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# The Representation of the Native American Woman in Pro-Indian and Revisionist Westerns

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**The Representation of the Native  
American Woman in Pro-Indian and  
Revisionist Westerns**

**Tiphaine PARATRE--BADOIS**

**Sous la direction de Florian TRÉGUER**

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## Introduction

Westerns have had an important part in American cinema. If the 1940s and 1950s pro-Indian westerns and the 1970s revisionist westerns were to be analyzed today, it could be relevant to see what the vision of society about women was during these decades and put it into question with a more recent and feminist approach. This perspective on women's role in society and its representation in movies have changed over time and can raise questions on how women were treated. It would also be relevant to focus particularly on one type of women : Native American women. There are few representations of Native American women in westerns because most of the time they are simply part of the background, and are seen taking care of the tribe or the children. Few movies show a Native American woman as a main character or as a character with an important part to play in the story.

Moreover, pro-Indian and revisionist westerns have a significant role in the history of American cinema. It is during the Post-World War II period that pro-Indian westerns began to be shot and became well-known in American society but also in the world. They were made in order to rehabilitate the image of Native American people who were presented as enemies and savages in previous westerns. This image was not at all accurate because it only presented a racist vision of white people toward Native American people's appearances and behaviors. Therefore, the aim of pro-Indian westerns was to give a more objective point of view of the conquest of the West as well as the representation of Native American people and their role during the conquest.

Nonetheless, the creation of this type of western took place in a notable period in American history as they were created during the Cold War, a period of tensions and conflicts in the United States. The fear of the unknown and Otherness was highly present. The paranoia of seeing communists everywhere was really strong and Hollywood was targeted and

therefore a place of conflict. As M. Elise Marubbio states in her book *Killing the Indian Maiden : Images of Native American Women in Film*, “The westerns reached its peak during these years in part because of its ability to capture these fears and ideals.”<sup>1</sup> Westerns had a strong impact on American people because they reflected the political context and the domestic issues of the country : “Filmmakers used the western's vocabulary to 'allegorize a wide range of difficult or taboo subjects like race relations' and cold war politics.” (Marubbio, 71). It is also a moment in American history when African American people started to protest for Civil Rights. In this context, Hollywood used pro-Indian westerns to reflect this issue as it is stated in Richard Slotkin’s book entitled *Gunfighter Nation : The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* : “The Indian film provided a setting for stories related to the domestic struggle over civil rights.”<sup>2</sup> As for women, they were also claiming greater equality with men regarding jobs and their role in society. During World War II, they used to work in factories or even had the same position as men and contributed for the war effort. After the war, many were sent back to their houses as housewives. The image of the housewife became essential during the 1950s because it showed women taking care of their families and the concept of family was seen as a way to fight the ideology of communism. This situation concerned not only white women but also women from different origins, such as Native American women. Just like white women, they participated in World War II as many “left their reservations for war industries and for service in the women’s corps of the armed forces.”<sup>3</sup> Around “eight hundred women, served in the armed forces”<sup>4</sup> whereas others stayed in reservations in order to “secure the ‘home front’ as the war drained manpower from their communities.” (Gouveia, 154). They even gained access to new jobs and were able to have a

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1 Marubbio, M. Elise. *Killing the Indian maiden: images of Native American Women in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006 : 64.

2 Slotkin, Richard. *Gunfighter Nation: the Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998 : 377.

3 Gouveia, Grace Mary. “‘We Also Serve’: American Indian Women’s Role in World War II. *The Michigan Historical Review*, vol. 20, n°2, 1994 : 182.

4 Rosier, Paul C.. “‘They Are Ancestral Homelands’: Race, Place, and Politics in Cold War Native America, 1945-1961”. *The Journal of American History*, vol. 92, n°4, 2006 : 1308.

greater “economic participation within their communities.” (Gouveia, 154). After the war, Native American women could still have access to so-called ““women’s jobs”” (Gouveia, 182) which places them at the same level as white women but they also suffered the same consequences because they “lost the higher-paying jobs”. (Gouveia, 182). In this vision, the issue of gender equality also affected Native American women’s position in society. Thus, the United States was a place where ideological and racial conflicts were present and inequality between men and women was also a serious problem during this period.

Then, these pro-Indian westerns were followed by the birth of revisionist westerns in the 1970s. As pro-Indian westerns, revisionist westerns seek to represent in a more genuine way Native Americans and the conflicts which occurred between whites and Indians but also between the different tribes during the conquest of the West or even a few years after it. However, in the revisionist genre, the classical model and structure of the western was questioned as the political context of the United States became unstable. In the 1970s, the United States was facing several events such as the Vietnam War and the invasion of Cambodia from which emerged many protests against violence because of the significant rate of deaths<sup>5</sup>, the Watergate Scandal in 1972 that made American people distrust President Nixon and his administration and therefore “set in motion a ‘wave of cynicism that swept the country in its wake’.” (Marubbio, 184). Domestic issues as civil rights also continued to create tensions in the country: “During that period the escalating war in Vietnam, along with the emerging civil rights, feminist, ecology and American Indian movements, dominated the public discourse and affected the content of many films.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the Civil Rights movement led by African Americans in the 1950s and the 1960s inspired Native Americans to express their opinion on social and political issues: “Among the voices raised were those of Native

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5 Cook, David A.. *Lost illusions: American cinema in the shadow of Watergate and Vietnam, 1970-1979*. History of the American cinema. Berkeley: University of California Press, vol.2, 2002 : 173.

6 Kasdan, Margo, and Tavernetti, Susan. “Native Americans in a Revisionist Western, Little Big Man (1970)”. *Hollywood’s Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003 : 124-125.

American activists protesting hundred of years of treaty violations, mining company dumping and contamination of reservation lands, and overall destruction of land and culture by outside forces.” (Marubbio, 171). These protests were a way for Native Americans to express their will to maintain a “cultural integrity”<sup>7</sup> in an American society in which they felt mistreated, excluded and misunderstood. Native American women had major roles in this activism since they took part in several protests as, for instance, the Wounded Knee occupation, which was “the idea of older women.” (Langston, 127). In addition to the civil rights movements, Native American women were also at the heart of a controversy concerning birth control. In this period, the Indian Health Service (IHS) created family planning services to inform women on the methods of birth control<sup>8</sup> which included sterilization. Many women claimed that the regulations on sterilization were not respected and that they had been sterilized by the IHS “without their informed consent.” (Lawrence, 406). In response to these different events, a feeling of despair was felt among Americans whose perception of society changed. This shift in the image of American society was conveyed through movies and westerns in particular: “a growing anti-establishment mood reflected the disappointment felt by many Americans, especially the young, whose dreams and ideals were dashed by the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert Kennedy and Malcolm X.” (Kasdan and Tavernetti, 125). However, the violence of this period also provoked a will to restore peace as the anti-war movement became more and more influential and Hollywood highly contributed to the denunciation of this violence: “the Western became a vehicle for antiwar protest and social criticism in the early years of the decade.” (Cook, 173). The suppression of the Production Code, also known as the Hays Code, in 1968 also played a relevant role in this denunciation as it “permitted the depiction of graphic violence and sex on the big screen.” (Kasdan and

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7 Langston, Donna Hightower. “American Indian Women’s Activism in the 1960s and 1970s”. *Hypatia*, vol.18, n°2, 2003 : 115.

8 Lawrence, Jane. “The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women”. *American Indian Quarterly*, vol.24, n°3, 2000 : 402.

Tavernetti, 125). These changes in the cinema industry and the numerous political events impacted the structure of westerns which was strongly based on the birth of American society and American myths. Consequently, this reassessment of the Western genre also caused changes in the representation of Native American women. Pro-Indian and revisionist westerns reflect two important periods in American history and it would be interesting to analyze how Native American women used to be depicted and how their representation evolved because they deal with the issue of intersectionality in periods of time when conflicts about sex and race are quite violent and serious.

In order to be able to analyze how Native American women were represented from the 1940s to the 1970s, I have chosen to focus in a first part on five pro-Indian westerns : *Duel in the Sun* (1946), *Broken Arrow* (1950), *Across the Wide Missouri* (1951), *The Big Sky* (1952), *The Indian Fighter* (1955). Then, in a second part I will focus on four noticeable revisionist westerns: *A Man Called Horse* (1970), *Little Big Man* (1970), *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972) and *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* (1973). These revisionist westerns all differ in tone and structure of the story and they are considerable examples of the changes in the Western genre. In each pro-Indian and revisionist movie, there is a Native American woman who is an important figure and has a major role to play in the story. *Duel in the Sun* deals mainly with the notion of intersectionality by spotlighting Pearl, a mixed-blood woman who is the main character of the story, which is rarely the case in westerns. Most of the time, the Indian woman is represented with a man by her side who is the main character, which is the case in *Broken Arrow*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky*, *The Indian Fighter*, *A Man Called Horse*, *Little Big Man*, *Jeremiah Johnson* and *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*. The Native American woman is still important because she has a symbolic and useful role for the man's purpose or identity. Even if she is less present or nearly absent in revisionist westerns as in *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*, she exists through the speaking of Jay Grobart (played by

Burt Reynolds), who used to be her husband, and people who knew her. In these pro-Indian and revisionist westerns, there are similarities in the way they depict these women but there are also many differences which can contradict themselves and generate many sorts of representations and interpretations on how Native American women are. A representation is the way someone or something is depicted<sup>9</sup>. These representations are inspired by the images that people can have on Native American women such as Sacajawea who took part in the Lewis and Clark expedition during the conquest of the West<sup>10</sup> or as Pocahontas who is still a famous figure mainly because she is romanticized in many stories, as Rayna Green argues in her magazine article *The Pocahontas Perplex : The Image of Indian Women in American Culture*.<sup>11</sup> A representation can also be the result of prejudices or stereotypes given by society. It is necessary to remember that a representation is always made from a point of view and therefore is a biased vision<sup>12</sup>. These movies have a western point of view on how Native American women are. They are supposed to reestablish the image of Native American people in a positive light but it is relevant to analyze if it is really the case for women as these movies are influenced by the political context of the time.

My main purpose is to draw the attention to the complexity of the representation of the Native American woman because she is portrayed with several stereotypes. She has different features, which can be perceived as paradoxical. It seems important to ask to what extent pro-Indian and revisionist westerns from the 1940s to the 1970s convey an ambivalent image of the Native American woman.

In a first part, the representation of the Native American woman in the 1940s and 1950s pro-Indian westerns will be analyzed. First, she is used as an allegory of Manifest Destiny in which she is linked to a white man in order to help him conquer the West. She is

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9 *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/representation>.

10 Pillow, Wanda. "Searching for Sacajawea: Whitened Reproductions and Endarkened Representations". *Hypatia*, vol.22, n°2, 2007 : 3.

11 Green, Rayna. "The Pocahontas Perplex: The Image of Indian Women in American Culture". *The Massachusetts Review*, vol.16, n°4, 1975, pp. 698-714.

12 Bhabha, Homi.K. "The Other Question...". *Screen*, vol.24, n°6, 1983 : 25.

also represented as a symbol of peace and as a princess whose role is to make a sort of treaty possible between white people and Native American people. Moreover, she is a symbol between Whiteness and Otherness. Sometimes her features are whitened but at the same time her Otherness is represented in a derogatory way. Then, the Native American woman is victim of intersectionality in each representation. On the one hand, she may be depicted as “a savage squaw” (Green, 703), as an uncivilized woman who looks to have a dark side because of her origins. On the other hand, she is victim of the male gaze<sup>13</sup> because she is objectified as an object of trade, an object of property which belongs to the white man and also because she is sexualized.

In a second part, the evolution of her representation in the 1970s revisionist westerns will be examined. First, she is mainly represented as a sacred figure whose spirituality and connection with a romantic wilderness are enhanced. This spirituality is deeply connected to her motherhood which opposes her to violence and war. Then, a continuous lack of authenticity in her depiction can be observed as she is less and less present on screen and that her main role remains diminished to the white man’s purpose and identity. She is also still reduced to her sexuality which is exacerbated, as it is the case in *A Man Called Horse* or *Little Big Man*, in which she is filmed as a symbol of the sexual revolution. Finally, the Native American woman is described as a central character in the deconstruction of the Myth of the Frontier. She guides and teaches the white man how to survive in the wilderness and her death convinces him to reject white civilization. Her presence is also paralleled with the presence of a white woman which contributes to the deterioration of the white woman’s image and to the deconstruction of the Native American woman’s stereotypes.

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13 Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Screen*, vol. 16, n°3, 1975 : 11.

## **I- An allegory of Manifest Destiny**

First of all, the Native American woman is often associated with Manifest Destiny. It was the idea that the conquest was justified and the country needed to be conquered because it was God's will. Many expeditions took place to conquer the West and white settlers wanted to go to Indian territories to look for gold and materials. Pro-Indian movies tend to repair history by showing a conquest in which Indian people and white people can collaborate. In *Broken Arrow*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky* and *The Indian Fighter*, the Native American woman falls in love with a white man and they symbolize the agreement between the Indian community and the white community to work together and maintain a sort of peace.

### **I.A. A symbol of union (*Broken Arrow*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky*)**

#### **I.A.1. Intermarriage between a white man and an Indian woman**

This union can be seen as an allegory of the conquest because the Indian woman opens the way to the white man to go to Indian territories and at the same time he begins to fall in love with her before marrying her at the end. In *Broken Arrow*, Sonseeahray (played by Debra Paget) is not supposed to marry Tom Jeffords (played by James Stewart) at the beginning of the story but their union evolves as Tom becomes more and more integrated into Indian culture and closer to Chief Cochise. According to M. Elise Marubbio, Sonseeahray represents the "Celluloid Princess" (62) who wears the "notion of a virgin continent and an untamed wilderness that desires the white male colonizer and the progressive march of civilization" (62). Indeed, Sonseeahray is often depicted as an innocent, pure girl and she looks very young. For instance, when Tom and Sonseeahray meet, there is a high angle shot on Sonseeahray which makes her look small, almost like a child as if she was seen from a male

point of view. It is also the case when she comes to the wedding. She wears a white dress and a dolly shot follows her while she goes down the aisle. She is at the center of the frame and the whiteness of her clothes and her face give her the appearance of a goddess. Therefore she looks like a holiness which is given by God to the white man.



Sonseeahray in her wedding dress. *Broken Arrow* (1950)

In *Across the Wide Missouri* and *The Big Sky*, the allegory of Manifest Destiny is even more obvious in the sense that both women, Teal Eye and Kamiah, are guides during an expedition which was the case of Sacajawea of Shoshoni. The latter was a Native American woman who married a French Canadian explorer named Toussaint Charbonneau and she was used as a translator and guide during the Lewis and Clark expedition<sup>14</sup>. She is used in many representations and she is known for being an “emblem of manifest destiny” (Pillow, 2). Then, Teal Eye and Kamiah both represent a version of Sacajawea, one who is more aggressive and the other who is more innocent and tempered. In *The Big Sky*, Teal Eye (played by Elizabeth Threatt) is a symbol of unity because she opens the way to Jim Deakins (played by Kirk Douglas) and his men to cross the West and she is often associated with the Missouri itself. For example, many medium shots on her are taken while she is on the boat and the Missouri is in the background. Just as Sonseeahray in *Broken Arrow*, she is part of the

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14 Pillow, Wanda. “Searching for Sacajawea: Whiteness Reproductions and Endarkened Representations”. *Hypatia*, vol.22, n°2, 2007 : 3-4.

untouched America. This idea is reinforced by what Jim Deakins says when he describes the Missouri as being “pretty and wild like a virgin”. Teal Eye guides them to the Blackfoot camp and gets married to Jim’s friend, Boone. Their union symbolizes the deal between the two communities but it is also the conclusion of their journey together.

### **I.A.2. A union between two communities**

Indeed, the intermarriage between the Native American woman and the white man is not only a means for white men to conquer the West but it also represents the unification of two different cultures and communities. This is what occurs in *Across the Wide Missouri* where Kamiah (played by María Elena Marquès), the granddaughter of a Blackfoot chief, marries Flint Mitchell (played by Clark Gable) in order to help him cross the West and find beavers for trade. At first, their marriage is commercial but then they become a real couple and Kamiah gets to learn some English words as Flint tries to speak her language. Their becoming husband and wife and having a son give an image of union to both communities. This union can be seen as an allegory of the civil rights and integration in American society<sup>15</sup>. The intermarriage and the “Princess figure” (Green, 703) are used in the 1950s westerns as “an allegorical reference to domestic civil rights politics” (Marubbio, 84). Richard Slotkin makes the same interpretation regarding *Broken Arrow*: “Their marriage is a symbolic proof of the possibility of integrating the two cultures and races” (376). Their union is possible thanks to the friendship that unites Tom and Cochise and the marriage reinforces the bond between the two communities. Moreover, this intermarriage in *Broken Arrow* and *Across the Wide Missouri* is not only a way to give a positive aspect to Manifest Destiny but also a way to criticize western societies and white supremacy. In *Across the Wide Missouri*, after his wife

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15 Marubbio, M. Elise. *Killing the Indian maiden: images of Native American Women in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006 : 84.

dies, Flint decides to stay with the tribe and it is also what Tom Jeffords wants to do when Sonseeahray dies in his arms at the end of *Broken Arrow*: “the bigotry and selfishness of White society so disgust him that he declares his intention to live as an Apache and must be recalled to a rational sense of his difference by the noble Cochise” (Slotkin, 376). Therefore pro-Indian westerns tend to use the symbol of unity as a means to repair the wrong made by the white community.

## **I.B. A symbol of peace (*Broken Arrow, Across the Wide Missouri, The Big Sky, The Indian Fighter*)**

### **I.B.1. Marriage as a means to guarantee peace**

Furthermore, the Native American woman is used as a link between the two communities and the two cultures but also as a means to make peace between them. Indeed, when the Indian woman marries a white man, their union is used to maintain peace so that the trade and the deal between the two communities remain in force. It is the case in *Broken Arrow, Across the Wide Missouri, The Big Sky* and *The Indian Fighter*. In *The Indian Fighter* the wedding is not shown but there is still the idea that at the end it is Onahti (played by Elsa Martinelli) who makes her father give up his wish of revenge against white people. The two-shot of Onahti and Johnny (played by Kirk Douglas) together emphasizes their union and the peace between the two communities. Johnny himself describes Onahti as an important element for peace to be maintained: “[She is] very different. Because she is, maybe someday there’ll be a lasting peace between our people”.



Johnny and Onahti. *The Indian Fighter* (1955)

It is explicitly explained in this movie that in the context of the conquest, Onahti is in herself a symbol of peace and that her marriage with Johnny is a way to seal the peace between white people and Native American people. In *The Big Sky* the same meaning is conveyed when Teal Eye marries Boone. As he comes into the tepee, she cuts the rope of the door with the knife she used to defend herself against white men. The shot on the knife which is dropped highlights the idea that no more violence will occur between Teal Eye and Boone and that peace will prevail.

Nevertheless, in *Broken Arrow* and *Across the Wide Missouri* marriage is not enough to keep the peace. Sonseeahray and Kamiah have to die in order to end the conflict. Both of them are already a symbol of peace throughout the whole story in the sense that they have divine features. For instance, Sonseeahray first appears when she is in a tepee and she is in the middle of the frame between Tom Jeffords and Cochise. The way she is dressed and her crown make her look like a goddess and this aspect is highlighted with the fair colors on her clothes and the lights which create “a halo effect” (Marubbio, 67). As for Kamiah, she looks like a protective person toward her family which is shown when she prays for her father when he dies. She stands in contrast with the violence she witnesses. However, death is needed in order to have peace: “Violence is an essential and necessary part of the process through which American society was established” (Slotkin, 352). Both women are the opposite of violence and their death are “quite essential to the formation of the white male’s American identity”

(Marubbio, 71). They put an end to the conflict between the two communities. Nonetheless, the Native American woman is not only a symbol of peace thanks to her marriage or to her death but she is presented as a peaceful and strong woman whose aim is to protect both communities.

### **I.B.2. The Indian woman as a protective figure**

First, this image of the Native American woman as a protective figure is inspired from many representations which were made through History. In these four movies, she is described as a “Princess figure” whose role is to “save or give aid to white men” (Green, 703). She has the role of a protector and this feature occurs in different ways as for instance as a mother figure: “The Indian woman began her symbolic, many-faceted life as a Mother figure – exotic, powerful, dangerous, and beautiful – and as a representative of American liberty and European classical virtue translated into New World terms” (Green, 703). This idea of a mother figure is important in western movies but it was also relevant in Native American tribes in real life: “there is a high value placed on women’s roles as wife and mother”<sup>16</sup>. Rayna Green illustrates the mother figure as a powerful being and calls it a “Mother-Goddess Figure” (702). What she describes in her article, may be applied to the way Sonseeahray in *Broken Arrow* and Kamiah in *Across the Wide Missouri* are depicted. As said before, the Native American woman can be seen as an allegory of the conquest in the sense that she represents the “virgin continent” (Marubbio, 62) and she is considered as the mother of American society. Even though Sonseeahray is not literally a mother, she is introduced by Cochise as “a White-Painted Lady, Mother of Life”, which means she is a “changing woman in Apache tradition” (Marubbio, 67). The fact that she symbolizes peace and is depicted as

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16 Powers, Marla. “New Perspectives on American Indian Women”. *Revue Française d’Études Américaines*, vol. 38, n° 1, 1988 : 354.

being “good luck” reinforces the idea that she is here to protect both sides and to prevent violence from happening. In *Across the Wide Missouri*, the representation of the mother figure is quite important in the depiction of Kamiah. When she is pregnant she seems strong when she refuses to let her husband help her carry the baskets. She also keeps working while being pregnant. Moreover, when the child is born, several shots show her with her child where she looks like a protective mother.



Kamiah taking care of her child. *Across the Wide Missouri* (1951)

This shot can bring the idea that the Indian mother protects the future of both communities, the union and mix of both cultures and therefore future American society: “She represented, even defended America” (Green, 703). Until her death she embodies this mother figure by being killed by her own people and standing near her child. She dies protecting both her child and the union between the white community and the Indian community. In *The Indian Fighter*, Onahti is also a mother as the prospect of a possible lasting peace is guaranteed by the words Johnny tells her father: “She’ll give me a son”. Peace will be given from a generation to another.

Furthermore, the Indian woman is also represented as a protector of white people and Indian people thanks to her high status. Indeed, what allows her to be in the position of a protector is her status inside the tribe. For instance, Sonseeahray is able to protect Tom because she has a high status. During her first apparition, she wears a sort of crown which

highlights her status and gives her divine features: “Her motionless pose, the lighting, and the rounded doorframe recall iconic images of Mary and other Christian saints.”(Marubbio, 67). She is in the middle of the frame and therefore as a divine protection for both communities.



Cochise, Sonseeahray and Tom Jeffords.  
*Broken Arrow* (1950)

In *The Big Sky*, Teal Eye wears a similar outfit when she finds her tribe and once again she has the capacity to protect white men through the West because she is the daughter of a Blackfoot Chief. Even though Teal Eye is depicted as a princess figure, her features can recall those of the Amazonian Native American Queen who “appears aggressive, militant, and armed with spears and arrows” (Green, 702). During the whole movie she holds a knife to defend herself and is quite aggressive toward white settlers whenever she meets them.

Therefore, the Native American woman is used as an allegory of Manifest Destiny in the sense that she is conquered by a white man with whom she wants to unite both cultures and maintain peace between them. She conveys the idea of peace through the mother figure and her high status helps her establish peace and protect both communities from war. Nevertheless, her representation is all the more ambivalent because she is represented from a western point of view which whitens her characteristics and gives a particular image of her Otherness.

## II. A symbol between Whiteness and Otherness

The Native American woman is ambivalent in her symbolism because she is represented with traits of Whiteness and Otherness. She looks to have an in-between identity which complicates the way she may be perceived and therefore she can be interpreted as a sort of frontier between Whiteness and Otherness. As said before, there is a shot on Sonseeahray in *Broken Arrow* where she is between Cochise and Tom. This image underscores the fact that she makes the union possible between the two peoples and therefore protects them but it can also mean that she symbolizes a frontier between the two communities because she is connected to both sides. This idea may be linked with Richardson's definition of the frontier: "[a] point which delineates where sameness ends and otherness begins."<sup>17</sup> She is both part of the Indian side and of the white side because of her marriage.

### II.A. A western representation of the Native American woman (*Duel in the Sun*, *Broken Arrow*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky*, *The Indian Fighter*)

#### II.A.1. Whitened in her appearance and language

In *Duel in the Sun*, *Broken Arrow*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky* and *The Indian Fighter*, the Native American woman tends to be whitened in her representation in the sense that she is depicted from a western point of view which shapes her appearance and language. In each movie, she is not even played by a Native American woman but by a white woman. Even if they all have brown make-up on their skins in order to look like Indian women, the audience knows that the actresses are not Native Americans which emphasizes

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<sup>17</sup> Richardson, Michael. *Otherness in Hollywood cinema*. New York: Continuum, 2010 : 33.

the difference between them and the rest of the tribe played by real Native Americans. The physical difference between the Native American woman and her tribe underlines her importance but also the fact that she is not seen from a Native American point of view because it is her Whiteness that differentiates her from the tribe.



Onahti. *The Indian Fighter* (1955)

For instance, in *Broken Arrow*, Sonseeahray is not played by a Native American actress and she is whitened in her appearance: “At first the movie uses makeup and lighting to emphasize her “Indian” appearance; but as the romance progresses, her skin and eyes appear lighter.” (Slotkin, 376). The more she is taught about white culture the more she becomes white. There is a scene where she lies down with Tom near the river and this image may make the audience think of Adam and Eve.



Sonseeahray and Tom Jeffords. *Broken Arrow* (1950)

As Marubbio highlights, there is a clear link between what represents Sonseeahray and this image: “Throughout the film, Sonseeahray and Jeffords meet near water and among the trees,

promoting the idea that she lives in a garden, a place of refuge that Jeffords visits and misses when he returns to the desert and Tucson.” (69). This idea of the “American Eve” (70) is quite connected with the idea of motherhood as if the Native American woman and the white man were the parents of America. This concept is also conveyed in *The Indian Fighter* at the beginning of the movie. Onahti is seen naked in the river surrounded by trees as if she was a part of nature and she looks like Eve in the Eden garden. Her being as Eve is enhanced at the end of the movie when her and Johnny are in the water and are taken away together by the current. The Native American woman as a representation of Eve is evidence that she is illustrated from a western point of view.

Furthermore, the Native American woman is also whitened in her language. In these five movies, only *Across the Wide Missouri* and *The Big Sky* let the Native American woman speak the language of her tribe. *Broken Arrow*, *The Indian Fighter* and *Duel in the Sun* make her speak English. In *Duel in the Sun*, Pearl (played by Jennifer Jones) is mixed-blood and despite her behavior which is often associated with her Indian origins, she only speaks English throughout the whole movie. In *Broken Arrow* and *The Indian Fighter*, Sonseeahray and Onahti both come from a tribe but they never speak their own language either which demonstrates that the two characters are not a genuine representation of the Native American woman. Their speaking only English displays that both Sonseeahray and Onahti are portrayed this way so that the audience can understand what they say. The movies are made by western people and they are adapted for a western public. This method to whiten Indian women’s representation for western society was also used in the depiction of Sacajawea: “Sacajawea could only initially be revered as an emblem of manifest destiny, suffragist icon, and multicultural figure if she was whitened for public consumption.” (Pillow, 8). Throughout history it was recurrent for Indian women to be changed by western society and this is what these pro-Indian movies also do. They use the Indian woman’s symbolism to convey a

message which modifies her appearance: “the Self is conceptually unable to treat the Other in the Other’s own terms.” (Richardson, 36).

### **II.A.2. Whitened in her behavior and role inside the tribe**

Moreover, the Indian woman’s behavior and her role inside the tribe also contribute to her depiction. For instance, in *Duel in the Sun*, Pearl is reminded several times that she needs to be civilized because according to the McCanles family she is not educated. The movie does not whiten Pearl but tends to convey the idea that the good way to behave in society is the way western society imposes. The representation of Pearl illustrates a parallel between Otherness and Whiteness and “Wilderness vs. Civilization” (Slotkin, 351). Pearl’s white side will only be revealed if she is educated whereas her Otherness is illustrated in her misbehavior according to white society’s standards. Laura Belle McCanles (played by Lillian Gish) educates her and she tries to shape her so that she can be accepted in western society: “All you have to do is to behave like a lady” and Pearl keeps repeating that she will comply with the rules: “I’ll be a good girl, I promise”. Nevertheless, if the movie tries to turn Pearl as a civilized person according to the western view, Pearl never actually succeeds which condemns her to a certain death: “The typical western heroine has traditionally been the bearer of civilization [...] and women who fail to meet these requirements can hope for no happier fate than a redemptive death taking a bullet intended for the hero.”<sup>18</sup> The fact that being educated is a sign of good behavior and that Pearl’s attitude is perceived as incorrect shows that she is built from a western point of view.

As for Sonseeahray, Kamiah, Teal Eye and Onahti, the whitening of their behavior is mostly shaped by her role in the tribe. In *Across the Wide Missouri*, Kamiah is the guide of the

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18 Cameron, Ian, and Pye, Douglas, eds. *The Movie Book of the Western*. London : Studio Vista, 1996 : 193-194.

expedition but from the beginning she is interested in marrying Flint and then she endorses the role of a devoted wife and mother. This image of a devoted wife is also perceivable in Sonseeahray's behavior toward Tom. This type of demeanor is not representative of the different roles women had in different tribes. Depending on the tribe, women may have not the same place: "Among both matrilineal and patrilineal tribes it has not been uncommon to find women warriors, statesman, chiefs, religious leaders, medicine women, or shamans (equivalent of doctors) and some women controlled great amounts of economic and political power."<sup>19</sup> In her essay, Maryann Oshana explains that some women warriors "were found among the war-oriented Plains tribes: Crow, Blackfoot, Sioux and Cheyenne." (46). Kamiah comes from a Blackfoot tribe but she is not the representation of a woman warrior. She does activities which are expected from an "Indian Princess" (Pillow, 13) as brushing her hair, looking at her face in a mirror or getting water from the river. Sonseeahray, who comes from an Apache tribe, also conveys this image because she is reduced to these activities. Even Teal Eye, who seems more independent, is often seen at the camp cooking for the white men and she does the same types of activities. This idea of the "Indian Princess" also displays that the Indian woman is represented from a western point of view as Wanda Pillow enhances in her essay about Sacajawea: "Reproductions of whiteness through Sacajawea allow her to fit into the 'Indian Princess' trope." (13). This term used to describe the Native American woman is a means to whiten her characteristics because it has been constructed by western movies. Even though *The Indian Fighter* does not clearly give the image of an "Indian Princess" to the Native American woman, Onahti has the same role as Sonseeahray, Kamiah and Teal Eye inside the tribe. Most of the time she is seen taking water from the river in order to provide it for the tribe or cooking. Although she appears more aggressive than Kamiah, Sonseeahray and

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19 Oshana, Maryann. "Native American Women in Westerns: Reality and Myth". *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol.6, n°3, 1981 : 47.

Teal Eye, her role remains the same. She takes care of the tribe and she endorses the role of a wife even if it is not explicitly said.

## **II.B. A pejorative representation of Otherness (*Duel in the Sun*, *Broken Arrow*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky*, *The Indian Fighter*)**

### **II.B.1. Definition of Otherness**

Nevertheless, the Native American woman may be whitened in her characteristics but sometimes she does not seem to be accepted as a part of the white community. It is difficult to define the identity of the Indian woman because she is represented from a western point of view and yet she is still considered as a different woman, as it is also the case in the representation of Sacajawea: “Despite the constant affirmations of her white female beauty, Sacajawea’s virtue and talents remain separate and inferior to those of white women.” (Pillow, 10). Indeed, the Native American woman is considered as ‘Other’ in spite of the will to make her look like a white woman by her appearance, attitude and language. This is mostly the case for Pearl in *Duel in the Sun* who is taught to behave like a lady and who tries to do so but people around her never perceive her as someone who is adapted to their community. She is always reminded to have Indian origins and she is never plenty accepted as she is. Even in *The Indian Fighter*, Onahti is often associated with nature which represents the wilderness.

This idea is underlined in a medium shot on Onahti where she stands in front of the camp and the forest.



Onahti. *The Indian Fighter* (1955)

Indeed, the representation of Otherness is mostly pejorative although sometimes the Indian woman seems to be worshiped as a goddess because of her difference. There is an aspect in which she is belittled because she is seen as a person who is not intelligent and childish as it is illustrated in *Duel in the Sun* or in *Across the Wide Missouri*, and on the other hand she is portrayed as a strange being who is both misunderstood in her attitude and in her intentions which conveys a feeling of mistrust. Otherness is seen as a negative feature because it can be linked to wilderness which symbolizes an unknown place that frightens people: “it is a place given over to nature and which is hostile to the human as a species.” (Richardson, 32-33). It is important to remember that these five pro-Indian westerns were created after World War II and during the Cold War and therefore Otherness was seen as a potential threat because of the fear of communism. As a result, each film presents Otherness in a negative way through the different stereotypes given to the Indian woman. A stereotype is a feature attributed to a person who belongs to a certain community but it may be more ambiguous. Homi K. Bhabha demonstrates in his work “The Other Question...” that it is actually not simple to define what a stereotype is: “The colonial stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself.” (21). He even argues that a stereotype “is not a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality.” (10). This false representation can be found in how Native American women are depicted. They are represented the way Hollywood wants them to be thanks to the stereotypes used to shape them: “Westerns have been very effective in creating a ‘Hollywood Indian’ so much that many people fail to recognize real Native Americans unless they fit the Hollywood stereotype.” (Oshana, 47). Native American people are often represented with the same features and stereotypes also in other media: “these representations not only locate Native American as historical figures, they also depict them as a particular type of Native

Americans.”<sup>20</sup> Despite the fact that pro-Indian westerns were made to restore the image of Native American people, the Indian woman seems to be still treated as something ‘Other’ which rather demeans her.

### **II.B.2. The vision of an uneducated woman**

The main stereotype of Otherness is the depiction of the Native American woman as a human being who does not know how to behave correctly and who is considered as intellectually limited by the white community. For instance, Kamiah in *Across the Wide Missouri* is mostly portrayed in a positive way in the sense that she looks nice, she is helpful, she tries to understand what Flint says and she is a mother figure. It does not prevent the movie from presenting her sometimes as a childish person when she is on her horse and tries to do a race with Flint. She looks uneducated and the way Flint punishes her by giving her a spanking after the race enhances the fact that she is ridiculed and that she is not taken seriously. This is also the case for Pearl in *Duel in the Sun* where she is portrayed as a “hysterical protagonist” (Cameron and Pye, 189). Her way to behave is linked with her Indian origins because she is constantly compared to her mother who was Native American as it is shown when she dances at the beginning of the movie and a man comes to criticize her and laughs at her face: “Like mother, like daughter.” This hysteria is visible in Pearl’s demeanor when she visits her father who is in prison because he murdered his wife. There is a medium shot on Pearl in which she has fuzzy hair and tears can be seen on her face. She screams at her father and looks like a lunatic or a little girl who is not satisfied with the situation. Here again there is a clear association between her Indian origins, which are reminded several times, and

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20 Leavitt, Peter A. et al. “‘Frozen in Time’: The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding: Media and Self-Understanding”. *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 71, n°1, 2015 : 43.

her aggressive behavior. This statement is perceivable when Pearl's behavior and appearance are compared with Jesse's new wife who is well-dressed and looks composed.



Pearl when she visits her father in prison. *Duel in the Sun* (1946)



Jesse and his new wife. *Duel in the Sun* (1946)

Another example which is evidence that Otherness is considered as something which has a negative connotation, is how Teal Eye in *The Big Sky* is treated because she does not speak English and that there are some complications for both communities to understand each other. When she is looking for Deakins and asks Boone where he is, he replies: "You don't understand." He thinks she cannot understand him because she does not speak their language. His tone also brings the idea that she is too stupid to understand them. There is a sort of arrogance which is emphasized when he tells her: "You can't talk." According to him what she says or even think does not matter because she cannot speak English. It gives the feeling that he does not care about her opinion and that he feels superior. This disdain can also be found in the no pro-Indian western *The Searchers* (1956). When Martin (played by Jeffrey Hunter) accidentally buys an Indian woman named Look (played by Beulah Archuletta) instead of buying a blanket, she starts to follow him and he tells her to go away and that he does not want her blanket anymore: "Look, you don't understand. I don't want it!" He rejects her when his uncle Ethan (played by John Wayne) tells him he bought her and not the blanket: "Oh no Ethan, tell her to go back!" and he keeps rejecting her afterwards. Therefore, Otherness is defined as a part of the Native American woman's personality. She is seen as

someone who behaves like a child and who is unable to understand everything because she seems to have an inferior intelligence in the way she is perceived by white people.

### **II.B.3. An idea of weirdness**

However, another aspect of Otherness is highlighted. Indeed, the Native American woman is treated as 'Other' and she looks to be also emphasized for not being like everyone else. She is depicted as a special person who has a part of mystery and she is almost not considered as a normal human being. This characteristic is contradictory in itself because the mysterious side of the Native American woman can be perceived as a godly feature as it is the case for Teal Eye and Sonseeahray but on the other hand she is described as a strange creature and white men feel suspicious about her because they do not know if they can trust her. For instance, in *The Big Sky*, the first time Deakins and his men see Teal Eye going out of the boat, she is veiled with a blanket and only her eyes can be seen. The following shot underlines the fact that the camera is only focused on her and that she has an important part to play in the story. In her first apparition, she is filmed as a mysterious creature but the music which accompanies her walk pace is sweet and does not seem to warn of a danger. Teal Eye does not inspire fear but at this state the audience may not be sure of what her intentions are considering she is surrounded by white men and that she may feel threatened. However, she is looked by white settlers in a suspicious way when she tends to heal Deakins's wound. They are afraid of what effect the herbs might have and that Teal Eye may be up to no good even though she already showed them several times that they can trust her because she kept helping them. This representation can be compared with other illustrations of the Native American woman in which she is someone who cannot be trustworthy: "In several adds [...] she is the

mysterious witch healer. Thus, she shares in the caucasian or European female's reputation for potential evil." (Green, 710).

Another facet of the idea of weirdness linked to the Indian woman's Otherness, is emphasized in *Broken Arrow*. She is considered as being apart from the white community but she may also be rejected from her own tribe because of her choice of way of life. When Tom and Sonseeahray tell Cochise they want to marry each other, Cochise's first reaction is to be surprised and worried for Sonseeahray. He thinks it would be not well perceived from the tribe and that Sonseeahray may be judged: "They will look at you as a strange animal." She is criticized for her strangeness from her own people because she claims to belong to the tribe but at the same time she makes choices which are not expected. Cochise tells Tom when he meets Sonseeahray that she is not to be married but at the end this is what happens. Even her own tribe looks at her behavior and intentions in a weird way because she wants to stand out and make her own choices.

Therefore, the Native American woman represents both a symbol of Whiteness and Otherness. She is whitened in order to fit in the Hollywood stereotype of the Indian woman where her role is the same regardless of the tribe she belongs to. The fact that Hollywood decides to depict her with white characteristics also causes a negative representation of Otherness. The Native American woman is judged as being intellectually limited because she cannot speak English and her behavior is sometimes similar to one of a child. Her Otherness is also what defines her as a strange person who inspires mistrust because she is mysterious which complicates to see what she really aims at. However, there is a last major element which contributes to the ambivalence of the Native American woman's representation in pro-Indian westerns. She is victim of intersectionality which darkens her traits linked to her origins and to her femininity.

### III. Victim of intersectionality

The last relevant aspect which takes part in the ambivalence of the Native American woman in pro-Indian westerns is the fact that she is criticized not because she is Indian or she is a woman but because she is an Indian woman. This concept can be linked with the theory of intersectionality which is a term created by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American professor who is specialized in race and gender issues. In a recent interview, she explains that intersectionality was first used to define African American women because they were considered as another category and they were suffering racial and sexual discrimination.<sup>21</sup> It can now be applied to different types of persons as Native American women.

#### III.A. Represented as “a savage squaw” (*Duel in The Sun*, *The Big Sky*, *The Indian Fighter*)

##### III.A.1. The presence of a dark side

*Duel in the Sun*, *The Big Sky* and *The Indian Fighter* are pro-Indian westerns but, as already said, the Native American woman is sometimes demeaned because of her origins. Because of her Otherness she is victim of intersectionality: “The woman’s background becomes the mode of representation of her Otherness, her moral and physical taint, and her disturbing sexual power.” (Marubbio, 90). The Indian woman may be perceived as uneducated but the element which strikes the most is her depiction as a savage woman. She seems to have a dark side which contrasts with the image of the innocent princess. For instance, Pearl’s hysteria and her determination to kill Lewt (played by Gregory Peck) at the end show her inner violence which she cannot hide anymore. Throughout the whole movie,

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21 “Kimberlé Crenshaw discusses ‘Intersectional Feminism’”, *Lafayette College*, published on October 2015 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=596&v=ROWquxC\\_Gxc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=596&v=ROWquxC_Gxc).

her femininity is underlined with close-ups on her face but at the end the emphasis is made on her savage side. One extreme close-up particularly displays her anger in which the music is loud and therefore enhances Pearl's aggressiveness and determination. She winces and drops of sweat and dust can be seen on her face.



Pearl. *Duel in the Sun* (1946)

Even without showing her violent side, Pearl often presents animal features as in the scene where she drinks water with her horse. She does not behave like a human should which enhances her association with a savage behavior. Pearl's savage side is what her surrounding mostly reproaches her. She is victim of racism already when she arrives at the McCanles' house where Jackson McCanles (played by Lionel Barrymore), Jesse (played by Joseph Cotten) and Lewt's father, makes several remarks on her origins and mocks her: "They should have called Pocahontas". This racist behavior can be compared to how Indian women are treated in *The Searchers*. When Martin buys Look who is supposed to become his wife, their family learns the news in one of their letters and when Laurie (played by Vera Miles) reads it she scandalized because she likes Martin and also because his wife is a "squaw": "A little Comanche squaw... Squaw!". The word "squaw" is a pejorative term which is worsened by Laurie's bad reaction. Even if Pearl is never called a "squaw", people around her do not accept her origins and have a racist behavior. It is relevant to compare how Pearl is perceived by others with a no pro-Indian western because the vision of the Native American woman's

origins and therefore her savage side is the same. She is negatively criticized because of her blood.

Another example of the Native American woman's dark side is Teal Eye's demeanor in *The Big Sky*. She is the most ambivalent representation among the five pro-Indian westerns chosen because she is both the illustration of the "Indian Princess" (Pillow, 13) and at the same time she is quite aggressive toward Deakins and his men. In her essay, Rayna Green defines this dark side of the Indian woman's personality as the opposite of what represents the Indian Princess: "The Princess' darker twin, the Squaw, must serve this side of the image, and again, relationships with male determine what the image will be." (711). Indeed, the Native American woman has two opposite personalities in her characterization which play a significant part in her ambivalence. For example, Teal Eye's darkness is conveyed through different filming techniques. Several times she is seen hiding on the boat and she is often filmed in the dark. In a particular medium shot where she looks at the camp, she is on the boat and in the shadows holding her knife. The threatening look she gives, the lighting and the knife are combined elements which highlight her dark side and her negative feelings toward white settlers.



Teal Eye. *The Big Sky* (1952)

This technique is also used in *The Indian Fighter*, where Onahti stares at Johnny from her tepee. Even though Onahti is threatening toward Johnny at the beginning of the movie, her savage and dark side are not as underlined as Teal Eye. Teal Eye is both "a savage squaw"

(Green, 703) and an “Indian Princess” (Pillow, 13). At the beginning of the movie, she is more perceived as “a savage squaw” because she mistrusts white men and they also do not trust her. For instance, in an over-the-shoulder shot, Teal Eye defends herself against Boone who wants to attack her because she took her knife back. When she starts to help them and be less aggressive, she begins to be more associated with the princess characteristics as it is mostly shown at the end of the movie in her white dress. This change of perception is due to the evolution of the relationship she has with white men: “Both her nobility as a Princess and her savagery as a Squaw are defined in terms of her relationships with male figure.” (Green, 703). Thus, her depiction depends on how she is viewed from the white community.

### **III.A.2. The vision of a sinful woman**

Furthermore, in her representation of a “savage squaw” the Native American woman is seen as a sinful woman. Indeed, the color of her skin is often associated with the idea of sin: “skin, as a signifier of discrimination, must be produced or processed as visible.” (Bhabha, 14). Both her color and her femininity are features which define her as a sinful woman because she is considered as an evil temptation for men. Sin seems inscribed in her blood. This aspect is mainly present in *Duel in the Sun*: “Her father’s heritage surfaces in her light skin tone, while her mother’s appears in her inherent sensuality and moral darkness.” (Marubbio, 90). What accentuates her “moral darkness” is the fact that she is a femme fatale. Mary Ann Doane defines the femme fatale as “a symptom of male fears about feminism.”<sup>22</sup> She is seen as “evil and is frequently punished or killed.” (2) The femme fatale is therefore judged as being negative for her environment and this pejorative trait is linked with Native American origins in the case of Pearl. She is blamed for being Indian which accentuates her sensuality: “Making her a threat to male sexuality and male dominance; her threat doubles

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22 Doane, Mary Ann. *Femmes fatales: feminism, film theory, psychoanalysis*. Routledge, New York, 1991 : 2-3.

with the added mark of racial ambiguity.” (Marubbio, 130). Being a femme fatale and a Native American woman are two features which are not well perceived by western society. The scene which illustrates this concept is when Pearl has to see the minister in the living room at the McCandles’ house. She arrives in the room with only a blanket on her. She does not wear any clothes which is commented by Laura Belle: “Of course she is not dressed properly.”, “She needs a little guidance.” In her two remarks she implies that Pearl does not know the norms of society and that she is a savage. Her origins are associated with the femme fatale image when the minister reproaches her to be a “flesh of temptation”. The will from the minister to control Pearl’s dark sexuality can be seen in a shot where Pearl is on her knees and the minister is standing in front of her.



Pearl and the minister. *Duel in the Sun* (1946)

In a high angle shot, she is smaller than the minister which conveys the idea that the power of God tries to crush her and exorcise her demons. Her savage side and her extreme sensuality must be vanished: “to fit into the patriarchal and racial structures of her world, Pearl must exorcise or tame her inner “‘dark’ sexuality.” (Marubbio, 123). Her origins, and therefore her dark sexuality, have to disappear if she wants to fit in society but she never succeeds and dies.

Nevertheless, the sinful and savage side of the Native American woman is quite paradoxical with the image of the innocent girl which can be given to her. Even Pearl who is most of all a portrayal of the femme fatale can sometimes be depicted as if she were an

innocent little girl. Compared to Sonseeahray in *Broken Arrow* who looks like a child during the whole movie and who seems pure in her white wedding dress, Pearl is filmed in a way which always underlines her sensuality with the close-ups on her face and her make-up. However, there is one specific scene where she recalls Sonseeahray's purity and candor. When Pearl goes to the ball, she is dressed with a white dress and looks like a lady. She even can make the viewer think of a child when Lewt upsets her and she cries lying on the lawn. Because she is well-dressed, her sinful part seems to have disappeared. Her not representing the femme fatale when she is dressed by western society emphasizes that it is a characteristic linked to her origins and therefore to her savage side. The innocent side and the sinful aspect clearly complicate the representation of the Native American woman: "Both race conflict and national identity, however, make this Virgin-Whore paradox more complicated than others." (Green, 703).

### **III.B. The objectification of the Native American woman (*Duel in the Sun*, *Broken Arrow*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky*, *The Indian Fighter*)**

However, these paradoxical representations of the Native American woman are partly due to the fact that she is represented from a male point of view. These different contradictory elements constitute her image and play a part in her intersectionality. She is seen as apart from other women and she is objectified by the male gaze which adds even more negative features to her depiction. In the five pro-Indian westerns chosen, Sonseeahray, Pearl, Onahti, Kamiah and Teal Eye are all objectified at some point in the movies.

### III.B.1. Represented as an object of trade and an object of property

First, the Indian woman is used as an object of trade between Indian tribes and the white community and she becomes an object of property of the white man. This is what stands out in Kamiah's role in *Across the Wide Missouri*. Flint decides to marry her because she is the grand-daughter of a Blackfoot chief and therefore she has a high status. If he marries her, she can help him cross some lands so that he can do his beavers trade. This is also what occurs in *The Big Sky* where Teal Eye is used to make it easier for white men to buy furs and to conquer the West: "Jourdonnais, le chef de l'expédition de *The Big Sky*, ramène Teal Eye chez les siens en vue de faciliter l'achat de fourrures; Flint épouse Kamiah au début d'*Across the Wide Missouri* afin de s'ouvrir le pays des castors."<sup>23</sup> This use of the Native American woman as an object of trade highlights another element which shows that she is seen from a male point of view.

Indeed, she may be considered as belonging to the white man and unable to live without a man by her side. In each movie, the Native American woman has at least one man with whom she is married or she has a romance. For example, in *Across the Wide Missouri*, from the beginning of the movie, Kamiah asks Flint if he is married and the latter does not want to until he realizes she might be useful for his trade. She is defined by her love for Flint. This is also what happens to Sonseeahray in *Broken Arrow*. She is never filmed without Tom by her side and her main purpose is to be with him and maintain peace between the two communities. Even in *The Big Sky*, Teal Eye seems more independent than Kamiah and Sonseeahray but she ends up married to Boone. This unavoidable fate of the married Indian woman in *Broken Arrow*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky* and *The Indian Fighter* can be explained by the association between the Native American woman and the conquest of the

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23 Lacoue-Labarthe, Mathieu. *Les Indiens dans le western américain*. Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2014 : 162.

West: “While Europeans aspired to control over nature by understanding its working, Americans sought to tame it through possession.” (Richardson, 19). This idea is enhanced in *The Indian Fighter* when Johnny compares the West to a woman: “To me the west is like a beautiful woman”, “I don’t want it to change”, “I don’t want to share it.” The Indian woman belongs to the white man and is in a way used to help him as it was the case for Sacajawea who is described as “Charbonneau’s property.” (Pillow, 4).

Moreover, this idea of possession of the Indian woman as an object of property for the white man is more accentuated in *Duel in the Sun*. In this movie, the possession of the Native American woman has nothing to do with the conquest of the West but it is more linked with the will of the white man to have a woman who belongs to him as if she was a doll. For instance, when Pearl is about to marry Sam Pierce (played by Charles Bickford) Lewt threatens him when he confronts him in the saloon. He claims that Sam cannot marry her because Pearl belongs to him: “Pearl Chavez is my girl”, “Pearl has always been my girl, just as long as I want her to be”, “Nobody will take my girl.” Lewt repeating “my girl” several times and saying that he is the one who decides of her fate shows his will to have power over Pearl. This aspect also exists in the no pro-Indian western entitled *My Darling Clementine* (1946). Just as Pearl, there is a woman named Chihuahua (played by Linda Darnell) who is mixed-blood but who is often criticized for her Native American origins. When she introduces herself to Clementine (played by Cathy Downs), the name of the man she is in love with is a part of her identity: “I’m Chihuahua I’m Doc Holliday’s girl”. Pearl never identifies herself as someone’s girl but the fact that Lewt wants to force her to be his girl shows his determination to control and define her.

### III.B.2. Represented as a sexual object

Finally, the last element which displays that the Native American woman is filmed from a male perspective is when she is sexualized. This sexualization is linked with the concept of the male gaze in which the woman is shaped by a male vision: “The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly.” (Mulvey, 11). This side of the Indian woman’s portrayal is the opposite of the idea of the mother figure. She is sexualized in the way she is treated by men. For instance, in *The Indian Fighter*, before Onahti and Johnny get to know each other, Johnny harasses Onahti and even assaults her when he tries to force her to kiss him. She defends herself but she is unable to fight him and her distress is even mocked by Johnny who laughs. It is the same situation that occurs in *Duel in the Sun*. Lewt comes to Pearl’s bedroom and kisses her against her will. She is scandalized by his action but Lewt finds his own behavior as completely normal: “Don’t pretend nobody did that before.” He thinks that it is normal and that she must have lived several times this situation given she is mixed-blood. He even goes further when he rapes her. He abuses her and he does not even feel guilty: “Indian women are portrayed as not quite human: they are savages, so it is perfectly acceptable to ravage their bodies. The women are the victims of a conquered culture, and therefore their bodies are conquerable.” (Oshana, 48). The Native American woman is perceived as a sexual object and her opinion and emotions are ignored. In these two examples she is described as an “object of male lust” (Marubbio, 93) which is even underlined in the way she is filmed. For example, Pearl’s sensuality is enhanced in several close-ups and medium shots on her face where her make-up is more than visible. Another example of the vision of the Indian woman as an “object of male lust” is when Boone takes off Teal Eye’s blanket to see her face and the high angle shot on her emphasizes male dominance because she looks crushed sitting on the ground.



Teal Eye. *The Big Sky* (1952)

Then, Boone judges her beauty: “Not too bad for an Indian.” This comment emphasizes how Native American women are seen by white men and how they are supposed to be physically. In some shots, Teal Eye has a feature in common with Pearl because even if she is not a femme fatale, she has some postures which underline her sensuality.



Teal Eye. *The Big Sky* (1952)

This sensuality is also noticeable in Onahti in *The Indian Fighter* who is seen naked in the river at the beginning of the movie: “L’erotisme indien ou métis surgit souvent à l’occasion d’une baignade dans un cours d’eau.” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 162). This vision is directly associated with the male gaze which pictures Native American women as it wants them to be.

Therefore, the Indian woman is victim of intersectionality in her portrayal because she is blamed for her sensuality which is accentuated by her origins. Her dark side enhances her dark sexuality which is criticized by western society and at the same time highlighted by the male gaze. She is objectified as an object of trade and of property and her sexualization is visible in the way male characters treat her and in the way she is filmed. This objectification shows that she is pictured from a male point of view which takes part in her intersectionality.

#### **IV – A sacred figure**

In the 1970s revisionist westerns, some of the characteristics given to the Native American woman in pro-Indian westerns remained but others changed as the perception of the conquest of the West and American society evolved. As already said, revisionist westerns differ from pro-Indian westerns because their main goal is not to illustrate civil rights issues but to denounce the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War and therefore the massacres which caused numerous deaths. Feelings of guilt and distrust toward the political power were felt by American people and these feelings were conveyed in revisionist westerns. As a result, the representation of the Native American woman was impacted. In *A Man Called Horse*, *Little Big Man*, *Jeremiah Johnson* and *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*, the Native American woman presents similar traits compared to the Indian woman described in pro-Indian westerns but some of them are particularly highlighted as the sacred aspect. In this vision, these movies give a depiction which is closer to Native Americans' perception of the Indian woman whose spirituality and motherhood are essential features.

#### **IV.A. A spiritual figure (*A Man Called Horse, Little Big Man, Jeremiah Johnson, The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*)**

##### **IV.A.1. The importance of religion and the spiritual connection with another world**

The portrayal of the Native American woman as a goddess was already present in pro-Indian westerns but it was used either to depict the Indian woman as an innocent and pure princess or as a weird creature who cannot be trusted. In revisionist westerns, the negative side of her non-human facet is erased to display only the positive side. She is viewed as a protector who has a connection with God or even a spiritual world. This characteristic is highly present in *A Man Called Horse, Jeremiah Johnson* and *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*. However, her spirituality is represented in different ways in each movie.

In *Jeremiah Johnson*, the Native American woman's spirituality is conveyed by her deep attachment to religion, and to be more specific, to Christianity. In this movie, Swan (played by Delle Bolton) is the daughter of the Chief of the Flathead tribe (played by Richard Angarola). She meets Johnson (played by Robert Redford) when her father gives her as a gift to him in order to become his wife. When Swan has to leave her tribe to live with Johnson in the wilderness, she does not forget the traditions of her tribe. Several times she is seen praying which enhances her strong link to God and Christianity. Her tribe does not represent the Native American tribe which is usually pictured in westerns. In this case, the tribe is christian and speaks French due to French settlers they used to know. Before eating her meal or going to bed, Swan prays and even Johnson does not understand her repetitive prayers: "I wish you would see fit to stop the practicing of those religious ceremonies." There is an inversion compared to previous westerns in which Christian religion was exclusively an element of

civilization and therefore not a characteristic attributed to the Native American woman. Kamiah in *Across the Wide Missouri* is also a protector and a believer but she is not a christian. Christianity was a symbol used in opposition to the Indian woman, who was defined as a sinful woman with a dark sexuality as it is the case for Pearl in *Duel in the Sun*. This insistence on Swan's religion mirrors the will of revisionist movies to deconstruct previous stereotypes and to give a new approach to the relation between whites and Native Americans: "the film's emphasis has shifted from the sexual and racial conflicts of *Mountain Man* to the failure of the Euro-American to understand and live within the American wilderness."<sup>24</sup> This movie brings another vision of the notion of Christianity and it also underlines the impact of white culture on Native American tribes. Swan's belief in God allows her to protect Johnson as it is a moment in his life when he seems in peace with himself and away from the troubles of white civilization.

Moreover, the image of the Native American woman as a protector thanks to her connection to God or to a superior force is also perceivable in *A Man Called Horse* with Running Deer (played by Corinna Tsopei). She is the sister of Yellow Hand (played by Manu Tupou), the Chief of the Sioux tribe. Her spirituality is directly linked with her intention to protect John Morgan (played by Richard Harris) an English aristocrat her tribe captured and used to enslave. When Morgan earns status because he killed two Shoshones who attacked the tribe, he can marry Running Deer with whom he learns how to live in the tribe. Before marrying her, Morgan has to participate in a ritual in which he has to do a vow to the sun in order to be officially accepted in the tribe. During the ritual, Running Deer's spirituality is illustrated by several devices. She has to go in a tepee to prepare herself for the wedding. She is seen standing outside the tepee, naked and raising her hands toward the sky. This long shot pictures her as a godly figure and this spiritual aspect is emphasized when she is in the tepee.

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24 McAllister, Mick. "You Can't Go Home: Jeremiah Johnson and the Wilderness". *Western American Literature*, vol.13, n°1, 1978 : 36.

A medium shot shows her holding plants in her hands which can remind the viewer of a religious portrait: “The mood of the scene, established by the dim lighting and the haze, seems to suggest a primordial connection among the woman, ritual and purification.” (Marubbio, 176).



Running Deer. *A Man Called Horse* (1970)

This idea of divinity is also enhanced by the comments of another captive that Morgan meets, named Batise (played by Jean Gascon), who is mixed-blood and understands the Sioux language. Throughout the movie, the tribe always speaks in Sioux and Batise allows Morgan, and the audience, to understand what they say by translating and explaining their beliefs and traditions. When Running Deer is outside the tepee, Batise states that “she must make pure” so that “nothing bad happens between she and [him].” Therefore, the Indian woman’s spirituality is still associated with the role of protector but there is also a willingness to give a more genuine illustration of Native American culture and to make the audience understand their customs. In previous westerns, this feature was mostly used to portray the Native American woman as a gift of God to the white man in the process of Manifest Destiny. This god-like trait is deepened when Morgan has visions during the ritual and sees himself with Running Deer. In these visions, they are running toward each other until they are together in a sort of lake. They symbolize a unity and a feeling of freedom is brought because his marriage with Running Deer is a way for him to be able to leave the tribe and be free. He calls her

“Little Freedom” and the wide space and the high brightness of the image contrast with the dark and oppressive lighting inside the tent where Morgan is standing during the ritual.



Morgan's vision. *A Man Called Horse* (1970)



Morgan during the ritual. *A Man Called Horse* (1970)

Indeed, several filming techniques are used to stress the differences between the two worlds and to make the viewer understand the important connection between Running Deer and the spiritual world: “The tone created through the cross editing of these scenes and her naked body both in the sweat lodge and the vision space imply that the two are interacting within a spiritual space.” (Marubbio, 177). Morgan and Running Deer even speak in English in these visions whereas Running Deer speaks only Sioux throughout the film. This element is evidence that they communicate in another world, away from the reality in which they do not have the same language. To this extent, Running Deer seems to have access to “other realms of the natural world and to the supernatural.” (Marubbio, 177). This aspect of the Native American woman belonging to another world is worshiped in this movie and it is a factor which is often present in revisionist westerns.

Indeed, Running Deer’s spirituality can make the viewer think of the after life as it is the case for Cat Dancing in *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*. Her spirituality is conveyed by her being represented as a ghost. Her name is in the title of the movie but she never appears in it. Contrary to *A Man Called Horse*, this film does not use the classical structure and tone of a western movie. It does not display a white man living in a tribe and meeting a Native American woman who becomes his wife. It portrays a white man, Jay Grobart, who used to be

married to a Native American woman, Cat Dancing, who was raped and murdered. Grobart killed the aggressor and was blamed for his wife's death. Then, he went to prison and the film begins when he robs a train with the help of his friends. Throughout the film, the viewer has access to little information about Cat Dancing. Even though Grobart talks about her, his descriptions remain vague. When he describes her to Charlie (played by Jay Varela), she has the usual attributes given to the Native American woman in movies, as a person who used to be joyful and whose innocence is underscored: "She used to laugh Charlie. Black hair. Like a child." Despite her physical absence, her spirit looks to be present in a white woman named Catherine Crocker (played by Sarah Miles) who meets Grobart during the robbery and then becomes his hostage. She is a lady and from the beginning of the movie, she has characteristics in common with the appearance and behavior of a Native American woman. First, her name "Catherine" recalls the name of "Cat Dancing". When she introduces herself to Sudie (played by Nancy Malone), a woman who has known Grobart for a long time, she begins to talk to her about Cat Dancing and she points out the similarity between the two names: "That was his squaw's name.". Even before knowing about Cat Dancing, Catherine has an unusual behavior when she meets Billy (played by Bo Hopkins), one of Grobart's friends. She fights him to keep her horse and she spits at his face while he calls her a "holy terror". Her behavior recalls rather Pearl's attitude in *Duel in the Sun*, who is told not to behave like a lady, than the composed and well-educated demeanor that is expected from a lady. Another example of her resemblance with a Native American woman, is when she walks in the desert with Grobart and his men. At some point, Grobart puts some mud on her face to prevent sunburn.



Catherine Crocker. *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* (1973)

In this high angle shot, the mud can make the audience think of Native American body paintings and the ghostly presence of Cat Dancing seems to become more and more important in Catherine's appearance and behavior throughout the film. This idea can be confirmed at the end when Grobart asks Catherine what happened to the lady he met. She replies that "she's gone", as if her former self vanished to give way to Cat Dancing's spirit. Like *Jeremiah Johnson*, this movie shows the choice of Hollywood to change the structure of westerns and thus the image of the Native American woman. M. Elise Marubbio defines revisionist westerns as "a media culture in search of new ways to present or critique the national mythic genre, including the Native American woman." (194) Accordingly, in *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*, this emphasis on the spirituality of the Native American woman takes part in this significant change of the Western genre.

#### **IV.A.2. A deep connection with a romantic wilderness**

Furthermore, in the representation of the Native American woman's divine aspect, a parallel can be drawn between her spirituality and the wilderness that surrounds her. In pro-Indian westerns, the Native American woman was already considered as a part of the wilderness with her constant comparison with the American continent. As already mentioned, the wilderness was associated with the idea of Otherness, and defined as "a place given over

to nature and which is hostile to the human as a species.” (Richardson, 32-33). In revisionist westerns, the new perception of the Native American woman’s divinity obviously leads to a shift in the image of the wilderness which is more worshiped than feared. In the four films chosen, the relation between the wilderness and the Indian woman is intensified which contributes to the enhancement of her spirituality. Throughout American history, several definitions have been given to the term “wilderness” but in these revisionist westerns, it can be related to the definition of the Romantics. In the eighteenth century, the concept of “romantic wilderness” was the fact of associating “God and wilderness”<sup>25</sup> because the Romantics saw nature as a representation of God’s power on Earth: “[the deists] accorded wilderness, as pure nature, special importance as the clearest medium through which God showed His power and excellency.” (Nash, 46). This interpretation of the wilderness is therefore similar to its depiction given in revisionist westerns which echoes the divine aspect of the Native American woman.

In *A Man Called Horse*, *Little Big Man*, *Jeremiah Johnson* and *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*, the first detail that demonstrates the belonging of the Native American woman to the wilderness is her name. Running Deer, Swan, Cat Dancing and Sunshine (played by Aimée Eccles), all have a name which refers to an animal or an element of nature. Even though Sunshine’s spirituality in *Little Big Man* is not explicitly demonstrated as in the other movies, there is one scene in which she looks connected to a romantic wilderness. Jack Crabb (played by Dustin Hoffman), a white man who was raised by a Cheyenne tribe and who experiences various types of lives between white civilization and the Indian community, meets Sunshine when she is giving birth during a battle between her tribe and white men.

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25 Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982 : 44 - 45.



Sunshine with her child and Jack Crabb. *Little Big Man* (1970)

In this shot, the trees, the bushes and the rocks around her suggest a protection, just as she protects her child in her arms. Her young appearance reinforces the comparison between her and nature as it gives the vision of “Indians as noble savages living in an unspoiled wilderness, spiritually pure, uncorrupted by civilization and at one with nature.” (Kasdan and Tavernetti, 122).

Then, this connection and parallel with a romantic wilderness is also evident in the personality of Running Deer and Swan. They are the two Native American women who are explicitly displayed with a connection to God and to another world. Both of them create a sort of aura around the white hero to protect him. For instance, when Morgan is captured by the Sioux, the editing conveys aggressiveness because of the repetitive cuts, the close-ups on Indians and swish pans. After Morgan succeeded in killing one of their enemies, he lives in the tribe and he is treated like everyone else. This is from this moment that Running Deer becomes closer to him and the first scene where they are speaking together completely differs from the beginning of the movie.



John Morgan and Running Deer. *A Man Called Horse* (1970)

Because of Running Deer's presence, the wilderness looks calmer and more pleasant. The flowers and the sound of the birds give a sweet atmosphere to the scene and the filming techniques underline it with very few cuts: "The overemphasis on the harsh reality of tribal life and existence in the wilderness is contrasted with [Running Deer's] passion for Horse and her Princess image." (Marubbio, 174). Her connection to the wilderness may also be noticed in Morgan's visions during the ritual. The shot/reverse shot on her and the flying bird highlights the idea that her spirit is linked with nature and animals. As for Swan in *Jeremiah Johnson*, just like Running Deer, she creates a sort of protective sphere when she builds her house with Johnson and lives a family life with Caleb (played by Josh Albee), their adopted son. In this vision, her demeanor parallels the mountains which are seen as a shelter from civilization according to Johnson's point of view. Even her reluctant behavior toward Johnson when she first meets him can be compared with the wilderness which Johnson admires but does not understand at the beginning of the movie: "Strong and silent, she symbolizes the world of the mountains; like the environment, she is a force with which Johnson must reckon, find peace, and love." (Marubbio, 187). Hence, both Running Deer and Swan have resemblances with the romantic wilderness that surrounds them and illustrates their spirituality.

Nevertheless, another example of the spiritual connection of the Native American woman with the wilderness can be found in *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*. This wilderness is not romantic as in other movies because there is not the idea of a superior force in nature or the presence of God's powers. However, Cat Dancing's spirit seems to dwell in this wilderness as, for example, the first time Catherine appears on screen and she is on her horse in the middle of the desert.



*The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* (1973)

This extreme long shot creates a discrepancy between the manner she is dressed which corresponds to the appearance of a lady with her black dress, her hat and her umbrella, and the absence of civilization around her. Thus, the desert can symbolize her non-conformism and the presence of Cat Dancing's spirit.

Therefore, the Native American woman's spirituality is expressed in different manners in each film. This image of a woman who has a connection to God or to a superior force is strongly spotlighted and the wilderness that surrounds her reflects her divinity and her power. The second characteristic which contributes to her representation as a sacred figure is the emphasis on her motherhood, an important attribute of Indian women in Native American culture.

#### **IV.B. The empowerment of the mother figure (*A Man Called Horse, Little Big Man, Jeremiah Johnson*)**

##### **IV.B.1. Women as a symbol of life opposed to violence and war**

The Native American woman's motherhood is underlined in an attempt to give her a more genuine portrait and to denounce the violence caused by wars between whites and Indians but also between Indian tribes. In many Native American tribes, mothers were

considered as powerful members: “While some white feminists view motherhood with suspicion and claim that it is a site of women’s oppression, many Indian women find the role empowering.” (Langston, 130). Running Deer, Swan and Sunshine correspond to the mother figure as they are all mothers, even if in Swan’s case, Caleb is not her biological son, her role remains the same. Their motherhood is mostly accentuated when battles and attacks occur in their camps or, in the case of Swan, in her house. The most conspicuous example in the movies chosen is Sunshine.

Even before the apparition of Sunshine on screen, *Little Big Man* expresses the necessity of women and children to be protected from the atrocity of war. When Jack sees an Indian camp wiped out after the attack of a Pawnee tribe, he tells his adoptive grand father Old Lodge Skin (played by Chief Dan George): “I don’t understand it Grandpa. Why would they kill women and children?” To his question, Old Lodge Skin answers: “Because they are strange.”, “They do not seem to know where the center of the earth is.” Here, *Little Big Man* demonstrates that the place and the treatment of women and children depend on the tribe. From the point of view of Jack’s tribe, which is Cheyenne, the death of women and children is seen as a blasphemy and a parallel is made between the destroying of the camp, the environment, and women and children: “Through the portrayal of the Cheyenne Indians, *Little Big Man* evokes a romanticized image of the ‘pure life’ and condemns the forces that caused that way of life to vanish – racial intolerance, unbridled greed, environmental plunder.” (Kasdan and Tavernetti, 129). The same analogy is made when Jack joins General George Armstrong Custer’s army (played by Richard Mulligan) as a muleskinner and takes part in a battle against the Cheyennes. White men start killing women and children which horrifies Jack who tries to intervene and to stop the slaying. This comparison between the environment and women may bring into mind the term “Native Womanism”<sup>26</sup>. “Womanism”

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26 Guerrero, M.A. Jaimes. “‘Patriarchal Colonialism’ and Indigenism: Implications for Native Feminist Spirituality and Native Womanism”. *Hypatia*, vol.18, n°2, 2003 : 67.

is a noun and a movement created by Alice Walker<sup>27</sup> which was used by African American women “instead of feminism to describe women’s consciousness which includes women’s issue, race/nationalist issues and class issues.” (Manuelito, 178). The purpose of this movement was for African American women to express their experiences and to detach themselves from feminism which, according to them, did not take race issues into account and therefore was more applied to white women. Just like the term “intersectionality” created by Crenshaw, “Womanism” also involves Native American women and it allowed them to raise their voices and to point out their essential roles inside Indian tribes: “‘Native Womanism’ also has an ecological perspective, because there is also a connection between the denigration and subordination of women and the corresponding degradation and subjugation of nature through acts of ecocide.” (Guerrero, 67). Thus, *Little Big Man’s* description of women and children being slaughtered by whites or Indians, just like the land, coincides with this idea that women are sacred and have an important role in most Indian tribes and that their killing is destroying the tribe’s land but also its culture, and consequently, its existence. This connection of the Indian woman to the land is also explicitly displayed in the first apparition of Sunshine. As already indicated, the wilderness reflects her youth and her will to protect her child. In this image, it is also possible to say that the wilderness, seen as “pure nature” (Nash, 46), as the original state of the American continent, echoes her motherhood with her child in her arms: “Through this constant connection of her with children and birth [...] the film renders Sunshine as a young earth mother whose fertility and beauty leave an indelible impression on Jack.” (Marubbio, 181). Motherhood is her major feature as she becomes a mother for a second time with Jack’s child.

Moreover, the sharp contrast between the violence of war and the Native American woman is stressed when the latter, perceived as a mother figure, dies. Sunshine and Running

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27 Manuelito, Kathryn D.. “Womanism to Indigenism: Identities and Experiences.” *Works and Days* 47/48, vol. 24, n°1-2, 2006 : 167.

Deer, who is pregnant when she dies, are both mothers when they are killed in the battlefield. Their death is brutal, especially Sunshine's. When her camp is attacked by Custer's army, Jack sees her running with their new born in her arms. In a long shot, the white man's domination over Sunshine is conveyed by his height and threatening attitude toward her. He is on his horse with his gun pointed at her.



*Little Big Man* (1970)

Sunshine holding her child and the white man holding his gun are two paradoxical elements which are combined in a same shot. This paradox strengthens the feeling of horror the audience may feel. Already before Sunshine's apparition, the shots on her sisters being killed, burned and covered in blood are used to shock the viewer. They are then followed by successive shots on Sunshine to underline an idea of rush and violence. Sunshine is shot several times which illustrates her agony to the viewer as she dies very slowly. The purpose of this movie to display this harsh image is linked with the political context of the 1970s, to denounce the slaughters caused by Americans in the Vietnam War: "Penn's scenes of the massacre of the Cheyennes – allegories for American actions in Vietnam, especially the My Lai massacre – connect the film's western European culture with acts of savagery and uncivilized state." (Marubbio, 182-183). *Jeremiah Johnson* uses comparable filming techniques when Johnson discovers Swan and Caleb who have been murdered by Crows in their house. The viewer does not see them being murdered but the crescendo music and the

accumulation of close-ups on the blood, Swan and Caleb's bodies on the floor and the arrows give a feeling of discomfort which opposes the peace that Johnson found when he was living with Swan and Caleb.

Nevertheless, this portrayal of the mother figure is ambivalent if the context in which the films were produced is taken into account. Running Deer's death resembles Sunshine's death but the fact that she dies pregnant can make the viewer think of a major social problem of American society in the 1970s.

#### **IV.B.2. An ambivalent mother figure**

Indeed, the massacre of Native American women, and therefore of the mother figure, echoes the Vietnam War and the loss of innocence of the period but it can also refer to the condition of Native American women where most of them were victim of forced sterilization. In the 1960s and the 1970s, birth control was a considerable progress but it had negative repercussions on Native American women as regulations were not entirely respected by some doctors: "Medical documents also disclose that a 'few' women signed consent forms on the day following their sterilization operation." (Lawrence, 407-408). This issue brings to light the persistent racism present in the United States: "Some of [the physicians] did not believe that American Indian and other minority women had the intelligence to use other methods of birth control effectively and that there were already too many minority individuals causing problems in the nation, including the Black Panthers and the American Indian Movement." (Lawrence, 410). Running Deer's death in *A Man Called Horse* can recall this problem of forced sterilization. Just like *Little Big Man*, this movie represents women as the opposite of war and violence. This fact is enhanced by the death of Yellow Hand's wife during the battle against the Shoshones which is graphic and amplified by the loud music and the screams of

Running Deer and her mother. Running Deer's death is not as brutal but her being pregnant worsens the situation and can bring into mind the forced sterilization suffered by Native American women. Furthermore, the fact that she dies and that her child can never be born, has heavy consequences on the future of the tribe. Morgan ends up chief of a part of the tribe and leaves the place with them. Yellow Hand also leaves the camp with the other part of the tribe. Running Deer's depiction mirrors the idea that in Native American tribes, each member has a part to play and that the disappearance of one of them can affect the balance of the tribe. This is also what happened to many Native American women who were sterilized without knowing it and whose life was impacted: "Children are very important to Native American women for economic reasons, tribal survival, and to secure their place in the tribe." (Lawrence, 412). As a result, the Indian community was in crisis: "Members of the [Women of All Red Nations] assert that communities having large numbers of sterilizations lost the respect of other tribal communities because of their inability to protect Native American women." (Lawrence, 411).

However, Running Deer's death as a mother may refer to another problem of American society. Despite the Civil Rights Act enacted in 1964, racial issues remained and the fact that she dies being pregnant can be interpreted as a rejection of miscegenation: "*A Man Called Horse* employs a common variation in which the child dies along with the mother, suggesting that miscegenation is a biological dead end as well as a social taboo."<sup>28</sup> In Hollywood westerns, the rate of deaths in mixed-blood couples was still important as Mathieu Lacoue-Labarthe explains: "En dépit de l'hétérogénéité croissante de ces groupes humains, s'unir à une personne d'origine distincte reste dangereux. L'échec du couple se traduit encore, à plus de 80%, dans les années 1960 et 1970 [...] par la mort d'au moins un des deux membres du couple." (344). In addition to this rejection, Native American women in films are more often killed than white women which is evidence of the remaining inequality between

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28 Phillips, Mike. "A Man Called Horse: Western Melodrama and Southern Gothic." *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture (1900-present)*, vol.19, n°1, 2020 : 4.

the different ethnic groups: “Mais la différence vient surtout des femmes, où le déséquilibre est flagrant: *The Last of the Mohicans* est le seul film dans lequel une Blanche meurt à l’écran; les neuf autres victimes féminines recensées entre 1960 et 2005 sont indiennes et métisses.” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 345). Hence, *Little Big Man*, *A Man Called Horse* and *Jeremiah Johnson* are relevant examples of this trend in the 1970s. *Sunshine*, *Running Deer* and *Swan are mothers and their dying* highlights this refusal of miscegenation.

Thus, these revisionist westerns emphasize the mother figure to spotlight her power and role in Native American culture but also to create a contrast with wars. Her death occurs to shock the audience and to blame the battles between whites and Indians and the conflicts between Indian tribes. The Indian woman remains untamed by violence and close to the wilderness. However, this enhancement on the mother figure can be seen as paradoxical regarding the context in which the movies were produced. The sterilization that was imposed on many Native American women contradicts the respect given to the Native American woman on screen, as motherhood is a crucial matter in Native American culture. Her death can be interpreted as a denial of miscegenation which was still a problem in American society and it also reveals a continuous trend in Hollywood cinema to kill the Indian woman.

Therefore, the sacredness of the Native American woman is a dominant feature in her representation. Revisionist westerns underscore her divinity which is only positively perceived. Her spirituality and motherhood are two elements used to illustrate her sacred aspect as they are both linked with the wilderness and the land. Her motherhood also mirrors the comparison between women and nature. She is seen as a protector and a sacred being who remains pure despite the wars caused by the rest of humanity. In the context of the production of the movies, she is used to oppose and criticize American intervention in the Vietnam War. Her death symbolizes the eradication of innocence of the period and reflects the social and

racial issues remaining in the United States. In addition, this sacred image of the Indian woman corresponds more to the Native Americans' vision of women which demonstrates the determination of Hollywood to modify the structure of the Western genre. However, the use of the Native American woman as a symbol can also have negative consequences on her portrayal. Her other characteristics are neglected as she is less and less present on screen and she is still defined by stereotypes which blur the authenticity of her representation.

## **V. A continuous lack of authenticity**

In spite of Hollywood's intention to picture a more genuine portrait of the Native American woman as a sacred figure, her representation in its entirety is still limited to stereotypes which have been used in previous westerns, as Maryann Oshana points out in her essay on Native American women in westerns: "The woman's image remained consistently backward and static." (48). Compared to pro-Indian westerns, she is less represented as her time on screen is reduced. Because of the movies' goal to use her as a symbol in the anti-war message, her apparitions are rare and only occur in a short period of time of the main character's life. Running Deer in *A Man Called Horse* is the exception to the rule because she is present from the beginning to the end of the movie, but she is mostly enhanced when Morgan is about to marry her and to be freed. Moreover, the context in which the films were produced also affects the depiction of her sexuality which is exacerbated. She symbolizes the sexual revolution which, once again, connects her origins to her sensuality. The Native American woman's growing absence on screen and the emphasis on her sexuality are two predominant factors that demonstrate a constant problem of accuracy in her description which gives an ambivalent reconsideration of her image.

## V.A. A smaller presence of the Native American woman on screen (*A Man Called Horse*, *Little Big Man*, *Jeremiah Johnson*, *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*)

### V.A.1. The persistence of some stereotypes

Even though the Native American woman is not as criticized and discriminated as in pro-Indian westerns, her noticeable increasing absence in revisionist westerns participates in the remaining of some stereotypes. Running Deer, Sunshine, Swan and Cat Dancing are essential characters in the story but their role remains minimized compared to the importance given to the white man. None of them is presented as a main character because they are only perceived as a symbol. This issue is mentioned by Lisa Charleyboy, a Native American writer, who claims that throughout the years the Native American woman was more treated as an object for movies, which according to her reflects the absence of consideration of Indian women in American society: “this lack of exposure makes it easy for audiences to not think of Native women as real people, furthering the invisibility of crimes against them.”<sup>29</sup> The continuity of this trend in the 1970s revisionist westerns is all the more ambiguous that it creates a paradox with the emergence of Native American women as activists in the American Indian Movement. They were involved in protests like, for example, the occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1969: “the work of women was essential in the daily running of the island, including running the community kitchen, school, and health center.” (Langston, 119). Indeed, just like men, they were part of the movement but the media of the 1970s essentially focused on male leaders as Donna Hightower Langston, an American writer and professor specialized in Native American studies, states in her essay on Native American women’s activism: “Yet male figures such as Richard Oaks (Mohawk) [...] and twenty-three old John Trudell (Santee

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29 Hafsa, Fatima. “Native American Women are contesting their misrepresentation in film”. *Ampersand*. USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, published on April 2019.  
<http://www.ampersandla.com/native-american-women-are-contesting-their-misrepresentation-in-film/>

Lakota), who ran the radio broadcast from Alcatraz, received more media attention at the time and remain better known to this day.” (119). Consequently, it is possible to say that similarly to other media of the time, revisionist westerns do not aim attention at the Native American woman and her little apparitions on screen do not give a precise and realistic representation of her appearance as well as the diverse roles she could have in the tribe. This is a problem which could already be found in pro-Indian westerns and which was not resolved in revisionist westerns, contrary to what they are expected to do: “the emphasis in Westerns has been on the glorification of male roles – both whites and Native; the Native American woman has remained almost invisible.” (Oshana, 50).

Furthermore, even if the Indian woman is worshiped for her sacredness and therefore mostly described in a positive way, this emphasis imprisons her in the image of the princess. Concerning the appearance, Running Deer is the closest illustration of the princess figure as she resembles Sonseeahray in the way she is dressed.



Sonseeahray. *Broken Arrow* (1950)



Running Deer. *A Man Called Horse* (1970)

Still, she does not have a child-like appearance which is an attribute related to the innocence and the youth of the princess. In this vision, Sunshine illustrates this youth as Jack observes the first time he sees her: “She didn’t look more than a girl.” Swan, and even Cat Dancing, who looks like a child according to Grobart’s memories, can also be compared with

Sonseeahray as they seem very young. It is important to remember that the “Indian Princess” (Pillow, 13) in the 1950s wore the “notion of a virgin continent and an untamed wilderness.” (Marubbio, 62). This is also what is displayed regarding Swan and Sunshine in their comparison to the wilderness. In addition to her young aspect, several elements are used to whiten the Native American woman on screen which corresponds, once more, to the definition of the Indian princess<sup>30</sup>. The fact that Running Deer is not played by a real Native American woman, just as Sonseeahray, links her to this image, and the stress on Swan’s Christianity may also be seen as a means to whiten her: “the prevailing view of the princess was that she was gentle, noble, nonthreateningly erotic, virtually a White Christian, and yet different, being tied to the native soil of America.”<sup>31</sup> The use of the English language in the case of Sunshine might also be interpreted as a way to whiten her or as a translation of the Cheyenne language since both her and Jack can actually speak Cheyenne: “Après le départ des soldats, Crabb s’adresse à elle en anglais, mais peut-être s’agit-il, dans l’esprit de Penn, d’une traduction du cheyenne à l’intention du public.” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 338). Thus, Running Deer, Swan, Sunshine and Cat Dancing all share these traits related to the princess figure which are also noticeable in their role since they aim to “save or give aid to the white man.” (Green, 703).

In the case of Running Deer, it is conceivable to say that she conforms to this role because at the end Morgan is free and he becomes chief. However, concerning Swan, Sunshine and Cat Dancing, it might be more difficult to link their actions with the concept of the princess. Swan guides Johnson how to live in the wilderness but her imminent death precipitates him into madness as he decides to kill every Indian that crosses his path and to leave the country. As for Sunshine and Cat Dancing, they give a sort of interlude in Jack and

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30 Pillow, Wanda. “Searching for Sacajawea: Whitened Reproductions and Endarkened Representations.” *Hypatia*, vol.22, n°2, 2007 : 13.

31 Bird, S. Elizabeth. “Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media”. *Journal of Communication*, vol.49, n°3, 1999 : 72.

Grobart's lives but they do not help them achieve a goal. They are rather representative of a stage in the hero's life and, as a result, in the construction of his identity.

Accordingly, even if these characters cannot really be defined as examples of the princess figure, some of its characteristics continue to prevail. The smaller presence of the Native American woman on screen and the remaining stereotypes in her attitude and physical appearance convey a simplified image of her existence. She keeps being classified into one category which does not present an insight of the various possible roles she could have. This narrowed view suggests that she only exists for the white man's purpose and identity. This idea may result in a misrepresentation of Native American gender systems that were not based on the domination of men over women.

#### **V.A.2. Always attached to the white man's purpose and identity**

Indeed, several elements in the movies seem to justify the Native American woman's presence through the part she plays in the white man's purpose and identity. This choice of representation is problematic as it does not reflect the reality of how Native American women were seen in Native American communities. As already said, if they were not wives or mothers, they could be warriors, doctors and so on. The absence of other roles in revisionist westerns is evidence that the reassessment of her image is not complete: "The complexities of these roles rarely appeared in ethnography, mainstream history, or popular culture because they were not understood by white cultural observers." (Bird, 74). Although these westerns tend to highlight the importance of mothers, and the spiritual facet of the Indian woman, the fact that she only depends on the white man's choice of life brings the idea that she has no purpose of her own. This vision does not respect the regard given to Native American women in tribes, since the superiority of men over women did not exist: "Each sex is valued for the

contribution it makes to the society. They are cooperative rather than competitive.” (Powers, 356). The other issue of these movies is that they depict only one type of system without considering the diversity of Native American tribes: “the tremendous diversity between tribes regarding gender systems generates complexities and an essentialized perspective of indigenous womanism is most inappropriate.” (Manuelito, 181).

The non-respect of Native American gender systems and the denigration of the Indian women may be noticed in one specific scene of *Jeremiah Johnson*. When Johnson begins his life with Swan and Caleb, he criticizes her for the poor quality of the food she cooks and then he forces her to learn to say yes by insulting her mother tongue: “Ain’t that a lot easier than saying all that gibberish?”. He then concludes the discussion by telling her: “That’s all you need to know for now.” Obviously, the purpose of this scene is to denounce the white man for his arrogance and ignorance by drawing “a comic parallel to the racism of Robinson Crusoe” (McAllister, 41) but the fact that Swan does not understand and, therefore, never replies to his disdain by staring at the ground, gives the impression that she is a docile person who does not dare to express her anger though she is forced to live with him against her will.



Swan. *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972)

The feeling of discomfort conveyed is even more evident when it is compared with a scene of *Little Big Man* where the same accusation against the white man is made. After eating his meal, Jack asks Sunshine to leave him alone by saying: “Be quiet now. I’m digesting.” In this case, the mockery of the white man’s arrogance is more explicit because of the comical mood of the scene. The character of Jack is a derision of the white man and Sunshine ignoring his request is a way to make fun of his attempt to control her.

Besides, another example of the Native American woman attachment to the white man, and of her belittlement, can be observed. Even when the Native American woman is not obliged to live with the white man, she is immediately attracted to him. For instance, Morgan sees Running Deer refusing to marry an Indian of another tribe but she naturally comes toward him when he is no longer enslaved: “the film suggested throughout that American Indian women are naturally attracted to white rather than American Indian men.” (Bird, 76). A similar spontaneous attraction occurs for Sunshine toward Jack whereas the latter wanted to use her in exchange for his wife Olga (played by Kelly Jean Peters). In this vision, both *A Man Called Horse* and *Little Big Man* keep the former and stereotyped model of the white man and the Indian woman whose love and attraction are imminent. This stereotype brings a sexist approach of the consideration of women: “Women are faceless, rather sexless squaws in minor roles, or sexy exotic princesses or maidens who desire white men.” (Bird, 78).

Moreover, the Native American woman is still objectified in her role. She is mostly used to fulfill the white man’s goal or to give an unexpected turning point in the story. She keeps being viewed as an object of trade, or as an object the white man can use to his ends, like Morgan, who utilizes Running Deer as a way out of the tribe. Morgan’s behavior toward Running Deer recalls Flint Mitchell’s use of Kamiah in *Across the Wide Missouri* who at first only wants to marry her to acquire a safe passage in Native territories for beavers trade. John Morgan wishes to marry Running Deer simply because Batise told him he could flee from the

tribe thanks to this marriage: “He understands that, once he achieves the status of a brave by killing an enemy, he may ‘buy’ Running Deer as a bride.” (Marubbio, 175). In his visions during the ritual, Running Deer even becomes an object of property when he declares that she belongs to him: “You are part of me, when I go, you go forever.” Despite his first dishonest intentions to use her, Morgan changes his position when he realizes he truly cares about her. This situation also brings to mind Jack’s attitude toward Sunshine since his first idea was to trade her to have his wife back.

Lastly, the Native American woman is objectified once again when she is perceived as a way to build the identity of the main character. For example, in *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*, Jay Grobart is an enigma for Catherine, as well as for the viewer, who cannot understand his coldness. The more she knows about Cat Dancing, the more she fathoms his attitude: “Cat Dancing, however, remains important to the viewer’s understanding of the white hero, to his temporary madness, and to its progression of the plot.” (Marubbio, 190). Indeed, Cat Dancing’s death affects him which makes him look in a permanent grief and in a state of guilt as he is the one who killed her. Her rape and death justify his personality which was a theme often used in westerns: “These films are not at all concerned with the actual brutalization of the women involved (in fact, she is often not shown at all), but rather with the effect which the rape/murder has on the man in her life – often a white man.” (Oshana, 48). Catherine, who parallels Cat Dancing’s appearance and behavior, can represent the physical objectification of Cat Dancing. First, she influences Grobart’s decisions and personality, and even if she is a white woman, the filming techniques employed convey the impression she is submitted to Grobart. In several high angle shots, she looks crushed when she faces him.



Catherine Crocker. *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* (1973)

As a result, Catherine is subject to the same objectification that was observed in *The Big Sky* regarding Teal Eye. Then, her easy acceptance of Grobart's confession about killing Cat Dancing, which occurs when she is more Indian-like, proves her deep attachment and devotion that certainly mirrors Cat Dancing's affection toward Grobart. Although *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* stages a white couple, the role of Catherine reflects the place given to the Indian woman in a mixed couple. The character of Catherine can therefore be understood as a medium through which Cat Dancing keeps existing.

Hence, revisionist westerns continue to display the Indian woman as a dependent figure whose utility is purely limited to the white man's purpose or identity which explains her modest presence on screen. This conception of the Native American woman does not coincide with Natives' perspective about women. She is not as objectified as in former westerns but the fact that her objectification remains, demonstrates a consistent lack of accuracy and a negative usage of her image by Hollywood cinema. This problematic illustration of the Native American woman as an object or even a symbol is worsened in the way her sexuality is exacerbated.

## V.B. The exacerbation of her sexuality (*A Man Called Horse*, *Little Big Man*, *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*)

### V.B.1. A symbol of the sexual liberation of the 1970s

In addition to the possibility of showing more graphic scenes, the disappearance of the Hays rules<sup>32</sup> allowed Hollywood to reveal more nudity on screen which impacted western movies, and to be more precise, the image of the Native American woman. She embodies the mood of the period since in some films she symbolizes the sexual revolution of the 1970s. In the movies chosen, both *Little Big Man* and *A Man Called Horse* associate the Indian woman with the idea of peace and love. When Running Deer is standing naked outside the tepee before the ritual, raising her hands toward the sky, Batisse asserts that she prepares herself to prevent bad omen on her future with Morgan and he concludes his explanation by saying: “and then, you have peace and love.” The juxtaposition of his comment and the nudity of Running Deer directly refers to the sexual revolution of the time. This explicit reference is rather positive in the case of Running Deer as it does not unreasonably betrays the authenticity of her representation. It is an argument used to romanticize this precise moment of the story whereas in *Little Big Man*, Sunshine’s description of a hippie-like woman affects a major aspect of her portrayal.

Despite the accentuation on Sunshine’s motherhood when she first appears, she is also paradoxically depicted as a woman whose sexual openness is exposed in an exaggerated manner, especially when she asks Jack to sleep with her four sisters. She starts her request by flattering Jack’s ego: “My strong husband who brings in so much food.” She then goes on by claiming that her sisters are without a husband and that they “sleep alone and cry.” Jack firstly

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32 Kasdan, Margo, and Tavernetti, Susan. “Native Americans in a Revisionist Western, *Little Big Man* (1970)”. *Hollywood’s Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003 : 125.

refuses her offer but her insistence convinces him to accept it afterwards. This moment illustrates a sexual freedom among the Cheyennes which is reinforced in the scene with Jack and the four sisters in the tepee: “the depiction of the Cheyenne women suggests a sixties stereotype with a comic twist. They personify the ‘natural’ women of the era who engaged in communal living and practiced sexual freedom.” (Kasdan and Tavernetti, 132). Sunshine leaves Jack alone with her sisters while she goes in the wilderness to give birth to her child. As a result, she is portrayed as a young mother who is also defined by her free sexuality which was seen as a positive feature: “il faut faire la part de ce qui est dû à la persistance des préjugés anciens, et de ce qui, dans le mode de vie supposé des Indiens, est jugé valorisant dans une période de révolution sexuelle.” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 360). Nevertheless, this depiction of the Cheyennes and the rapid union between Sunshine and Jack are not at all accurate as it was not part of the customs of this tribe: “In reality Cheyenne women were constrained by strictly maintained rules of chastity; even courtship was conducted over a period of years and under stern guidelines.” (Kasdan and Tavernetti, 132). Therefore, the image of the Native American woman is once more essentialized because she does not correspond to a real description of Cheyenne women and the comic tone of this scene is also questionable as it displays Sunshine’s sisters in a ridiculous way: “He accomplishes the task, makes his wife happy, makes her sisters happy, amuses the audience, and in the process demonstrates the flagrant disregard the film has for the Cheyenne people and their culture.” (Oshana, 49).

Even if the objective of this symbolism of the sexual liberation was to draw a positive portrait of the Native American woman, this image alters largely her authenticity as it can be seen with Sunshine. Her hippie aspect and the stress on Running Deer’s nudity preserve the idea that her sensuality is inscribed in her blood, like it was the case with the femme fatale: “Native or indigenous women were viewed as exotic and erotic females who had the power to

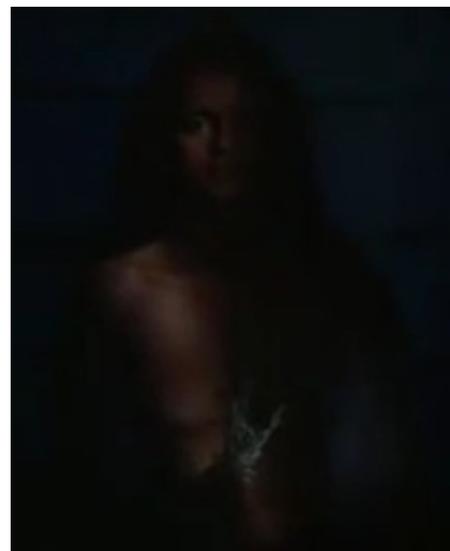
seduce any man into promiscuity.” (Guerrero, 67). This connection between her origins and her sexuality can above all be examined in *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*, in the evolution of Catherine into an Indian woman.

### **V.B.2. The association of her origins with sensuality**

Indeed, this process of assimilating the Indian woman’s origins with her sensuality is conspicuous in the way she is physically represented. Catherine, who can therefore be considered as a physical presence of Cat Dancing, shares similarities with Running Deer’s nudity in the way she is filmed. The more she resembles Cat Dancing the more her nudity is emphasized. For instance, when she and Grobart are preparing themselves before going to the Shoshone village where his children remained after Cat Dancing’s death, Catherine tries to wash herself in the lake. She is naked to the waist and her loose hair recall Running Deer in the tepee.



Catherine Crocker. *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* (1973)



Running Deer. *A Man Called Horse* (1970)

After this scene, for the first time in the movie she does not wear her dress but a shirt, a pair of trousers, boots and a hat. Her two braids, which resemble Sunshine's hairstyle, strengthen the idea that she is not the lady she used to be and that she is thus closer to the appearance of a Native American woman. In this view, when she is near the lake she looks like Onahti at the beginning of *The Indian Fighter* who echoes the vision of the Indian woman as the "American Eve". (Marubbio, 70).

The second detail that demonstrates this accentuation on Catherine's nudity after becoming more Indian-like is when Grobart kills Dawes (played by Jack Warden). Her shoulder is uncovered and her fuzzy hair oppose her former lady appearance which is evidence that the Native American woman's sensuality is linked to the idea of wilderness. This movie exhibits the continuous stereotyping of her sexuality by attributing it to Catherine in order to make her fit in the classical representation of the Native American woman in films.

Nevertheless, this persistent correlation between the Indian woman's origins and her sexuality in *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* may also bring to light a confusing aspect. Even though Catherine's nudity is more distinguishable when she looks more like Cat Dancing, she is already treated as a sexual object when she is a lady. Several times Grobart's friends try to rape her and when Dawes traps her alone in the little wooden house he talks of her body like a sexual object by saying: "I wonder how it looks like a lady undressed." This sexualization parallels the one suffered by Native American women, like Running Deer, who seems to be the object of the male gaze in the way she is filmed: "The manner in which the camera roams Running Deer's naked body also accentuates her eroticism, visually trying it through the sweat ceremony to an earthly, 'Native' sexuality." (Marubbio, 176). The fact that Catherine is also called a "squaw" by Dawes underlines the idea that these two types of women are considered the same. This concept completely contradicts the distinction between the "squaw" and the lady stated in *Duel in the Sun*. As a result, this blurred boundary also

occurs for the princess as it can be seen with Running Deer's nudity or Sunshine's sexual freedom since it was rather a characteristic attributed to the "squaw": "But who becomes the white man's sexual partner? [...] It cannot be the Princess, for she is sacrosanct. [...] The Princess' darker twin, the Squaw, must serve this side of the image". (Green, 711). Although the Indian woman could be pictured naked in the 1950s to represent another form of Eve, like Onahti, it was never as explicit. Accordingly, this accentuation of the Native American woman's origins with her sensuality generates a new sort of princess figure whose features are related to the "Sexualized Maiden" (89) and the "Celluloid Princess" (62) defined by Marubbio, who calls this new ambiguous figure the "Celluloid Maiden" (194). This portrayal maintains an inaccurate and discriminating image of the Indian woman but also accentuates her ambivalence by conspicuously combining the princess aspect and the erotic facet.

Thus, the exacerbation of the Native American woman's sexuality is used to portray her as a symbol of the sexual revolution and to keep classifying her in an 'Other' category by linking her sensuality to her origins which are anew connected to the idea of wilderness. She is still treated differently compared to white women because when a white woman shares common traits with her, the stereotypes become even more detectable as, for example, her sexualization. A new definition of the Native American woman is given by these contradictory features which keep conveying an inaccurate image.

Therefore, the lack of authenticity of the Native American woman is marked by her considerable smaller presence on screen as well as the remaining image of the princess. Compared to the 1950s pro-Indian westerns, she is not constantly at the white man's side but her rare appearances only occur because of the utility she has to his purpose or identity. This role and her objectification do not correspond to the real consideration Native Americans had on women nor do they coincide with the various gender systems that existed among the tribes.

Movies tend to depict her in a positive manner by portraying her as a symbol of the sexual liberation but the excess of this symbolism may affect the realistic aspect of the Native American woman as it is the case for *Sunshine* regarding the representation of Cheyenne women. Her exotic sexuality is directly linked to her origins which creates another complex image. Even though she is not treated as “a savage squaw” (Green, 703), the manner in which her sexuality is depicted associates her again to the image of the “squaw”. Consequently, the paradoxical combination of her motherhood in the sacred aspect and her eroticism echoes the ambivalence of the period. Movie makers seek new ways to represent the Native American woman even if it does not conform to the reality. However, despite this continuous lack of authenticity, a more positive side of her representation in revisionist westerns can be observed as she may be considered as a central figure in the deconstruction of the Myth of the Frontier.

## **VI – A central character in the deconstruction of the Myth of the Frontier**

Although the Native American woman remains a second character in the story, she is spotlighted for her role in the anti-war message that contradicts the traditional image of westerns, but also the structure of a fundamental notion in American history, the Myth of the Frontier. The term myth is a complicated concept but according to Claude Lévi-Strauss in his essay “The Structural Study of Myth”, a myth is a story inextricably linked to history and particularly language, since it is through language that a myth can last: “A myth [...] is both historically specific – it’s almost always set in some time long ago – and ahistorical, meaning that its story is timeless.”<sup>33</sup> Richard Slotkin completes this definition by categorizing myths as stories which are part of a nation and its history: “myths are stories drawn from a society’s history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society’s

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33 Klages, Mary. *Literary Theory: The Complete Guide*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness.” (5). The Myth of the Frontier is deeply inscribed in American identity but several meanings emerged from its original significance. Concerning western movies, this myth is illustrated by a division between “wilderness/civilization, Indian/White border” (Slotkin, 14). As Michael Richardson explains, there is a distinction between white civilization which symbolizes “sameness” (33) and Indian tribes who are linked to “otherness” (33). Thus, there is both a physical separation between whites and Indians and an ideological one between what is known and what is unknown. The role of the white man in this myth is to go in “‘Indian country’ and experience a ‘regression’ to a more primitive and natural condition of life so that the false values of the ‘metropolis’ can be purged.” (Slotkin, 14). As a result, the main purpose of this myth is to “explain and justify the establishment of the American colonies” (Slotkin, 10) and the presence of Otherness is necessary in the progress of civilization but also in the reinforcement of “a sense of American identity” (Richardson, 33).

In pro-Indian westerns, this myth is already less approved because the white man may stay live in an Indian tribe and reject his own civilization, like Flint in *Across the Wide Missouri*, but Otherness is still presented as a pejorative trait of Indians, especially in the depiction of the Indian woman who is both whitened and considered as Other. Nevertheless, this portrayal no longer exists in revisionist westerns. The Native American woman is fully part of the wilderness and she is the reason that convinces the white man to stay in it. Even though she does not represent the frontier of this myth anymore, she plays a significant role in its deconstruction as she reinforces the white man’s determination to give up on his own lifestyle and civilization. The second main factor that is evidence of the reconsideration of this myth, is the way the Native American woman is positively described compared to the white woman.

## **VI.A. The rejection of white civilization (*A Man Called Horse, Little Big Man, Jeremiah Johnson, The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*)**

### **VI.A.1. The Native American woman as an anchor and a guide into the wilderness**

The first major component of the reconsideration of this myth is the rejection of the white man's own civilization and culture. This idea can be noticed in *Jeremiah Johnson*, in the manner Johnson perceives his former life and how Swan participates in his new choice of life. He flees from white civilization to seek shelter in the wilderness in an attempt to forget the barbarity of wars as he is a veteran of the Mexican-American war. This fact can be understood in his discussion with Bear Claw (played by Will Geer) who asks him: "Must have missed another war down there?", to what Johnson replies: "Didn't miss anything.". This reluctance toward white civilization as well as his perception of the wilderness as a shelter can anew be related to the vision of the Romantics: "this second conception is the value of wild country as a sanctuary in which those in need of consolation can find respite from the pressures of civilization." (Nash, 4). His behavior even recalls the primitivists who "believed that man's happiness and well being decreased in direct proportion to his degree of civilization." (Nash, 47). It is relevant to remember that the Native American woman is a personification of the wilderness and that therefore it is her who allows the white man to find a balance in his new life by guiding him.

Indeed, because of her connection with nature, she is not the one who is conquered by the white man's culture but it is rather him who is compelled to live according to her customs. For instance, despite the silent behavior of Swan at the beginning of *Jeremiah Johnson*, she will not learn Johnson's language and way of life but it is him who will adapt to her culture

and, consequently, to his new environment: “It is Johnson, not Swan, who must change and adapt, and his changes must be organic and whole, consistent with the moral and practical necessities of his adopted world.” (McAllister, 42). This inversion of roles between the white man and the Native American woman is primarily noticeable in the type of language used. The choice of Native languages is not only a device employed to give a more genuine depiction of Native tribes. As already stated, a myth is built by language and the Myth of the Frontier is an element of American identity. The fact that in *A Man Called Horse* and *Jeremiah Johnson* the white man must learn the tribe’s language displays the movie makers’ intention to disrupt this myth. In *A Man Called Horse*, the whole movie is spoken in Sioux, except for the dialogues between Batise and Morgan which are in English in order to make the viewer understand the scene. Even if Morgan is an English man, and therefore not representative of American nation, he can be seen as an “icon of civilization” (Marubbio, 174) which is conspicuous if his appearance at the beginning and at the ending of the movie are compared.



Morgan before knowing the tribe.  
*A Man Called Horse* (1970)



Morgan when he is married to Running Deer. *A Man Called Horse* (1970)

In the first picture, there is even a mismatch between his clothes and the environment. Once he is with Running Deer, his integration into the Sioux tribe must be done by his learning of the customs but also the language. When Running Deer tells him she is pregnant, she speaks

in Sioux and even though Morgan keeps talking to her in English the rest of the time, he understands her words and replies to her in Sioux. However, the most striking example of the use of Native languages is *Jeremiah Johnson*. Notwithstanding his efforts to impose his language to Swan, he is the one who will change by speaking only Flathead. His complete assimilation into Swan's culture is underlined when Lieutenant Mulvey (played by Jack Colvin) and his troop of the U.S Cavalry ask for his help to find a stranded wagon train in the mountains. The first remark of Johnson when Lieutenant Mulvey talks to him is his uneasiness with the English language: "It's been a long time since I had so much of the English language spoken at me. I ain't used to it." Therefore, language is an important factor to take into account since it is part of the white man's transformation into an Indian way of life. In this vision, the Native American woman influences him to forsake his language and culture. Running Deer and Swan are clear examples of this new image of the Indian woman who paradoxically shares traits with the image of the princess but also imposes her culture on the white man in order to guide him in his new life: "Nonetheless, the Celluloid Maiden continues [...] to act as the pivotal point in the hero's balance between insanity and sanity, savagery and civility." (Marubbio, 184). This idea contradicts the Myth of the Frontier which values the conquest of Native American territories, and thus of their culture, by white settlers.

Furthermore, the role of the Indian woman in the story also contributes to his new life. Although her role as a guide recalls her depiction in pro-Indian westerns, her acting as a balance is a new aspect which is mostly visible in the description of Swan. In her actions, she is not reduced to activities like cooking, brushing her hair or taking care of Caleb. She actively participates in Johnson's new life by building with him their new home and she teaches him how to become a better hunter. The house represents domesticity which can be interpreted as a symbol of stability that is afterwards destroyed by Johnson when Swan and Caleb are dead: "He burns the cabin - his bridge to the new assimilated civilization they were

creating.” (McAllister, 43). Moreover, her instructing him how to survive in the wilderness also echoes her relationship with him. The more he appreciates the wilderness the more he understands her. As a consequence, he does not aim to force her to learn English and he ends up accepting her and the wilderness as they really are. Swan permits Johnson to complete his learning of the wilderness and to integrate him into her culture. Thus, she brings a balance in his life which is also the case of *Running Deer*, *Sunshine* and *Cat Dancing*. Even if in *Little Big Man* *Sunshine* does not guide Jack in the wilderness since he was raised by her tribe, the moment when she lives with him may be seen as a time of stability and peace when it is contrasted with her violent death caused by Custer’s men.

However, in *A Man Called Horse*, *Little Big Man* and *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*, this concept of stability is not entirely obvious until the Native American woman dies. This is her loss that leads the white man to refuse to go back to civilization and even to lose his mind.

#### **VI.A.2. The Native American woman as a symbol of trauma**

In the four movies chosen, the Native American woman is an object of trauma for the white man when she dies. Her death shifts his vision on his own culture and civilization but it also disturbs his mental health. He seems to have lost his purpose in life as it can be mostly observed regarding the death of *Sunshine*, *Swan* and *Cat Dancing*.

The first example of this loss of interest in life may be seen in the characterization of Grobart in *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*. Unlike the other revisionist westerns chosen, the story takes place several years after *Cat Dancing*’s death. In this vision, the movie focuses on the repercussions of her death on Grobart’s personality, who is depicted as “a hero whose past experiences with the military or the law psychologically alter his view of life and

civilization.” (Marubbio, 154). Although his coldness and his actions as an outlaw are partially explained by Cat Dancing’s death, the fact that he killed her thinking she cheated on him displays an innate aggressiveness. This hostile behavior is only perceivable in other movies when the Native American woman dies.

In *Little Big Man* and *Jeremiah Johnson* the death of the Native American woman is the main trigger of this madness as the white man blames his own civilization for her death. Even though in the case of Johnson, it is the Crows who kill Swan and Caleb, their death is the direct consequence of the U.S Calvary troop’s arrogance, who dared to walk in a Crow cemetery in spite of Johnson’s warning. Their denial of Crows’ beliefs is what causes Swan and Caleb’s murders. Similarly to Johnson, white civilization is responsible for the death of Sunshine and Jack’s child. *Little Big Man* and *Jeremiah Johnson* use common filming techniques to convey the main character’s shock and their wives dying can be understood as a sort of mental death. When Sunshine falls on the ground, a reverse shot on Jack falling underlines his pain and loss of stability. The sudden silence and the accumulation of shots on Native corpses accompanied by a crescendo military music, enhance the trauma suffered by Jack but also denounce white men’s violence. In *Jeremiah Johnson*, Johnson’s trauma is conveyed by successive shots through which a feeling of emptiness can be felt as he stays near Swan and Caleb’s bodies looking away. The cross fades and his lack of expression amplify this sensation. Later in the movie, this spiritual death is brought by a shot on Johnson lying on the ground next to the Indians he killed. The slow zoom out emphasizes his loss of mind, as well as his loss of bearings in the wilderness, given Swan is not here to guide him anymore.



*Jeremiah Johnson (1972)*

Besides, this mental death is the beginning of his downfall. His thirst of revenge pushes him to kill every Indian he sees: “Until Swan’s death, his chances for transformation seem good; when she is killed, Johnson avenges her death and thus triggers an inevitable consequence, locking himself up with a blood feud with the Crows.” (McAllister, 42). The consecutive shots of Johnson killing Indians emphasize his growing madness which may also be noticed in his gaze compared to his composed look and attitude when he used to live with Swan and Caleb.



Johnson before Sunshine's death.  
*Jeremiah Johnson (1972)*



Johnson after Sunshine's death. *Jeremiah Johnson (1972)*

As a result, Johnson experiences both a hatred toward his civilization and a disenchantment of the perception he had of the wilderness: “the vision [Jeremiah Johnson] represents is ultimately pessimistic, an urgent denial of the romantic daydream of escaping from White

civilization into a new Eden.” (McAllister, 36). Therefore, Swan’s death also destroys the romantic image of the wilderness created from white society’s point of view.

As for Jack in *Little Big Man*, his insanity and trauma are visible in different stages and in the way he mistreats himself. His first instinct after Sunshine’s death is to kill Custer but his failure aggravates his lack of self-esteem: “I was a total failure as an Indian.”, “There was nothing left of my self-respect at all.”. After going back to white civilization, Jack decides to go live in the wilderness but without the presence of Sunshine, he becomes aware of his inability to survive on his own. When he sees a piece of an animal’s foot jammed in a trap, he realizes the harshness of the wilderness and he nearly commits suicide: “Something snapped in my head. I decided that life wasn’t fit to live and the only thing to do was to mingle with the twinkling stars.”, “At that moment, I really was crazy.”. Still, it is not his determination to get revenge that drives him mad but it is actually the reason that brings him back to reality and prevents him from killing himself. Sunshine’s death forges his hatred of Custer and of wars imposed by white society, which are also associated with craziness. This idea is exemplified when Custer is on the battlefield, pretending talking to the President after his victory whilst his men are dying around him. Accordingly, this mad aspect of the white man demonstrates an explicit criticism of white society but also a disapproval of the Myth of the Frontier since the white man cannot succeed without the Indian woman.

Therefore, the Native American woman’s death in revisionist westerns reveals a reexamination of white civilization as well as the boundaries between this civilization and the wilderness. Her death emphasizes the inhumanity of white men which affects the main character’s vision toward his own society but also toward the wilderness he admires. In comparison with previous westerns, the notion of madness is inscribed in white men’s blood whereas Indians are considered as sane. Hence, white men fail to “purge the false values of the ‘metropolis’” (Slotkin, 14) as they end up losing their minds and refusing to go back to

their civilization. This reassessment of the Myth of the Frontier can also be analyzed in the image of the white woman, which is more negative compared to previous westerns, and in the Native American woman's personality.

## **VI.B. A parallel between the Native American woman and the white woman (*Little Big Man*, *Jeremiah Johnson*, *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*)**

### **VI.B.1. The degradation of the image of the white woman**

Notwithstanding the remaining of some stereotypes, the image of the white woman gives the possibility of noticing changes in the representation of the Native American woman. Some of the negative traits that were given to her in pro-Indian westerns, as hysteria, are this time used to describe the white woman. In *Jeremiah Johnson*, when Johnson begins his journey in the wilderness, he crosses the path of a white woman (played by Allyn Ann McLerie) who lives in a little house, isolated from the rest of the world. The first time he sees her, she is outside her house talking to one of the dead members of her family, who were killed by Blackfeet. When she sees Johnson, her first instinct is to threaten him with a rifle as she is scared and suspicious of his intentions.



The Crazy Woman. *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972)

This medium shot shows her hysteric expression which may bring into mind Pearl's demeanor, whose hysteria is linked to her Native origins. The fact that she does not even have a name, only a nickname "the Crazy Woman", reduces her to this feature which was originally chosen for the Indian woman. She seems unfit to survive in the wilderness, just like Johnson when he loses Swan: "But as a child of nature, Swan lives in peace with the very wilderness that drives the white woman insane." (Marubbio, 188). Her agitation directly contrasts with Swan's calmness, as it can be seen in the following shot.



Swan. *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972)

Moreover, another stereotype that is reassessed is the belittlement of the Native American woman caused by the presence of the white woman. In pro-Indian westerns, the Indian woman is considered as the bearer of unacceptable flaws. She is uneducated, sinful and has a "dark sexuality" (Marubbio, 123) whereas the white woman is supposed to represent "white womanhood: modesty, purity, domesticity and a keen sense of moral superiority." (Pillow, 6). This concept is completely mocked in *Little Big Man* when a parallel between Sunshine and Mrs. Louise Pendrake (played by Faye Dunaway) is drawn. As already said, Sunshine has a sacred aspect in her connection with the wilderness, even if she never explicitly claims her religious beliefs, she has a divine facet in the way she is pictured. Her

divinity seems natural and pure unlike Mrs. Pendrake's belief in God which is shallow. When Jack is welcomed at the Pendrakes' house, Louise asserts "it is [her] christian duty" to give him a bath, explaining that she must be a devoted wife to her husband Reverend Pendrake (played by Thayer David) by doing her wife's tasks. When she speaks about religion, she insists on the fact that "purity" is the "reward" which stands in opposition to Indians who are perceived as impure and called "heathens". In this vision, Mrs. Pendrake corresponds to the description of the white woman but she actually does not respect these values as she cheats on her husband and then becomes a prostitute: "[Jack] becomes aware of their hypocrisy and this period ends in his discovery of Mrs. Pendrake with her lover." (Kasdan and Tavernetti, 127). Another white woman who does not coincide with "white womanhood" (Pillow, 6) in this movie, is Jack's sister, Caroline (played by Carole Androsky). She is the contrary of this model as she dresses and behaves like a man. She teaches Jack how to use a gun claiming that "a man ain't complete without a gun." She refuses to fit in with this image as she looks uncomfortable with social standards. In these three examples, it is possible to say that revisionist westerns picture a distorted image of the white woman which stands in contrast with the Native American woman's purity and stability. The white woman looks unable to adapt to the wilderness or to accept the strict values imposed by white society.

Nevertheless, Catherine in *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing* is the exception to the rule. She does not present signs of instability and she overcomes the difficulties of the life in the wilderness. Her success is due to Grobart who initiates her this new way of life but who also shares with her his memories of Cat Dancing. The more she spends time with him, the more she looks like Cat Dancing and the depiction of an Indian woman. Contrary to other westerns, this is Grobart, the white man, who affects her choice of life: "À la fin du film, elle apprend à siffler comme DreamSpeaker, le fils métis de Grobat. Catherine remplace donc avantageusement Cat auprès du héros: suffisamment indienne pour celui-ci, elle reste

néanmoins une blanche.” (Lacoue-Labarthe, 348). Yet, this example is evidence that the white woman is capable of adapting to the wilderness only if she is a replica of the typical Native American woman. The image of the white woman remains mostly degraded which is not the case of the Indian woman.

### **VI.B.2. The deconstruction of the Native American woman’s stereotypes**

Indeed, the Native American woman is rather positively valued for her personality which is possible thanks to the modification of some stereotypes. She is admired for being able to live in the wilderness but also for her capacity to adjust aspects of white civilization to her culture. For instance, Swan is a Christian but contrary to Mrs. Pendrake in *Little Big Man*, her approach to Christianity is not based on her wife’s duties or on strict education. From the moment Johnson arrives at the Flathead camp, a cross can be seen as their religion is important to them but this Christianity differs from the one portrayed in *Little Big Man* since it looks integrated into Flathead culture: “The Flatheads show the influence of white culture, but that influence is no longer direct and is thoroughly integrated. The elements of white culture they have retained have been absorbed and reshaped to adapt to Flathead ecology.” (McAllister, 41). To this extent, Native Americans display a sort of resilience by keeping their identity and at the same time by accepting the colonial past. Swan is an example of this idea as she prays several times but keeps speaking Flathead.

Then, the deterioration of the white woman’s image leads to an evident admiration for the Native American woman’s beauty as, for example, when Jack meets Mrs. Pendrake again after Sunshine’s death. She seduces him but Jack refuses her sexual advances. Originally, westerns and American literature portrayed the Native American woman as inferior to the white woman’s beauty: “Sacajawea is beautiful, but when she is placed in a white civilized

setting, her beauty pales (becomes darker) in comparison to the white women around her.” (Pillow, 10). *Little Big Man* erases this stereotype by showing Jack who keeps mourning Sunshine when he sees Mrs. Pendrake. Despite the sexualization of the Native American woman, she has a sacredness in her role as a mother and in her connection to the wilderness that classifies her beyond the white woman.

Finally, the last aspect which is put into question concerns the behavior of the Indian woman. She may not always conform to the princess figure and this can be noticed in *Jeremiah Johnson*, when Swan and Johnson meet and get married. Unlike *Little Big Man* and *A Man Called Horse*, this film does not use the stereotypical immediate attraction between the white man and the Native American woman. In previous westerns, if the white man did not really care about the Indian woman, the latter was at least enthusiastic about their union like Kamiah in *Across the Wide Missouri*. In *Jeremiah Johnson*, Swan surprisingly looks reluctant toward Johnson. She does not even smile when she sees him for the first time and her disapproval of their marriage may be interpreted in her cautious attitude.



Swan at her wedding. *Jeremiah Johnson* (1972)

This unwillingness is accentuated by the filming techniques which do not show Swan and Johnson in the same frame. In a long shot, a great distance can even be seen between them.

They are supposed to symbolize a union but the scene does not convey the mood expected from a wedding ceremony.

Therefore, the degradation of the white woman's image has a major impact on the stereotypes given to the Native American woman. Revisionist westerns clearly reassess her representation by reversing some of her traits with the white woman. Negative characteristics as hysteria, instability and sin are assigned to the white woman. The derision of the well-educated white woman denounces a criticism of western society's conventions. As for the Native American woman, she is admired for her superior beauty and her capacity of adaptation in the wilderness. The integration of civilized aspects, as religion, into her tribe illustrates her will to maintain the integrity of her culture. She is a symbol of resilience which is discernible in her demeanor toward the white man. Thus, the inversion of features between the two types of women is a means to break the division between whites and Indians, that were seen in the Myth of the Frontier as civilized people against savages, or to be more precise in an ideological way, between what is good and what is evil.

In conclusion, the Native American woman is a central character in the deconstruction of the Myth of the Frontier as she plays a crucial part in the white man's rejection of white civilization. She accompanies him in the wilderness that he does not see as a conquerable space but as a place of consolation and as a way to escape from white society and its endless wars. He must adapt to her language and culture and she helps him in his new life by giving him a balance that is destroyed when she dies. He experiences her death as a trauma that reinforces his revulsion toward white people and provokes his madness. His decision to deny his own culture opposes the result expected by the Myth of the Frontier in which he is supposed to bring improvement to his own civilization by going back in it. The analogy between the Native American woman and the white woman aims to revise the image of

Indians and white people by ascribing the pejorative traits to the white woman. By doing so, these movies demonstrate a real determination to dismantle western society's norms and to destroy some stereotypes of the Native American woman. She illustrates the steadiness and easiness of Native people who, despite the conquest of the West, keep the integrity of their culture. Hence, the Native American woman is a key figure of the anti-war message that deconstructs this American myth. This revision mirrors the impacts of the Vietnam War on American people who no longer believe in their traditional values and in the fundamental myths of the country.

## Conclusion

To conclude, pro-Indian and revisionist westerns convey an ambivalent image of the Native American woman because many facets contradict each other. In pro-Indian westerns shot in the 1950s as *Broken Arrow*, *Across the Wide Missouri*, *The Big Sky* and *The Indian Fighter*, she is positively illustrated as an allegory of Manifest Destiny. She endorses the role of a peace keeper and creates a bond between her people and the white community thanks to her marriage. She is seen as a divine person who is pure and looks like a protector as it is the case for Sonseeahray, Kamiah, Teal Eye. Onahti does not have this clear image of a goddess but she protects her tribe as well as Johnny whom she saves at the end. Her marriage guarantees a certain peace and union between the two peoples. The Indian woman is often associated with the “Mother figure” (Green, 703), as it is the case for Kamiah, as if the union between the white man and the Indian woman allows a new American society to be created with the mix of the two communities.

Nevertheless, the problem of this positive vision of the Native American woman is that it is a biased portrayal made by western society and some features that belong to the Indian culture are criticized. This aspect is also present in pro-Indian westerns of the 1940s as *Duel in the Sun* exemplifies it. This western point of view causes issues of authenticity in the way she is shown in her appearance, language, behavior and role inside the tribe. She is whitened in her appearance in the sense that she is only played by white actresses. Movies as *Broken Arrow* and *The Indian Fighter* do not try to give a genuine portrayal of the Native American woman given she only speaks English and not her own language. It is the same problem concerning her behavior and her role inside the tribe. Only the roles of wife and mother are highlighted whereas in reality she could have other roles to endorse depending on the tribe she belonged to. Her behavior is also judged as inappropriate which is why western society tries

to make her learn how to behave properly as it is the case for Pearl. These attributions of white features in the Indian woman's depiction tend to integrate her in western society but at the same time she is not completely accepted in it. She remains aside from white women and she is depicted as belonging to another category which places her in an in-between identity. Her Otherness is not well perceived because it is a part of her personality which is considered as weird and uneducated or assimilated to the idea of wilderness. Even in the allegory of Manifest Destiny which is supposed to symbolize racial integration inside society, the fear of the unknown clearly reflects the problems of American society during the Cold War. Everything which was perceived as different could not be trusted because of communism. The Indian woman is sometimes admired for her godly appearance but she may be treated as a strange being who does not inspire trust. This is why the "Celluloid Princess" (Marubbio, 62) of the 1950s has some characteristics in common with the "Sexualized Maiden" (Marubbio, 89) of the 1940s. They are both criticized for their Otherness, which is conveyed through their origins, but also for their femininity.

Even though the sensuality of the "Sexualized Maiden" (Marubbio, 89) is more obvious than the one given to the "Celluloid Princess" (Marubbio, 62), who is supposed to be pure or divine, they are both judged as a temptation for male lust and they are objectified. Teal Eye is a relevant example of the princess who presents some aspects of the femme fatale in her postures and in the looks she gives even if it is not as accentuated as Pearl who represents the femme fatale of the 1940s. Pearl's sensuality is visible thanks to her seductive looks but also to the close-ups on her face which underline her womanhood. The Native American woman is blamed for her seductive power and for the color of her skin. Her femininity is directly connected to her blood which is why she is objectified in every movie. In men's behavior, it seems normal to treat her as a sexual object because she is an Indian woman. It is the case in *Duel in the Sun* (1946) and *The Indian Fighter* (1955) which yet have not been

released in the same decade. Even if the Indian woman is no longer presented as a femme fatale in the 1950s, some negative features and similarities remain.

What complicates the interpretation of her representation is that each side of her portrayal has its opposite side. She may be enhanced as a mother figure or as an innocent and young princess who is beautiful but on the other hand she may be sexualized and she is victim of the male gaze in her objectification. She is admired for her divine features which inspire fascination from the white community but at the same time she is looked as a weird creature. The issue is that it is difficult to say if her image in pro-Indian movies is mostly positive or negative. If she is compared to those who are portrayed in no pro-Indian westerns such as *My Darling Clementine* and *The Searchers*, she has indeed a more important role but she suffers similar discriminations such as racism and sexism. She can be ridiculed by the white man, treated as if she were mentally limited or considered as an object of property which belongs to the white man.

All these contradictory aspects contribute to her ambivalent representation in the 1940s and 1950s pro-Indian westerns. Even though she is not as demeaned as in other westerns, she remains not completely respected and her representation is not genuine because she is depicted from a western and male point of view.

As for the 1970s revisionist westerns, this ambivalence becomes more complex because of the political context of the United States which changed Americans' vision of the traditional myths and values of their society. The instability of the period affects the image of the Native American woman as she is more positively portrayed despite a constant lack of accuracy. In *A Man Called Horse*, *Little Big Man*, *Jeremiah Johnson* and *The Man Who Loved Cat Dancing*, her sacred aspect is emphasized in order to give a Native American perception of the Indian woman. She is worshiped for her spirituality and her motherhood which connect her to the wilderness. She is not considered as a strange creature anymore as

she seems pure compared to the violence she witnesses. Hollywood uses her death and the conflicts between Indians and whites, and among Indian tribes, to point out the barbarism of wars and white society's disrespect for other cultures as many Americans were horrified by the bloodshed caused by the American army in Vietnam. This context leads to an admiration for Native American women in films but their forced sterilization in the 1970s demonstrates a discrepancy between their image in movies and the way they are actually treated in American society.

Furthermore, the use of the Native American woman as a symbol in movies, shows a continuous disregard for a real and accurate representation. Revisionist westerns are supposed to rehabilitate the image of Native Americans but the Indian woman is still associated with the idea of the princess. The fact that she is even less present in the story, compared to pro-Indian westerns, displays a regression. Her existence remains attached to the white man's purpose and identity and the exacerbation of her sexuality reinforces some stereotypes as well as the ambiguity of her portrayal. Even if the Indian princess was already objectified in pro-Indian westerns, her sexualization in revisionist westerns is closer to the one suffered by the "Sexualized Maiden" (Marubbio, 89), as the sexual revolution of the 1970s influences her characterization, like *Sunshine* and her hippie-like attitude or *Running Deer* in the emphasis on her nudity. The Indian woman's sensuality is still linked to her origins and the boundary between the princess and the "squaw" is blurred because of the manner her sexuality is underscored. As a result, these movies give a new portrait of the Indian woman called the "Celluloid Maiden" (Marubbio, 194) which conforms to the ambiguous political and social context of the 1970s.

In spite of this lack of authenticity and the remaining of stereotypes like the image of the princess and her objectification, she is above all spotlighted for her key role in the anti-war message that deconstructs the Myth of the Frontier. The rejection of white civilization is

the main factor that revises this myth and the Native American woman takes part in it by helping the white man in his new life in the wilderness. A clear inversion of roles occurs in the adaptation of the white man to the Indian woman's culture and language. She offers him a space where he feels free from the wars of white civilization and she allows him to find a balance in his new life. When she dies, the white man loses his mind, becomes unstable and decides to deny for good his own civilization. In this vision, her death not only denounces the atrocity of wars but also destroys one of the main principles of the Myth of the Frontier. The revision of the distinction between the Native American woman and the white woman also results in a change of perception between Whiteness and Otherness. Pejorative features as hysteria are assigned to the white woman whereas the Native American woman is admired for her calmness and stability. This reversal of stereotypes proves the will of revisionist westerns to disrupt the boundaries between whites and Indians in a period of time where the Western genre is in crisis.

Compared to pro-Indian westerns, her portrayal in revisionist westerns is more positive but the presence and disappearance of some stereotypes complicate the analysis of her representation. She resembles the princess but at the same time this stereotype is put into question. Her motherhood is emphasized but the stress on her sexuality is evidence that the reconsideration of her image is not complete. In addition to her inconsistent features, the difference between the way she is described in films and the way she is considered in reality also contributes to her ambivalence. Therefore, the evolution of her representation corresponds to the mood and to the vision of American society. Even though she is not representative of real Native American women, her symbolism is enhanced in these two types of westerns to reflect the context of the time but also to question the values and the history of American society.

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