How did William Hart’s childhood prepare him for his acting role in Western films?

William S. Hart was, perhaps, the greatest of all Western stars, for unlike Gary Cooper and John Wayne he appeared in nothing but Westerns.

From 1914 to 1924, he was supreme and unchallenged.

It was Hart who created the basic formula of the Western film, and devised the protagonist he played in every film he made, the good-bad man, the accidental-noble outlaw, or the honest-but-framed cowboy, or the sheriff made suspect by vicious gossip; in short, the individual in conflict with himself and his frontier environment.

Unlike most of his contemporaries in Hollywood, Hart knew something of the old West.

He had lived in it as a child when it was already disappearing, and his hero was firmly rooted in his memories and experiences, and in both the history and the mythology of the vanished frontier.

Although no period or place in American history has been more absurdly romanticized, myth and reality did join hands in at least one arena, the conflict between the individual and encroaching civilization.

Men were accustomed to struggling for survival against the elements, and Indians were bewildered by politicians, bankers, and businessmen, and unhorsed by fences, laws, and alien taboos.

Hart’s good-bad man was always an outsider, always one of the disinherited, and if he found it necessary to shoot a sheriff or rob a bank along the way, his early audiences found it easy to understand and forgive, especially when it was Hart who, in the end, overcame the attacking Indians.

Audiences in the second decade of the twentieth century found it pleasant to escape to a time when life, though hard, was relatively simple.

We still do; living in a world in which undeclared aggression, war, hypocrisy, chicanery, anarchy, and impending immolation are part of our daily lives, we all want a code to live by.

The basic formula of Western films is that the individual is in conflict with himself and his frontier environment.

The arrival of politicians, bankers, rs, and businessmen bewildered and confused the men who were used to struggling for survival against the elements.

Western films have appealed to twentieth-century audiences because they offer an escape to a time when life, though hard, was relatively simple.

I had to make a supreme effort to stop myself from laughing.

People often wonder who the dramatist was thinking of when he devised the protagonist in his last play.

It looked as if the man had committed the crime, but he hadn’t: he had been framed by two rivals who wanted him put into prison.

The two parties have been in conflict about education since the election.

Children need a happy and secure home environment if they are to develop normally.

All the man’s contemporaries were beginning to retire while he was still working hard to make a living.

The woman’s novels are firmly rooted in her upbringing in Ireland.

The new housing estate is now encroaching on part of the forest.

When the boy first arrived in England from Asia, he was completely bewildered by the different way of life.

The nuclear arms race caused the entire world to feel threatened by impending immolation.

Audiences in the second decade of the twentieth century found it pleasant to escape to a time when life was hard but simple.

And we still do: in a world that is still full of aggression, hypocrisy, and anarchy, we still want to escape and look for a code to live by.

The ‘Western’, or ‘cowboy film’, has become a classic in the twentieth century.

Although few are made today, those that are made are still popular.

Why?

What is it in a Western that people all over the world enjoy watching?

It isn’t the scenery, although that may help.

Those wide open spaces, the prairies, and the rocky hills always put the cowboys into perspective.

It isn’t the accompanying music, because it is sometimes excellent and sometimes dreadful.

Nor is it the violence, and there is often a lot of violence in a Western.

Quite several people, cowboys and Indians, ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’, are killed along the way.

It must be that the Western is characterized by a simple plot and characters that are universal in their appeal.

The good man (our hero, perhaps an unwilling sheriff) finds himself in conflict with the ‘bad guy’, the professional ‘gunslinger’ or even a gang of them, the ‘baddies’ — and although he faces lots of challenging situations (sometimes even becoming a ‘bad guy’ for a while), we know he will be victorious in the end and either get the woman or ride off into the sunset with his faithful horse.

I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

That boy has been nothing but trouble ever since he came to the school.

I’ve just looked through that box and there is nothing but rubbish in it.

I did mention it to him, but he wasn’t impressed.

You did post my letter, didn’t you?

We did enjoy ourselves at the party.

Her speech, though quite short, was excellent and very entertaining.

There wasn’t enough time to visit the old castle. I wish we had found time, though.

They all thought that it was a good cause to fight for. (= for which to fight)

The story gave them all something to talk about. (= about which to talk)

The police couldn’t arrest the man because they didn’t have quite enough information to act on. (= on which to act)

He keeps changing his mind, so he’s an impossible man to work with. (= with whom to work)

Wayne Sleep is appearing in ‘Song and Dance.’ (= can be seen)

He appeared from nowhere. (= came into view)

It appears/seems odd that he hasn’t written to any of us.

Can you devise a solution to this problem?

An encephalograph is a device for measuring brain activity.

Police blew up the suspect package.

If travelers look nervous, customs officers get suspicious.

My memory is not as good as it used to be.

This ring is the only remembrance I have of my grandmother.

We often know little about the history of our times.

Climb into bed and I’ll read you a bedtime story.

I lost my address book when the man robbed me of my bag.

The man who stole my handbag took my address book as well.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, the painter never experimented with abstract art.

Unlike some people, I never pass on any gossip I might hear.

Unlike you, I have never been interested in football.

This was the party’s most disastrous and embarrassing defeat ever: in short, it was a fiasco.

On this particular issue, the Prime Minister is in direct conflict with many of his colleagues in the Government.

Although she is normally right, she has been wrong on at least one occasion this week.

He tried several times to pass his driving test, and in the end, he succeeded.

The basis of Western films, as defined by William S. Hart, is conflict.

William S. Hart’s understanding of the West was based on direct personal experience.

The basic theme of early Western films was the clash between civilization and Nature.

The passage suggests that audiences, past and present, like simple living and simple rules.

William S. Hart appeared in nothing but Westerns.

Hart devised the protagonist, whom he played in every film.

Hart knew something about the old West in which he had lived as a child.

Although no period has been more absurdly romanticized, myth and reality did join hands in at least one arena.

Hart devised the leading part he played in every film.

His hero was rooted in the mythology of a frontier that had disappeared.

This period has been romanticized ridiculously.

Men accustomed to struggling for survival were confused by politicians.