

# Reel



# Women

Realistic is the operative word when defining the parts contemporary actresses play – no more demure maidens of yore, and **Christine Todd** provides some history to bring us up to date.

At one time, women in Film were portrayed quite differently than they are today. It used to be that a woman's role opened with a splash of sass and a sprit of *joie de vivre*. She'd sweep down a grand staircase wearing a satin ball gown and exchange clever banter with a smitten handsome man. She would wear expensive business clothes while having no apparent job. Fiery women were irresistible to red-blooded men, if only for a while. Whenever their mutual attraction turned into a battle of the sexes, our heroine's pluck would soon evaporate, be drummed out of her and replaced with feminine acquiescence and subdued womanly ways.

Consider actress Maureen O'Hara playing the role of Katherine, estranged wife of John Wayne's McLintock, in the 1963 movie of the same name. Katherine was a strong-willed woman with a mind of her own who refused to do as she was told. In no time, she was hoisted across her husband's knee and spanked like a child. Audiences deemed it hilarious, apparently believing the old adage: "A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do" in order to tame his feisty woman.

Woe betide McLintock had he accidentally stumbled into this century's *Kill Bill-Vol.2* and Uma Thurman. It's highly doubtful that her character – a woman with mettle who indeed managed to kill Bill – would put up with a spanking from any man. Before he could have collected his wits, she would have given our cowboy a proper going over, with a few well-placed karate chops thrown in for good luck.

Imagine what might have happened had McLintock found himself in the 2003 movie *Monster*. It's questionable that even a man his size could have controlled Charlize Theron's character, Aileen Wuornos – a real life *femme fatale* and slayer of six men. In fact, McLintock might well have been deftly tipped over Aileen's knee for a substantial spanking, after

which he'd have considered himself lucky she hadn't put him underground in the process.

While women's roles have evolved, Mr McLintock hasn't. He wouldn't fare any better with Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*, Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*, Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada*, or with any number of similar, no-nonsense females.

Today's women with mettle become self-sufficient and have real jobs, sometimes toiling in traditional men's work. In 2009's *Sunshine Cleaning*, two sisters changed their lives for the better by starting a crime scene clean-up business,

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scrubbing and swabbing floors and walls covered in bodily fluids and gruesome body bits. No satin ball gowns and sweeping staircases for these gals.

Women's roles have become more realistic. Contemporary audiences genuinely like women with mettle, and prefer to see said mettle stick – or is that, in fact, *metak*: as in 'iron lady', or 'woman of steel', or 'sharp-as-a-knife female' who's just as resilient? After all, to tame her man – or to create a little personal justice – a woman's gotta do what a woman's gotta do. **S**

[ct@christine-todd.com](mailto:ct@christine-todd.com)