explicit. However, the transition between subject and agent is more subtle. In that case, we should focus on what agency is and how these characters own an agency inside a male-dominated genre. From flat characters to round characters, according to E.M. Forster, there are some relevant hints that demonstrate how a character can become round. The round character is more developed, with more focus on it (as we saw in the filmic subject, characters need more exposure to be centred in the narrative). That process of development is indeed possible once a character is on screen for more than five minutes, physically or by abstraction. After analysing each subject’s filmic space, we would tend to say that the films which were directed more recently stage Native female characters long enough to allow them a certain agency. The duration on screen enables a time that is necessary for the development and the transition from object to subject and finally agent.

However, this is not the only tool to measure agency inside a narrative. As we saw with Powaqa, she appears rather scarcely in the film, but she is always mentioned. The character is not developed by itself, appearing on screen. There is a latent presence that makes her awaited by the audience. Her name is mentioned for one hour of film without her being shown. In terms of development, due to her short appearance we can say that she has no real process of becoming another kind of character, unlike Swan for instance. The fact is that she cannot follow the generic pattern from object to agent since she is shown on screen directly as agent. She is the object position when she lies on the ground for supposedly two visible minutes on screen, maybe more if we believe that she has been raped more than once by the French soldiers, but she immediately embraces agency when she takes revenge on Toussaint.

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[74] CHOPIN Kate, *The Awakening, and Selected Short Stories*, 2006.

On the contrary, to continue with 'short-time' characters, Look who has been defined more as an object and a filmic prop, does not share the same agency as Powaqa. Her actions as agent are more subtle. Although she is characterized as a non-thinking character deprived of background and depth she has ultimately transcended the notion of Otherness and agency on a small scale since she orients the protagonists on the right path in the narrative. Thus, we can question how it is possible for a character to maintain the state of object from beginning to end. Even in the flattest characterization one may recognize the subtle role given to Look in which she becomes not only an object but the agent of the action, namely helping the white heroes accomplish their central quest.

In terms of duration, Look and Powaqa share an equivalent space and time. But we can notice that fifty years later, some revisions have been made on what a fully-fledged agent is and what a passive agent is for the sake of the narrative (Look). The passivity of the latter character is also enhanced by her death. Cutting short time and space on screen diminishes the position as agent. Unlike Look (and the other women in the corpus), Powaqa is the only one to remain alive at the end of the film. She epitomizes the notion of 'survivance' that is linked with the idea of resilience towards the dominant violence and exploitation through the act of living. From the five films at stake, Iñárritu stands out when he avoids the Native character's death, which had been a generic pattern in western films for too long. Sonseeahray, Sunshine and Swan are more present on screen in terms of duration, which will allow a more striking transition between object-subject-agent. Swan, who appears more or less detached and erased in the first part of the film becomes agent in several sequences.

When she shares her first meal with her new family, Jeremiah tries to hold her face and she immediately pushes him out.[75] We can see the degree of agency she has and how responsive the character can be. It is rather new and unconventional in the western genre (alongside with Powaqa's revenge) not to picture minoritized people as victims of the white man, but on the contrary, taking

[75] See 51'07 in *Jeremiah Jonhson,*Sydney Pollack,1972

action, refusing, thus contradicting the passive attitude of victimization. Even though Jeremiah and Swan's love story is quite positive, we see how resilient Swan can be towards the process of assimilation. She is as powerful as he is , she makes him learn her language. There is a sequence[76] in which she teaches him how to hunt without bullets. She brings him knowledge in several fields of life. She is also shown on screen doing 'man's work' like cutting wood and building the house.

In *Little Big Man,* Sunshine's act of rebelling against the patriarchal society Jack Crabbe has inherited – somehow – is through manipulation as Elise Marrubio pointed out:

"Sunshine manipulates Little Big Man into sexually satisfying her three lonely sisters while she goes off into the snow to have their child."[77]

This is an explicit act of agency because she succeeds in convincing him to do so since he was not motivated by the idea in the first place. She insists clearly when she says "Why do you hate my sisters"[78], and Crabbe cannot answer the contrary. He does not want Sunshine to think he hates her sisters. So, Crabbe reluctantly offers himself to the three sisters, to please his wife and eventually, to please himself, even though he does not seem to take that much pleasure in the beginning. On the contrary, he does not boast for having sexually satisfied three women in one afternoon. He does acknowledge that this way of living would fit him, but he will not share the polygamy with the other boys to show off or display a sort of domination. This is rather unconventional since it depicts women as sexually needy. According to Hollywood's past of censorships (Hays Code) or taboos, picturing women claiming a need for sex is a provocative move that transgresses the codes of sexual gender roles in which the man is the one "in demand" and the woman rather passive in the act of love. Yet, it also demonstrates the stereotype about Native cultures, here the Cheyenne, as polygamous and sexually deviant to the American's mindset.[79]

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[76] See 55'15 in *Jeremiah Johnson,* Sidney Pollack, 1972
[77] MARUBBIO M. Elise, *Killing the Indian Maiden*, *op. cit, p.181.*
[78] See 1'21'33 in *Little Big Man,* Arthur Penn, 1970.
[79] MARUBBIO M. Elise, *Killing the Indian Maiden*, *op. cit.*

Sunshine has three sisters and this number reminds us of the trio of witches in Shakespeare's play *Macbeth.* With the help of the prophecy they convince the protagonist to kill the King in order to take the throne. Macbeth in under the influence of the women who instilled an idea in his head. Likewise, Sunshine in the role of Lady Macbeth maintains the idea inside Crabbe's head of fulfilling her three sisters' sexual appetite. The three of them exercise power on Crabbe. He seems somehow spellbound and cannot stop the process, once he has started to please one of the sisters, he cannot say no to the two others[80].Moreover, the tepee in which they are sleeping is a dark space, enlightened by a dim light, most of the sequence happens in the dark, the viewer only hears long gasps of pleasure. The sisters lay in a triangle and Crabbe goes from bed to bed as if he was accomplishing a ritual or a prophecy.

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[80] See 1'23'49 in *Little Big Man,* Arthur Penn,1970.
[81] *Ibid.*

The voice-over (old Jack Crabbe) commenting on the sequence tells the viewer that Crabbe processes what he calls an "Indian ritual" from which he comes out transformed and fully "Indian". Beyond the cliché, the whole ritual aspect enhances the magic behind these women who appear as witches and exercise a certain power over the man. The trick which is seen as 'sorcery' is that women, Sunshine and her three sisters can manipulate to achieve their ends, just like some men do. The Witches, since the Middle Ages have been frightening figures to men because they were seen as wielding power over them that prevents them from holding on to the situation. The theory was that women were deprived of wit. Acknowledging women as silly housewives who cannot think 'like a man', govern, or make decisions ultimately led men to think they are supernatural creatures once they can prove the contrary. Thus, "powerful" women, or just witty women were seen as witches because men could not lay their hands on them, physically or mentally speaking. Women were accused within their delimited (domestic) space to alter men's power and ability to be men through rituals and prophecies[82]. In order to justify such a loss of control, men preferred to believe into sorcery rather than considering women as naturally and socially intelligent as them. The latent threat which drove men into creating the witch figure is what Stephanie Poto calls the inverted "gender hierarchy"[83]. In *Little Big Man*'s case, the Native "witches" somehow stand alongside with these witty, "manipulative" women accused of witchcraft because they can lead a man on, inverting the idea that the woman is the one in charge of her sexual needs. Women's playfulness in manipulation is just the backlash of years of male domination, and certainly one of the most powerful and only ways to fight back the phallocratic societies they experienced throughout centuries to finally embrace their roles as agents.

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[82] SPOTO Stephanie Irene, « Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power », *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 45, 2010, p. 53-70.
[83] *Ibid.*

CONCLUSION

From myths to real identities, via by caricatures and stereotypes, the reflection I have carried so far, with the help of the feminist scholars quoted, is that the Native women's characterisation as the issue at stake cannot be concluded with a full stop. Through the different analyses exposed, we can argue that their agency has grown because of the delayed consideration given to them both on-screen and in real life. The Hollywood Western genre, from its silent period to its vanishing in 1960s, mostly excluded women and Native women from the main narrative or downsized their roles as agents. The next generation of western films reappeared in the US during the Vietnam war, the anti-western, which slightly improved the position of Native women, filmmakers tend to render a more 'realistic' characterisation. Meanwhile, in Europe, the rise of the western genre, particularly in Italy and Spain, did not really improve the position of women as characters and even less Native women as film characters. The spaghetti western, or Italian western as a genre of derision, extrapolating or mocking Hollywood's sense of right and wrong, religious, and other chauvinistic ideologies could have been one of the media to improve women's characterisation, but the position of women inside Italian narratives was not different from the classic Hollywood western genre. Nevertheless, between the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s the emergence of female-focused films and the rise of women's voice through feminist movements allowed women to take a small step in the industry of cinema. In 1968, Linda Wertmuller released one of the first female-directed western spaghetti *The Belle Starr Story,* staging a woman in the leading role. The image that was carried along from the two previous periods of male directed westerns is the docile or tamed woman, in traditional and patriarchal roles of princess and wife. So with the rise of female-led filming teams, women's characterisation started to change, allowing them to act in the roles of bandits and cowboys. Still the idea of a seductive leathered lady on a horse, even though she was outside the pattern of docile daughter or wife, was a projection of male directors who fantasied of the female version of the cowboy: the cowgirl.

Initially the cowgirl is a horsewoman, someone who rides horses, takes care of a ranch, just like the cowboy. However, the latter figure has been objectified, associating the riding of the horse with the riding of a man. From that male point of view, the imagery behind the cowgirl figure in popular culture became a symbol of sexuality within the countryside of the West: the cowgirl is not a farmer but often a dancer (*Coyote Girls*, David McNally, 2000) or an escort in a saloon. Beyond the representation of horsewomen in cinema, the whole pornographic industry used the image of the country woman, or the 'cowgirl' becoming a whole trend since sexualised costumes of cowgirls are still sold nowadays. The sexuality that is disguised in the West does not concern only women, but also many men within rodeo-riding communities. From those communities stems the figure of the homosexual cowboy, which also became a pornographic trend. In the same way, Native women suffered from a sexualised image that is still on-going in our present days, as there are also many sexualised costumes sold for play roles, carnival or Halloween events.

Even though the western genre during its golden age and respect of the Hays Code repressed the sexual drives because of the fear of miscegenation and homosexuality within the West it nevertheless transpires with unconscious sexuality as Peter Lehman writes in his article : "Looking at Look's Missing reverse shot : Psychoanalysis in *The Searchers":*

"*The Searchers* deals with a number of highly charged sexual and racial themes such as incest and miscegenation. In the 1956 social context the real American racial tensions (which were of course highly sexualised) lay between whites and blacks). The conventions of the western allow Ford to displace those tensions into the past and onto another race".[84]

[84] LEHMAN, PETER, RICKMAN Gregg et KITSES, JIM, « "Looking at Look's Missing Reverse Shot: Psychoanalysis and Style in John Ford's The Searchers" », *op. cit*, p.264.

Ultimately, the Native woman directed to die at the end of the western film (Sunshine, Swan and Sonseeharay) is one of the most explicit ways to avoid the blending of communities, highlighting Euro-American's fear of the Other and racism. However the exotic features and the sexualised images of the Native woman are the irrefutable proof of the white man's repressed desire to commune with that 'curious' and 'exotic' other which is forbidden in his society. Victor Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* (1833) is a fair instance of the hatred love towards the Other: Priest Frollo is insanely lustful towards Esmeralda, part of the gypsy community that he loathes profoundly. The non-white woman as a figure of Otherness is seen as a witch who instils devilish feelings in him, corrupting his faith and love for God. In order to eradicate the feelings towards what he hates the most he will organise her public death. The death of the woman as the Other is symbolically the death of the white man's problematic feelings towards her.

Still the agency of the Native women is ultimately reduced because of their deaths and the threat they represent for the white society. Even though feminist western films have been released recently like *Meek's Cutoff* (Kelly Reichardt, 2011) or *Jane Got a Gun* (Gavin O'Connor, 2016), the western genre is profoundly anchored in a Euro-American perspective. Indigenous peoples are not fond of western films: most of the interviews[85] that I saw of indigenous people reacting to western films are a proof that the genre belongs to a phallocratic white-narrative, excluding its protagonists and is still let somehow "unrevised". There is still a space unoccupied between revisionist westerns of the 1970s to our present day as Jörn Hetebrügge explains in an article "Another blank space in the genre, however, remains: there is room for a big post-colonial Western that tells of the conflict between Native Americans and Euro-Americans from an indigenous perspective".[86]

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[85] REACT, *Indigenous People React To Indigenous Representation In Film And TV (Pocahontas, The Lone Ranger)*, 2019.

[86] HETEBRÜGGE, JÖRN, *The Western Movie and the Image of the Native Americans - kinofenster.de*, [https://www.kinofenster.de/filme/archiv-film-des-monats/kf2003/kf2003-der-mit-dem-wolf-tanzt-english-hg1-bild-der-natives-americans/], consulté le 10 mai 2021.

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