

# Religion, Female Sexuality and Magic in (Post)Modern Film

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**ABSTRACT.** Vinczeová Barbora, *Religion, Female Sexuality and Magic in (Post)Modern Film*. "Images" vol. XXXIV, no. 43. Poznań 2023. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. Pp. 337–344. ISSN 1731-450X. <https://doi.org/10.14746/i.2023.34.43.22>.

The paper strives to investigate the relationship of female sexuality, magic and religion in film based on the comparison of two selected films. The three themes have been often seen as intertwined especially by religion, which has built an image of a female witch in alliance with the devil, or evil forces. The research aims to answer the question whether postmodern cinema embraces the combination of the aforementioned themes often associated, historically, with the notion of witchcraft practised especially by female witches. The scope of the research is limited to two films; however, the possibility to expand the research in the future and include newer films exists. Comparative methods and analysis are used throughout the paper. The paper is structured according to the analysed themes found in both films – *Carrie* (dir. Kimberly Peirce, 2013) and *Thelma* (dir. Joachim Trier, 2017). The author claims that these themes are similar and rooted in the same perception of the female monstrosity in both films, with different outcomes of this combination. The authors suggest that this is due to feminist tendencies becoming more prominent in every artform. However, this claim needs investigating from the feminist studies' point of view.

**KEYWORDS:** witchcraft, sexuality, magic, comparative analysis, postmodernism

## Introduction

"Historically, witchcraft has always been viewed as a highly sexually charged act." [1] Take the various popular tales from across cultures: the beautiful Greek Circe, who turned men into pigs and became Odysseus' lover; the unpredictable Arthurian Morgan, often portrayed as the wicked seductress; the biblical Lilith, whose sexuality and disobedience to Adam inspires fantastic fiction until today.

The connection between magic, (female) sexuality and religion has been present in Western culture for a very long time. Roper mentions early tales of sexual magic from the seventeenth century, quoting the story of Appolonia Mayr:

Here a woman is apparently committing infanticide as a kind of love magic, in a crazed and hopeless attempt to force her lover to marry her. [...] She bears the child without female assistance. The Devil acts as midwife, and it is he who remains standing over the child. [...] Appolonia Mayr was burnt as a witch. She lived in a world in which the Devil was a character one might meet on any lonely pathway,

who might whisper whom to kill, how to control others. [2]

Western culture contains numerous tales about witches, often lonesome and powerful figures, who were feared and persecuted. Being almost exclusively female, [3] witches were often hunted, tried and executed for various reasons, many of them gender- and sexuality-related, summarized as:

- "the reactions of peasant workers to the bitterness and cursing of individual women;
- patriarchal anxieties about solitary women and their often quite real knowledge of medicine and contraception;

[1] M.D. Bailey, *Historical Dictionary of Witchcraft*, Lanham 2003, p. 118.

[2] L. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, sexuality and religion in early modern Europe*, London 2005 [1994], p. 1.

[3] Küng states that 80 to 90% of the accused were female.

– women as scapegoats for impotence and barrenness, for the failure of harvests, disease among cattle and catastrophe, sickness and death;

– the sexual obsessions and fantasies of celibate church Inquisitors who showed interest in the alleged perversions, obscenities and orgies (even with demons) of women with an insatiable lust, vilifying the witches as followers of Satan, so that they became a dark feminine principle (this was compensated for on the other side by the idealization of women in Mary – above the senses, pure and conceiving without a stain).”[4]

In this context, witches stand against the traditional, safe Christian portrayal of a nurturing, motherly, submissive woman without sin, as represented by Mary. They were feared because of their power, abilities, and sexuality. However, from a (post)modern point of view, a powerful woman embracing her power, sexuality, and defying expectations of society, not fitting into the prescribed role, is celebrated. In reinterpretations of the witch figure, authors allude to witches representing feminism. Harris claims that for witches, “the future is feminist”[5] and Shane[6] uses the metaphor of a witch to examine feminism in Chile. Hester argues that “witch-hunts were an attempt at maintaining and re-

storing male supremacy within this context,”[7] the context being numerous socio-cultural and political changes.

“All human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject”[8] and it was usually religion[9] which stood against women with magical abilities: “When witchcraft was deemed heresy by the Catholic Church in the fourteenth century, the services witches had previously performed were labelled as crimes – particularly midwifery.”[10] Lilith was banished from paradise and substituted with a meeker, more obedient version of herself; the already mentioned witch-hunts spread not only through Europe but also Africa and other continents; and in modern times, even *Harry Potter* has sparked religious controversy.[11]

Modern popular fiction has not avoided the myth of the witch, reinterpreting it, changing it and finally reinventing it. Authors such as John Updike, Deborah Harkness, Roald Dahl, Anne Rice, Alice Hoffman or even J.K. Rowling have each made their own take on the topic. The film industry has not lagged behind either, and gave us classics such as *Practical Magic* (Griffin Dunne, 1998), *I Married a Witch* (René Clair, 1942), *The Wizard of Oz* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939), *Rosemary’s Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) or *The Blair Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick, Eduardo Sánchez, 1999) to more recent masterpieces such as *The Witch* (Robert Eggers, 2015), *Suspiria* (Luca Guadagnino, 2018), *The Autopsy of Jane Doe* (André Øvredal, 2016) or *You Won’t Be Alone* (Goran Stolevski, 2022).

Although witchcraft has many faces, especially in the present day, the focus of the article rests on the three aforementioned themes: magic, female sexuality and religion, represented in the selected films. The source material for analysis in this article are the films *Carrie*[12] and *Thelma*,[13] which both address very similar, if not the same themes. The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between these three themes; establish the conflict between them and the resolution of this conflict, and to answer the question whether these three

[4] H. Küng, *Women in Christianity*, London 2005 [2001], pp. 74–75.

[5] V. Harris, *Witches on Surfboards: How Witch Media Has Ridden the Waves of Feminism*, “Cardinal Compositions” 2020, vol. 4.

[6] J. Shane, *They Used to Call Us Witches: Chilean Exiles, Culture, and Feminism*, Lanham 2009.

[7] M. Hester, *Lewd women and wicked witches: A study of the dynamics of male domination*, London 2003 [1992], p. 107.

[8] B. Creed, *The monstrous-feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis*, New York 2007 [1993], p. 2.

[9] Here, focus lies on western religions and their emphasis on the concept of female purity.

[10] B. Creed, op. cit., p. 74.

[11] R.L. Wagner, *Bewitching the Box Office: Harry Potter and Religious Controversy*, “Journal of Religion and Film” 2003, no. 7(2).

[12] *Carrie* (dir. Kimberly Peirce, 2013).

[13] *Thelma* (dir. Joachim Trier, 2017).

themes can and do coexist in (post)modern cinema.

### Carrie and Thelma

*Carrie*, a remake of the Brian De Palma's 1976 film of the same name, based on Stephen King's first novel *Carrie* (1974), is a 2013 horror film about a religious oppressed girl who develops telekinetic abilities. *Carrie* was directed by Kimberly Peirce, with Chloë Grace Moretz playing the main character. The film received both positive and negative ratings. Peter Bradshaw from *The Guardian* called it "efficient, but only tentatively updated to the digital age of cyberbullying and social media" and "strangely pointless," [14] while *Variety* claimed that *Carrie* "sustains interest as a moody psychological/paranormal drama with a melancholy undertow that at times tilts into genuine pathos." [15] Inevitably, *Carrie* is compared to the original 1976 film, and the necessity of a remake is often questioned by critics.

*Thelma* is a 2017 Norwegian film, similarly about a religious girl who discovers herself to have magical abilities. *Thelma* was directed by Joachim Trier with Eli Harboe cast as the main character Thelma. The film scored mostly favourable reviews, calling Harboe's performance "very formidable." [16] *The Guardian* called *Thelma* an "electric erotic thriller" [17] and *Vulture* said that *Thelma* is "both more mysterious and more accessible than his [Trier's] other films. The spell it casts transcends the silly plotting. It puts you in a zone all its own." [18] The "Nordic seriousness over knowing winks and jinx" [19] was praised by some critics, while others perceived it as detached and boring.

*Carrie* and *Thelma* have not escaped comparison. Both films are named after their main character. It is impossible not to see the parallels between the two films and it is hard not to agree that "the story of an ostracised, religious girl developing supernatural powers, Joachim Trier's *Thelma* invites comparisons to Brian De Palma's 1976 film *Carrie*." [20] *Thelma* was also called "a Norwegian «Carrie»;" [21] "«Carrie» in Norway setting" [22] or a "more sexu-

alized *Carrie*, with Scandinavian melancholy." [23] Indeed, the themes both films explore

- [14] P. Bradshaw, *Carrie – Review*, *The Guardian*, 28.11.2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/nov/28/carrie-review> (accessed: 5.05.2022), p. 1.
- [15] J. Chang, *Film Review – Carrie*, *Variety*, 17.10.2013, <https://variety.com/2013/film/reviews/carrie-review-1200734450> (accessed: 4.05.2022), p. 1.
- [16] P. Bradshaw, *Thelma review – telekinetic lesbian drama is scary, sexy and cool*, *The Guardian*, 2.11.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/nov/02/thelma-review-joachim-trier-telekinetic-lesbian-psychological-drama> (accessed: 12.05.2022), p. 1.
- [17] S. Hans, *Thelma review – electric erotic thriller*, *The Guardian*, 5.11.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/nov/05/thelma-review-electric-erotic-thriller-joachim-trier> (accessed: 12.05.2022), p. 1.
- [18] D. Edelstein, *Thelma is Like Carrie Remade by Ingmar Bergman*, *Vulture*, 10.11.2017, <https://www.vulture.com/2017/11/thelma-review.html> (accessed: 12.05.2022), p. 1.
- [19] T. Brady, *Thelma review: Thrilling but chilly tale of lesbianism and Christianity*, *The Irish Times*, 2.11.2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/film/thelma-review-thrilling-but-chilly-tale-of-lesbianism-and-christianity-1.3276757> (accessed: 12.05.2022), p. 1.
- [20] O. Smith, *Thelma is more than just a modern Carrie*, *SeventhRow*, 5.11.2019, <https://seventh-row.com/2019/11/05/thelma-carrie-comparison> (accessed: 24.05.2022), p. 1.
- [21] S. Burns, *A Norwegian «Carrie», «Thelma» Is A Coming-Of-Age Tale With Psychokinetic Disruption*, *Wbur*, 17.01.2018, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2018/01/17/thelma-joachim-trier> (accessed: 24.05.2022), p. 1.
- [22] B.C. Steele, *Movie review: «Thelma» rethinks «Carrie» in Norway setting*, "The Citizen-Times", <https://eu.citizen-times.com/story/entertainment/movies/2017/12/07/movie-review-thelma-rethinks-carrie-norway-setting/914033001/> (accessed: 1.05.2022), p. 1.
- [23] J. Slotek, *Thelma a more sexualized Carrie, with Scandinavian melancholy*, *Original-Cin*, 15.11.2017, <https://www.original-cin.ca/posts/2017/11/8/thelma-is-carrie-with-scandinavian-melancholy-and-metaphor> (accessed: 30.05.2022), p. 1.

are mainly religion, sexuality, and magic. The structure of this article is therefore based on the three main themes, each chapter exploring the differences and the similarities between two films.

### Religion, Family, and Tragedy

Religion and family are closely linked in both movies. In *Carrie*, the main bearer of religious dogma is Carrie White's mother Margaret. A devoted Catholic, Margaret's relationship to religion is dogmatic. She considers anything sexual sinful; her view is particularly in line with the Catholic Church's view of women: "It was particularly female sexuality that made women sinful; women were considered sexually insatiable and led men into damnation through association with their bodies."<sup>[24]</sup>

Religion is equally present in *Thelma*, although it is a modernised version of Christianity that Thelma's parents practise. Instead of the torture witnessed in *Carrie*, the Christianity in *Thelma* is a more understanding version of itself, promoting kindness, communication, and love. Thelma's parents are both religious and encourage their daughter to pray, although there is less dogma and cruelty involved:

De Palma's take sees the meek, sweet Carrie (Sissy Spacek) fall victim to merciless bullies and an abusive mother (Piper Laurie); there's no question where your sympathies lie when her violent powers prove fatal to her peers. Thelma's (Eili Harboe) suppressors are only her parents. They use their religious conservatism to control her.<sup>[25]</sup>

The conflict arises when Thelma discovers she is a lesbian and that she can influence her

surroundings with magic – both facts that go against the religious upbringing. She is also pushed into repressing her magical abilities by her father, who acts as a representation of the "patriarchal discourses [which see her] as an implacable enemy of the symbolic order,"<sup>[26]</sup> while her mother acts as a more passive, less determined bystander.

These religious notions have a common denominator in both films: an incident in the past. In *Carrie*, Carrie's mother Margaret succumbed to "sin", and her partner left her while pregnant. Carrie's mother has subsequently oppressed and mistreated her daughter, blaming her for her misfortune. Similarly, a very young *Thelma* has killed her younger sibling, transporting him into a frozen lake by magic out of jealousy. Thelma's parents have watched her and led her to religion ever since in hope that any magic abilities might be suppressed.

The links between the two films are an early tragedy followed by religious suppression of any supernatural abilities. Family acts as the religious influence in both cases. The main characters are advised or forced to pray. Margaret is often heard ordering Carrie to pray: "Go to your closet and pray. You pray"; "Did you finish your prayers, little girl?"; "You're going to get in there and you're going to pray for forgiveness."<sup>[27]</sup>

Thelma's parents stress praying less, but religiosity is enforced in a different, equally effective way: "I remember how Dad once held my hand over a lit candle. He pulled it away just before I got burned. But it was really painful. Then he said... «Remember, this is what it's like in Hell, all the time»."<sup>[28]</sup> The co-writer of *Thelma*, Eskil Vogt, affirms that Thelma's father "imposes himself, but in a very passive aggressive way. They call, and they ask questions. But he doesn't yell at her. He isn't physical with her in the way you might expect. He's more subtle."<sup>[29]</sup>

The suppression – of sexuality and magic – in both cases relates to religion, as related to the claim that religion is characterized by submission is the often repeated charge that magic is fundamentally immoral. Again the basic structure of this theme goes back far in Western thought. Ancient attacks

[24] M. Hester, op. cit., p. 145.

[25] O. Smith, op. cit., p. 1.

[26] B. Creed, op. cit., p. 76.

[27] *Carrie*.

[28] *Thelma*.

[29] A. Heeney, Co-writer Eskil Vogt on *Thelma*: «We're not happy with movies just being naturalistic. It has to explore cinematic form», SeventhRow, 20.11.2017, <https://seventh-row.com/2017/11/20/eskil-vogt-thelma> (accessed: 30.05.2022), p. 1.

on magic viewed it as a social threat, and Christian thinkers long viewed witchcraft and magic as sinful and evil.<sup>[30]</sup>

This notion is reflected in both films and forms the basic conflict between magic, sex and religion that is analysed.

Since the setting of the two films is almost the same, it is only natural that both main characters are also very similar: shy, naive, religious and sheltered young women, overprotected by their parents and unsure of themselves: “*Thelma* has already earned comparisons to Brian de Palma’s *Carrie*, in which the title character is also raised in near isolation in a strict religious household.”<sup>[31]</sup> Neither has many friends; *Carrie* is even severely bullied for her religion, unusual style of clothes and being unaware of female menstruation. *Thelma* does not experience bullying, or at least not in the sense *Carrie* does – yet she is still occasionally a focus of pranks, for example, when friends trick her into eating marijuana cakes, which are in fact drug-free, yet to fit in, *Thelma* pretends to be drugged and is called out for being a liar. However, *Thelma* is shown to indeed experience hallucinations, possibly because of her awakening powers.

### Sex, Love, and Control

The catalyst of the conflict in both films is in the form of school and the freedom it offers in opposition to religious upbringing. *Carrie* is not a new student at her high school; however, she had long been bullied because of being different. When she experiences her first period, she panics, being afraid of dying. Menstruation as a catalyst of powers is not a new notion, and “in some horror films the witch’s supernatural powers are linked to the female reproductive system – particularly menstruation.”<sup>[32]</sup> Blood as a symbol is ever-present in *Carrie* – her classmates prank her by spilling pig blood on her, and there is “menstrual blood, pig’s blood, birth blood, the blood of sin and the blood of death,”<sup>[33]</sup> adhering to the perception of menstrual blood being related to supernatural powers: “Woman’s blood is thus linked to the possession

of supernatural powers, powers which historically and mythologically have been associated with the representation of woman as witch.”<sup>[34]</sup>

In *Thelma*’s case, it is her first time being away from home, having started the first year at a university. The new environment is more accepting than *Carrie*’s school, although she too is the subject of pranks. She is exposed to a different lifestyle in conflict with her religion, including alcohol, parties, and freedom of sexual orientation. The struggle she experiences is more on the inside than on the outside. While *Carrie* *knows* she wants to go out with a boy and she *knows* her mother’s dogma is not good, *Thelma* questions the rightness of her own behaviour, ignores and suppresses her homosexual orientation and experiences feelings of guilt when drinking alcohol.

In both films, school acts as an important environment: for *Carrie*, school is both a prison where she is bullied, but also an opportunity to abandon her religious upbringing. For *Thelma*, school does not carry the threat of bullying to the same extent and is a place with more freedom and less oppression than she experiences with her parents.

School is also the place where both girls experience their awakening. In both cases, we can talk about a link between the sexual awakening and the awakening of magical powers: “*Carrie* gets her first period in the school changing rooms and her peers mock her distress. Her powers manifest as a light bulb smashing overhead.”<sup>[35]</sup> Similarly, *Thelma* experiences seizures and manifests telekinetic powers when she thinks of her love interest: “*Carrie*’s psychic powers are by her first period, linking her

[30] R. Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World*, Oxford 2004, p. 112.

[31] M. Barton-Fumo, *Thelma*, “Film Comment” 2017, no. 53(6), p. 73.

[32] B. Creed, op. cit., p. 77.

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 78. The quote refers to the original *Carrie*, however, it is still true for the remake.

[34] *Ibidem*, p. 79.

[35] O. Smith, op. cit., p. 1.

“affliction with womanhood. In the Trier film, telekinesis is awakened by desire and exacerbated when she goes to university and falls in love with another woman, Anja.”[36] Blood as a symbol is not prevalent in *Thelma*, and Thelma’s abilities manifest to the greatest degree when she thinks or acts on the notion of “forbidden” love. However, bodily fluids are present when Thelma urinates herself during a seizure caused by her abilities. It can be argued that this event represents loss of self-control or an inability to control oneself, often present in children and the elderly, but Thelma’s self-control is eventually recovered and the incident is not repeated.

When these abilities manifest for the first time, both girls try to suppress them. Carrie, pressured by her mother, thinks of herself as unclean. Thelma tries to find a more modern solution and undergoes several medical tests to explain her seizures. Rejection is the first reaction in both cases, although the final acceptance of magical powers varies – while Carrie embraces them with a sense of doom, Thelma ends with a surprisingly happy ending, using her magic to positive ends, possibly redeeming herself after killing her baby brother.

### Magic, Life, and Death

As already mentioned, magic and sexuality are closely intertwined in both films. With Carrie, it is her first period that links her to magic – it is both a sexual and a magical awakening. Carrie starts to realize she is stronger than her own mother. This can be seen when she refuses to be locked in a closet to pray and attacks her mother by magic instead. The refusal to succumb to religious pressure and the perception of “uncleanliness” that Carrie’s mother enforces

on her also manifests in Carrie’s insistence to go to a school prom with a boy, wearing a dress that her mother considers unchristian:

Take off that dress, Carrie.

No.

Take it off and we’ll burn it together and pray for forgiveness.

Mama, it’s modest[37]

and:

You’re going to get in there and you’re going to pray for forgiveness.

No, never again, Mama![38]

Similarly, Thelma goes against the religion of her upbringing by kissing another female student and “her journey of discovering her sexual identity is interspersed with confusion, rejection and doubt in relation to her sexual orientation, as homosexuality is a concept that stands in strong contradiction with her religious upbringing.”[39] In both cases, the main characters abandon their religion in one way or another – Carrie by going to prom and Thelma by admitting her homosexuality to herself.

The result of these actions seems to have a negative impact in both cases. Carrie attends the prom, yet is pranked when her classmates pour a bucket of pig’s blood on her. Her magical abilities are triggered by anger and an enraged Carrie murders everybody present. After returning home, she and her mother reconcile and die under a crumbling house.

The pessimistic ending is where *Thelma* seems to be headed too: pressured Thelma unwillingly makes her love interest disappear. After leaving university, she is drugged by her father who plans to murder her: “I should never have let you leave. I thought it was over. It hadn’t happened since you found God as a child. I’m going to help you.”[40]

However, Thelma does not lose will to live; for if we return to Carrie, she had the ability to save herself, but didn’t. Thelma does what Carrie couldn’t: “We can finally see her father bursting into uncontrollable and unstoppable flames while he’s on a boat on the deep lake, having no chance of rescuing himself.”[41] She

[36] M. Barton-Fumo, op. cit., p. 73.

[37] *Carrie*.

[38] Ibidem.

[39] C. Negrea, *Representations of Witches in the Coming-of-age Subgenre*, “Studia Ubb Dramatica” 2020, no. 65(1), p. 282.

[40] *Thelma*.

[41] C. Negrea, op. cit., p. 284.

embraces her identity, being a lesbian with magical abilities and brings back her love interest, who reappears in her life: “Why can’t I just be what I am? Why isn’t that possible?”[42] An uncommonly happy ending is a new characteristic appearing in Trier’s film.[43]

It seems that Carrie finds it impossible to reconcile religious upbringing and magic: death is the inevitable end. She finds no acceptance and used her abilities to destroy and kill. However, given the chance, it can be presumed that Carrie could have learned to use them to good means too, as seen in several scenes, where she experiments with levitation. Carrie returns to her religious mother in the end; she gives up on love and magic that religion denies her.

On the other hand, Thelma overcomes her upbringing: in the final scene, we see her happy with her girlfriend. By rejecting her upbringing and murdering her oppressive father, she can make a different choice to Carrie’s: she chooses the freedom of her sexuality, love and magic over religion.

### Conclusion

*Carrie*[44] and *Thelma*[45] have been frequently compared. This comparison stems from common themes and similar plotlines shared by both films. Several main themes were identified and analysed.

In both films, religion and family are tightly linked in the form of religious oppression. In *Carrie*, the oppressor is Carrie’s mother Margaret, while in *Thelma*, it is Thelma’s father. Although the oppression is more subtle in Thelma, it has the same effect as in *Carrie*, creating a religious, shy girl who questions her abilities and doubts herself.

Both main characters have dormant magical abilities: Carrie has telekinetic abilities, while Thelma can manipulate reality, heal, but also kill. They discover these abilities while experiencing sexual awakening, too. Carrie’s abilities first manifest when she experiences her first period and Thelma’s reappear when she falls in love with another girl.

In both films, religion is portrayed in opposition to sexuality and magic. Carrie struggles to go on a date with a boy; all her efforts are perceived as unclean, evil and anti-religious by her mother. Sexuality itself is a sin, the notion of sin coming from the outside – Carrie’s mother – rather than the inside – Carrie herself. The abuse from Carrie’s mother is a catalyst of Carrie’s revolution. Thelma’s conflict is more ingrained in Thelma herself. It is also a result of religious upbringing; however, Thelma takes longer to rebel and reject the constrictions coming from her father. Her sexual conflict is a result of suppressed homosexuality and long-term indoctrination.

Carrie does not manage to break free; the film ends with her death. She is unable to move past the feelings of guilt, shame and self-hate that are forced on her by her mother. In *Carrie*, the unnatural represented by Carrie’s magical abilities is doomed to die and Carrie herself accepts this.

Thelma, on the other hand, does not accept the same fate, although initially it seems that she herself will also die. Thelma’s father sees her as unnatural and evil and intends to kill her. However, while Carrie accepts her fate, Thelma fights, uses magic to drown her father and heal her invalid mother. Thelma shows the viewer that her abilities are neither good nor evil; it is how she uses them that matters. Her character leans away from the portrayal of witches as evil and embraces the positive qualities of witchcraft contrary to films where “her [the witch’s] other social functions as healer and seer have largely been omitted from contemporary portrayals.”[46]

While Carrie dies after taking revenge on her bullies, Thelma realizes that the only thing stopping her from a fulfilled life are her father’s fears and prejudices stemming from his reli-

[42] *Thelma*.

[43] A. Lynse, *Manifestations of dread in Thelma*, “Journal of Scandinavian Cinema” 2019, no. 9(2).

[44] *Carrie*.

[45] *Thelma*.

[46] B. Creed, op. cit., p. 76.

gion. Thelma's vengeance could be interpreted as self-defence; if she didn't kill her father, he would kill her instead. Contrary to Carrie, Thelma embraces her sexuality, reunites with her lover and we see her use magic in everyday life, deflecting from patriarchal attempts to control her as a woman.[47]

It is possible to ask why *Carrie* and *Thelma* do not share the same pessimistic end, despite sharing very similar, if not the same, themes. We might speculate that the reason could be the different era both movies were written in – King's heroine is a traditionally misunderstood heroine doomed by "evil", which she can only destroy by destroying herself. Carrie cannot embrace her powers as Thelma does. Again, we can speculate that only today women are beginning to be able to embrace their powers, wishes and wants, no matter what society tells them. This development might be reflected in *Thelma*: the heroine realizes she *can* and *wants* to embrace her differences. Contrary to the brief mention of Thelma's grandmother, who had been institutionalized because of the same abilities that Thelma manifests (and coming to having a tragic end similar to *Carrie*), *Thelma* is a metaphor for a powerful, modern woman, able to embrace her differences and use them for her own benefit.

To conclude, these two films show that in the case of both *Carrie* and *Thelma*, religion cannot coexist with sexuality and magic. Pressure to reject the sexual is present in both films; Carrie is pressured to suppress her attraction

to boys, while Thelma's beliefs tell her that homosexual love is "unclean". Both characters break away from religion to pursue their love interest. Magic is tied to sexuality in both films; for Carrie, it is destructive and self-destructive. Carrie cannot overcome the sexuality awakened in her; she views her feelings as unclean and this perception is transferred to her perception of magic. Thelma, on the other hand, accepts both her powers and sexuality; she embraces them and is able to lead a fulfilled life. Thelma shows the viewer that there is no such thing as "evil" powers, only an evil person. Her self-acceptance and self-realization through magic could be interpreted from the feminist point of view in further research.

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