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THE AMAZON FEMALE ARCHETYPE IN MAINSTREAM CINEMA: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Summary. The paper focuses on narrative analysis of the language used by seven female characters in English-language mass culture films: Alice (Alice in Wonderland, 2010), Margaret “Peggy” Carter (Captain America, 2011), Carol Danvers and Maria Rambeau (Captain Marvel, 2019), Okoye (Black Panther, 2018 and Black Panther: Wakanda Forever, 2022), Judy Hopps (Zootopia, 2016), and Diana Prince (Wonder Woman, 2017). The research is based on Jung’s idea of the archetype as a recurring image of the collective unconscious, Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs (defining the individuals’ motives), and Schmidt’s typology of fiction archetypes. The paper focuses on the turns of the characters representing the Amazon archetype. Out of human needs, defined by Maslow, the Amazon archetype is governed by the needs for (self)respect and self-actualization. As the needs are satisfied, the characters belong to the protagonist group. Schmidt defines that the Amazon’s function is to fight patriarchy and prove that women are equal to men in all situations. As a rule, the Amazon is depicted in fields of activity where women are represented relatively little: the characters are super-heroines (Carol Danvers and Diana Prince), dragon slayers (Alice), fighter jet pilots (Carol Danvers and Maria Rambeau), army generals (Okoye), secret service agents (Margaret Carter) and police officers (Judy Hopps). The archetype might serve as a vehicle for the development of the character’s arc and, respectively, be part of the image of the main character (in the case of Carol Danvers, Judy Hopps, and Diana Prince); it might be the basis of the image of the main (Alice and Margaret Carter) or secondary female protagonist (in the case of Okoye and Maria Rambeau). Narratives characteristic of the Amazon archetype are those about the fight for truth, justice, equality, freedom, independence, justice, (self)respect, achievement, recognition, self-realization, and self-actualization.

Key words: the Amazon archetype, psycholinguistic image, character language, verbal representation, narrative analysis, female cinematic character.

Problem statement. Contemporary cinematography presents the public with varying images and narratives. Female characters, once restricted to traditional roles of mother and wife, have evolved to reflect social changes. Mainstream films gaining worldwide commercial success transmit to people in different countries and cultures their vision of contemporary women. Numerous media critics seem to share an understanding that female identities are informed by social codes rooted in popular culture. Continued analyses of media representations help to shed light on the ways in which the normative ideas about femininity are formed in popular culture [1, p. 735].

Over the last few decades, more females are joining the ranks of action figures. This change must be understood within the larger

context of a society in which women are increasingly allowed to be heroes in a variety of contexts [2, p. 10]. The woman is gradually becoming ‘an individual,’ expected to have her own journey. The ‘new heroine’ is an attempt to overthrow binary gender expectations and to explore the issues encountered by women as independent questors (the quest, of course, being a metaphor for autonomous existence) [3, p. 116]. Women are... the barometers of changing fashion. Like two-way mirrors linking the immediate past with the immediate future, women in the movies reflect, perpetuate, and in some respects offer innovations of the roles of women in society [4, p. 12].

The new heroine’s journey differs from that of the ‘traditional’ passive female. She refuses to be the victim of projections and fights for the freedom of self-identification [3, p. 122]. Post-Jungian researchers, having proposed various classifications of human archetypes, delineate the proactive female as a representative of the Amazon / Female Messiah (Hero / Crusader) archetype.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Jung’s idea of the archetype as a recurring image of the collective unconscious [5] gave rise to several post-Jungian classifications of psychological archetypes, including those of mass culture media [6; 7; 8; 9]. Each archetype performs a certain function in the plot and possesses a set of motivations, defining the characters’ (verbal) behavior. The idea of the archetype is compatible with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs [10], each archetype being governed by a specific set of needs. For instance, the combination of the needs for (self)esteem and self-actualization defines the Amazon archetype, a character striving for independence, equality, and respect.

Faber & Mayer define that the Hero archetype is frequently represented by the courageous and impetuous warrior. Being a noble rescuer and crusader, the Hero must undertake an arduous task to “prove their worth” and later become an inspiration. Symbolically the Hero is the “dragonslayer,” the redeemer of human strength [6, p. 309]. Alice Kingsleigh (*Alice in Wonderland*, 2010), one of the researched in the paper characters, is a literal dragonslayer, as in the cinematic story, she is supposed to kill the mythical dragon Jabberwocky.

Similarly, Mark & Pearson distinguish the Hero archetype. The Hero saves the day when everything seems lost. The Hero triumphs over evil, adversity, or a major challenge and in so doing, inspires us all. We see the Hero in any crusader for a cause or in efforts to rescue the victim or defend the underdog. The natural environment for the Hero is the battlefield, the athletic contest, the streets, the workplace, the political jungle, or any place where difficulty or challenges await courageous and energetic action. The Hero wants to make the world a better place [8, 2001, p. 105–106].

Cowden, LaFever, & Vidars propose a similar female archetype, labeling it the Crusader. Ready for action, the Crusader marches in. This is a heroine in the truest sense. She is confident, tenacious, and headstrong against opposition. Lines of battle have been drawn, and she never backs down from a contest. The world has veered off its course, and she is just the one to set it straight again. From her perspective, if she does not do it, it will probably not be done (at least, it will not be done correctly). The Crusader is a fighter through and through. If she meets up with a brick wall, she goes over, under, or around, but quitting is never an option. The task in front of her is all-important, and everyone should realize that. She walks right past those who disagree. Her compassion is for those she champions, not the people she tramples over to succeed in her mission. Fully prepared to stand alone against the enemy, she views those who fall short of her rigid standards with scorn. If necessary, she can become a one-woman army [7, p. 87–92].

Schmidt proposes two female archetypes, sharing characteristics with the Hero/Crusader archetype of previously discussed typologies. The Amazon is a feminist who looks after women and children and passionately fights patriarchy. She fears losing her freedom and independence and takes great pride in being able to take care of herself. Her competitive nature makes her afraid of losing, and she especially does not want to lose to a man. She enjoys proving she is the equal of any man, mostly in physical ways. She will fight to the death against any attacker, making her a force to reckon with. She is not afraid of her own death but afraid of other women and children dying when she could have helped them. She finds her identity in being the rescuer [9, p. 28–32].

The Female Messiah is the way to love and enlightenment. She may not know of her connection to the Divine but just be “driven” to accomplish something important. It seems her whole life is for one purpose, and that purpose affects the lives of thousands of people. The Female Messiah is not easily accepted by the masses as a spiritual authority figure because of her gender. If she remains somewhat quiet and allows others to speak of her for a time, she will later have the opportunity to speak out about her views. This can cause trouble for her unless women are viewed as equals. The Female Messiah archetype can also contain any of the other archetypes, which will help her to achieve her goals in this lifetime [9, p. 72–73].

The difference between the two archetypes is that the Amazon focuses on equality and the social position of women, while the Female Messiah fights for the greater good of humanity in general. However, as the research demonstrates, the two archetypes are interlinked and often combined. Thus, Diana Prince and Judy Hopps embody both archetypes, while Carol Danvers demonstrates the narratives of the Amazon archetype (showing her previous life on Earth) and the Female Messiah and Mystic archetypes (revealing her fight for the greater good and focus on recreating identity and searching for inner force). As the article focuses on the Amazon archetype, it examines only narratives characteristic of it, ignoring other themes in the examined turns.

As the available typologies of mass media archetypes focus on the characters’ psychological characteristics, they leave a gap in the field of archetypal narrative analysis. Human beings are storytellers by nature. In many guises, such as folklore, legend, myth, epic, history, motion picture, and television programs, the story appears in every known human culture. The story is a natural package for organizing many different kinds of information. Storytelling

appears to be a fundamental way of expressing ourselves and our world to others [11, p. 27].

Therefore, the present paper aims to compose a framework of female narratives characteristic of the Amazon archetype in contemporary mass culture cinema. The research focuses on the turns of seven cinematic heroines: Alice (*Alice in Wonderland*, 2010), Margaret “Peggy” Carter (*Captain America*, 2011), Carol Danvers and Maria Rambeau (*Captain Marvel*, 2019), Okoye (*Black Panther*, 2018 and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, 2022), Judy Hopps (*Zootopia*, 2016), and Diana Prince (*Wonder Woman*, 2017). The researched characters are protagonists as their needs for equality, respect, and self-actualization (not without some effort) are generally satisfied. The author’s previous research demonstrates that the Amazon’s function in the plot is to fight; it defines her concentration on truth, (self-)esteem, achievement, independence, appreciation, self-actualization, self-fulfillment, freedom, justice, and fairness [12, p. 47].

The concept of person presupposes the continuity of experience and the storylike structure of lives makes narrative the most promising methodology [13, p. 693]. Researchers use first-person narratives as source material and third-person narratives in describing and interpreting lives because the temporal nature of experience makes it difficult for human beings not to attribute order, direction, and purpose to experience. It is because lives are structured through experience in a storylike manner that their study takes the narrative form [13, p. 693].

Research methods. The turns of the researched characters (and their partners in dialogs) in the films were extracted from subtitles, checked against the films’ sound, and submitted to narrative linguistic analysis. Common themes of the characters’ stories are defined to account for archetypal verbal characteristics. Third-person narratives add perspective to the first-person stories of the heroines.

Main findings. The researched mass culture films propose a new, proactive heroine who fights patriarchy for recognition and social status. These cinematic stories comprise the top 100 box office mainstream films (1999–2023) and top 20 commercially successful films with a leading female character (from *Wonder Woman*, # 16 to *Captain Marvel*, #6). Three of the researched films are superhero blockbusters, presenting a female in the leading role. Prior to *Wonder Woman*’s release, studio executives widely categorized female-driven comic book movies as box office poison. Despite only two recent examples to draw from – Warner Bros.’ *Catwoman* (2004) and Fox’s *Elektra* (2005) – female-driven superhero projects had underperformed in the past [14, p. 8].

Thus, *Wonder Woman* (2017) was only the second DC adapted movie (among thirty-one films in 1941–2017) to have a woman in the leading role. With regard to *Captain Marvel*, only one of the forty-eight *Marvel*-related films since Bryan Singer’s *X-Men* in 2000 had a woman lead, and since *Marvel Studios* began the official *Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)* in 2008 with Jon Favreau’s *Iron Man*, there have been no women-led films at all [15, p. 928]. The 2019 release of *Marvel Studios*’ superhero film *Captain Marvel* brought with it a wave of firsts: it was the studios’ first female-led solo film, the first female-led superhero film to pass the billion-dollar mark, and for many fans, one of the first female superhero films with an explicitly feminist ethos [16, p. 297]. In this context, both films were seen to be clear but long overdue challenges to overt sexism and patriarchal bias within the industry [15, p. 928].

Between 2008 and 2017, six major studios released close to fifty superhero films. Despite the inclusion of white female characters in ensemble casts (*The Avengers*' Black Widow and *Suicide Squad*'s Harley Quinn) or as love interests (*Iron Man*'s Pepper Potts and *The Amazing Spider-man*'s Gwen Stacy), the lack of women and characters of color was glaring [14, p. 2]. The tendency has gradually changed with the release of *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Captain Marvel* (2019), *Black Widow* (2021), and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022). As mentioned in the author's previous research [17, p. 25], *Black Panther* (2018), the superhero film concentrating on the adventures of black characters, may be considered revolutionary; even more so, its sequel *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022), presenting a plethora of black female characters led by a black superheroine. Though *Captain Marvel* is also criticized for the lack of diversity in representing female characters [16, p. 307], the upcoming sequel *The Marvels* (November 2023) should cover this gap. *The Marvels* will present a story of three female characters, namely the white Carol Danvers, the first black female superheroine Monica Rambeau, and Kamala Khan, Marvel's first Muslim protagonist of Pakistani origin.

Another important, recent example for how feminist ideology has been embedded within mainstream cinema might be *Zootopia* (2016). The main character is policewoman Judy Hopps, a white, fluffy bunny who overcomes all prejudice against physical weakness and small size while pursuing her dream and career. She is shown in action during the animated film, which evidently involves violence and danger while she solves all problems and crimes with the help of her wits. Even though Ms. Hopps is 'the good girl,' she is a policewoman, who occasionally has to act violently, but by all means, her job involves the negation of all traditionally-conceived ladylike behavior [18, p. 196].

As indicated above, the leading characters of *Captain Marvel*, *Wonder Woman*, and *Zootopia* represent the Female Messiah and Amazon archetypes. Their independence and agency (the Amazon) are justified by the characters' mission to make the world a better place (the Female Messiah); thus, they obligatory work in cooperation with a male partner. As Seybold underlines, *Zootopia* showcases a dimensional, powerful female lead, but she is only permitted to exercise the expression of this power within socially determined, gender-appropriate bounds. *Zootopia*... affirms a traditional power dynamic by granting the female protagonist success in her quest only when she allows her male costar to direct their partnership [19, p. 70]. The Female Messiah being a way to enlightenment, normally needs a man to transmit her message to the wide public.

However, the Amazon stays the most proactive and independent female archetype, which is why she is depicted in professions traditionally associated with men. Alice is a dragonslayer in Wonderland and an apprentice of her father's business partner in nineteenth-century England. Judy Hopps is a police officer. Peggy Carter is a British MI6 agent and member of the Strategic Scientific Reserve. Okoye is the general of the Dora Milaje, a formidable corps of women warriors with physical and intellectual acumen [20, p. 212]. Carol Danvers and Maria Rambeau are fighter jet pilots; later, Carol becomes a superheroine. Diana Prince is another superheroine. They race speed cars, pilot planes, wield varying weaponry, participate in secret missions and fistfights, practice martial arts, command warriors, lead rescue missions, and pursue criminals.

No longer as passive as she was before, the new heroine is nevertheless a suffering and struggling protagonist whose path is never smooth or perfect [3, p. 117]. Langsdale argues that while the category of "bad guys" shifts in *Captain Marvel*, there is something conceptually broader in Carol's way... it's the misogyny [16, p. 302]. Thus, the Amazon knows disapproval of society:

Peggy: I know a little of what that's like, to have every door shut in your face.

Maria: The Air Force still wasn't letting women fly combat... so testing Lawson's planes was our only shot at doing something that mattered.

Joseph Danvers (to Carol): What the hell are you thinking? You don't belong out here!

Men (to Carol): Give up already! You don't belong out here! You're not strong enough. You'll kill yourself. / They'll never let you fly. / You're a decent pilot. But you're too emotional. You do know why they call it a cockpit, don't you?

Feeling suppressed by the social expectations of feminine appearance, the Amazon is rebellious against restrictive clothes:

Alice: Who's to say what is proper? What if it was agreed that "proper" was wearing a codfish on your head? Would you wear it?.. To me, a corset is like a codfish.

Okoye: Bast willing, this will go quickly... and I can get this ridiculous thing off my head... What? It's a disgrace.

Diana: How can a woman possibly fight in this?.. It's itchy. It's choking me.

The Amazon narratives include the theme of the reverse roles of men and women in society:

Alice: I had a sudden vision of all the ladies in trousers and the men wearing dresses.

Mad Hatter (to Alice): It's absolutely Alice. You're absolutely Alice! I'd know you anywhere. I'd know him anywhere. / Beware of the Jabberwock, my son. And the frumious Bandersnatch. He took his vorpal sword in hand. The vorpal blade went snicker-snack. He left it dead, and with its head, he went galumphing back. It's all about you, you know...

Diana: I'm the man who can (do something about the war)!

The Amazon does not tolerate condescending, sexist attitudes:

Maria: Call me "young lady" again... I'm gonna put my foot in a place it's not supposed to be.

Judy: You're gonna wanna refrain from calling me Carrots... / Don't call me cute.

The Amazon is not keen on the idea of being bossed around and/or suppressed:

Alice: From the moment I fell down that rabbit hole, I've been told what I must do and who I must be. I've been shrunk, stretched, scratched, and stuffed into a teapot. I've been accused of being Alice and of not being Alice. But this is my dream! I'll decide where it goes from here.

Peggy: You can't give me orders!

Judy: Hey! Hey! No one tells me what I can or can't be!

Diana: What is a secretary?.. Well, where I am from, that's called slavery.

Carol: You're talking about destroying them because they won't submit to your rule. And neither will I.

The Amazon holds her ground when a man presents her with a challenge. Knight remarks that in a society that traditionally depicted women as the weaker sex in film and television, *Wonder Woman* exercised toughness at every turn. Although reluctant to

commit violence, she did not back down from a fight [21, p. 310]. Thus, the Amazon needs to prove that she is equal to any man (physically or verbally):

Alice: Lost my muchness, have I? / How's this for "muchness"?

Peggy: I can do more than that.

Carol: *Wanna fight? / I was already slipping when you happened to punch me in the face. The two events were not related. / Oh, hey, guys. Arm wrestle for the Tesseract?*

Maria: About to show these boys how we do it. You ready?

Okoye: If your muscle brains were present, they would still be there choking on their fuzzy adornments.

Judy: You don't scare me, Gideon. / I am a cop. And I'm on the Emmitt Otterton case, and my evidence puts him in your car, so intimidate me all you want, I'm going to find out what you did to that otter if it's the last thing I do.

The Amazon makes her own decisions and refuses to be manipulated:

Alice: *I make the path! / But this is my life. I'll decide what to do with it.*

Peggy: *With respect, sir, I don't regret my actions.*

Carol: *I have nothing to prove to you.*

Okoye: *I still have a lot of fight left in me.*

Diana: *No, but it's what I'm going to do. / What I do is not up to you.*

The Amazon believes that her way is right even if it does not coincide with general expectations:

Alice: *Don't worry, Mother. I'll find something useful to do with my life.*

Judy: *This has been my dream since I was a kid. / I've been working for this my whole life.*

Her faith in her success is grounded in the belief that anything is possible:

Alice: *I was wondering what it would be like to fly... Why wouldn't I? My father said he sometimes believed in six impossible things before breakfast.*

Judy: *It may seem impossible to small minds... But just 211 miles away... stands the great city of Zootopia! Where our ancestors... declared that anyone can be anything! / And you little guy, you want to be an elephant when you grow up... you be an elephant... because this is Zootopia, anyone can be anything.*

The Amazon cares about the well-being of women, children, and animals. Comic books, being the origin of the *Wonder Woman*, *Captain Marvel*, and *Black Panther* heroines, 'emerge as speculative fictions... that showcase utopic visions of social change... Wonder Woman... while often saving Capt. Trevor, primarily saved helpless women from imminent death and destruction, also attempting to empower women to look after themselves and discover their own physical and economic strengths' [22, p. 959]. This narrative is common for the Amazon and Female Messiah, the latter being the leading archetype for Judy Hopps and Diana Prince:

Alice: *You're lucky to have my sister for your wife, Lowell. You'll be good to her. I'll be watching very closely.*

Maria: *You are Carol Danvers. You are the woman on that black box risking her life to do the right thing. My best friend... who supported me as a mother and a pilot when no one else did.*

Carol: *If you hurt them, I will burn you to the ground.*

Okoye: *Take another step closer, and I will kill you all. / Help the child!*

Diana: *I'm willing to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. / What kind of weapon kills innocents? / These animals, why are they hurting them?... But this is not the way. I could help them. / We need to help these people... These people are dying. They have nothing to eat, and in the village... Enslaved, she said!... Women and children!*

However, she also rescues males:

Alice: *We're going to rescue him. / I've come to rescue the Hatter.*

Judy: *Mr. Otterton, my name is Officer Judy Hopps. Your wife sent me to find you. We're gonna get you out of here now.*

Diana: *I plucked him from the sea. / That man... he's wounded.*

Simultaneously, the Amazon is unapologetic as she taunts and condemns men for their weaknesses:

Peggy: *Faster, ladies! Come on. My grandmother has more life in her; God rest her soul. Move it! / Come on, girls.*

Okoye: *Guns. So primitive!*

Diana: *Where I come from, generals don't hide in their offices like cowards... You should be ashamed. / These are the reinforcements?... Are these even good men?... This man is no fighter... You fight without honor... A liar, a murderer, and now a smuggler. Lovely. / For all his talk of shooting, he cannot shoot.*

The Amazon is not sure about marriage; at least, she does not see it as something obligatory. She might also be skeptical about the necessity of men when it comes to sex:

Alice: *But I don't know if I want to marry Hamish. / I'm sorry, Hamish, I can't marry you. You're not the right man for me. And there's that trouble with your digestion.*

Diana: *"Marriage"?.. And do they? Love each other till death?... Then why do they do it?... So you cannot sleep with me unless I marry you... / You refer to reproductive biology... The pleasures of the flesh... I've read all twelve volumes of Clio's Treatises on Bodily Pleasure... They came to the conclusion that men are essential for procreation, but when it comes to pleasure... Unnecessary.*

Conclusion and prospects for further research. The obtained results demonstrate that the narratives of Alice, Okoye, Maria Rambeau, Peggy Carter, and to a lesser extent, of Carol Danvers, Diana Prince, and Judy Hopps are determined by the Amazon archetype. The researched archetype represents heroines distinguished by such characteristics as freedom, independence, self-sufficiency, competitiveness, self-esteem, courage, altruism, and determination. The Amazon heroines teach their audience that women can be leaders, professionals in any field, that they can study whatever they want to, and most of all, that they are not dependent on any man for survival but they can be free and independent agents of their own fate [18, p. 197].

The Amazons are depicted in professions and activities generally associated with men. The Amazons tell the stories of social disapproval and contempt, the necessity to fight for their rights and social status, and uneasy recognition. The Amazons fight against patriarchal restrictions and expectations. They do not tolerate sexist and condescending attitudes. The Amazons never shy away from a challenge, especially from a challenge launched by a male. The Amazons do not put up with weakness, be it physical or moral. They champion the feminine cause and keep to their ideas despite others' opinions. The Amazons' narratives also include the theme of reversed gender roles and untraditional views on marriage and sex.

Among the prospects of the research is the composition of a comprehensive framework of narratives characteristic

of cinematic heroines and revealing the mainstream image of women in the 21st century.

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Бережна М. В. Жіночий архетип «Амазонка» у масовому кіно: нарративний аналіз

Анотація. У статті досліджено наративи у мовленні семи жіночих персонажів англійських фільмів масової культури: Аліси (Alice in Wonderland, 2010), Маргарет «Пеггі» Картер (Captain America, 2011), Керол Денверс та Марії Рембо (Captain Marvel, 2019), Окоїе (Black Panther, 2018 та Black Panther: Wakanda Forever, 2022), Джуді Гопс (Zootopia, 2016), а також Діани Принц (Wonder Woman, 2017). В основу дослідження покладено ідею К. Юнга про архетип як повторюваний образ, що існує в колективному безсвідомому, класифікацію потреб А. Маслоу (що визначає мотиватори дій індивідів) та типологію архетипів художніх творів В. Шмідт. У досліджуваному матеріалі розглядаємо жіночих персонажів, які належать до архетипу «Амазонка». Вважаємо, що за класифікацією потреб А. Маслоу, «Амазонка» керується потребою у (само)повазі та самореалізації. Оскільки ця потреба є задоволеною, архетип реалізовано у персонажах-протагоністах. За визначенням В. Шмідт, функція «Амазонки» – боротися проти патріархального укладу та довести рівність жінок з чоловіками. Як правило, «Амазонка» зображена у сферах діяльності, де жінки представлені порівняно мало: персонажі є супер-героїнями (Керол Денверс та Діана Принц), убивцями драконів (Аліса), пілотами винищувачів (Керол Денверс та Марія Рембо), генералами армій (Окоїе), агентками спецслужб (Маргарет Картер) та офіцерками поліції (Джуді Гопс). Архетип може виступати як засіб для розвитку арки персонажа (у випадку Керол Денверс, Джуді Гопс та Діани Принц), відповідно бути частиною образу головної героїні; або як основа для образу головної (Аліса та Маргарет Картер) чи другорядної протагоністки історії (у випадку Окоїе та Марії Рембо). Для «Амазонки» характерними є наративи про боротьбу за правду, справедливість, рівноправ'я, свободу, незалежність, справедливість, (само)повагу, досягнення, визнання, самореалізацію та самоактуалізацію.

Ключові слова: архетип «Амазонка», психолінгвістичний образ, персонажне мовлення, вербальна репрезентація, нарративний аналіз, жіночий кіноперсонаж.