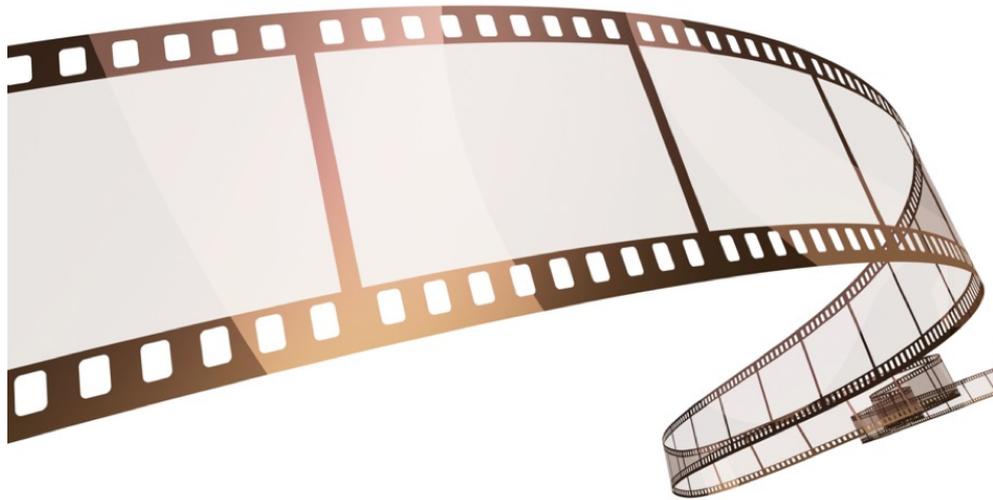


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Mother-Daughter Identity Constructs in *Lady Snowblood* and *Carrie*

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Abstract: Both *Carrie* (1976) and *Lady Snowblood* (1973) have each received significant attention in critical film theory and philosophical works. However, when considered with the aim of drawing comparisons rather than focusing on established theoretical concerns that prevent or at least obfuscate such a pairing, both films betray the same approach to identity construction with respect to the main female characters. This approach involves the reliance on a narrative construct in which a repressive condition is placed upon the leading women in these films, a condition that, when critically evaluated, may have help us to deepen our understanding of

the ways in which women are represented in film in general. While the interpretations presented here and the value that they hold may overlap with claims already made about such films in non-comparative contexts, the analysis here may serve to foreground certain structural features that make these films warrant renewed attention due to the underlying assumptions implicit in their development about the critical role of a mother with respect to how a daughter defines her own identity.

INTRODUCTION

The 1970s were a defining decade for women in cinema. As the second wave of feminism began to unfold, a wide array of films featuring women in leading roles came to the fore as a reflection of the social changes emerging around the world. Notably, while these films share the essential characteristic that women are portrayed as empowered in some way, they are quite different with respect to their narrative content, socio-historical contingencies and ideological orientations. Some of the films that emerged during this decade include *Lady Snowblood* (Toshiya Fujita, 1973), *Foxy Brown* (Jack Hill, 1974), *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976) and *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979). Despite this period of immensely creative and progressive cinematic development, to see what these films have in common is generally more difficult than considering what is different about them, including, at the core, genre classification, modes of representing the female characters in relation to the male characters and the different cinematic techniques used to tell these captivating stories. In particular, issues regarding screenwriting and adaptation along with persistent mainstream influence (i.e. *Carrie*) or lingering cult status (i.e. *Lady Snowblood*) have solidified a certain level of critical attention on these films. Furthermore, the mistakes made or limitations revealed in these distinctive representations of women on screen in an era in which women were struggling to both define and refine their identity against forces of social oppression, continues to be a subject worthy of extensive discussion.

My intent here is to focus on two films from this period, *Lady Snowblood* and *Carrie*. While these films may not seem to have that much in common on the surface, when considered with the aim of drawing comparisons rather than focusing on established theoretical concerns that prevent or at least obfuscate such a pairing, both films betray a certain approach to identity construction with respect to the main female characters. This approach involves the reliance on a narrative construct in which a repressive condition is placed upon the leading women in these films, a condition that, when critically evaluated, may have more widespread implications for how we understand the representation of women in film in general. While the interpretations presented here and the value that they hold may overlap with claims already made

about such films in non-comparative contexts, the analysis here may serve to foreground certain structural features that make these films warrant renewed attention due to the underlying assumptions implicit in their development about the critical role of a mother with respect to how a daughter defines her own identity.

The approach here falls within the domain of philosophy of film ‘without theory’ for two reasons. First, a significant amount of attention has been paid to theoretical issues such as the symbolism of blood and its implications for misogynist interpretations of *Carrie*. Such a theoretical focus has tended to dominate the narrative history of this film in both academic and non-academic literature. In contrast, the historical contingencies and distinctively Japanese representations of the female warrior in *Lady Snowblood*, sometimes defined as an exploitation film, along with Quentin Tarantino’s adaptation of Yuki into O-Ren Ishii in *Kill Bill: Volume 1* (2003), have controlled the theoretical discussion of *Lady Snowblood*’s significance in the English language. Thus, by comparing these two films based on their narrative constructions, I intend to explore their philosophical significance without relying on established theoretical constructs or concerns that may prevent such ideas from coming into full view. Second, the need to restrict these films into incisively demarcated genres which remain culturally isolated may be doing a disservice to some of the intriguing features that they share. Here, these films are interpreted as belonging, albeit loosely, to a new kind of genre construction that has yet to take more definitive shape. Insofar as the pairing itself is incongruous and antithetical to the way in which these films have drawn isolated trajectories in the history of interpretation, drawing new comparisons can be justified insofar as it prevents us from falling into a kind of theoretical trap with both films.

Thus, I proceed in a somewhat circuitous fashion with respect to my objectives. I start by theoretically clearing the air, so to speak, in discussing some of the predominant ways in which certain theoretical interpretations have leveraged various types of classifications and concerns with respect to both *Carrie* and *Lady Snowblood* at the expense of others in the English language research on these films. From there, I move on to the task of elucidating certain structural features of significance that these two films share, these centering on the role that the mothers play in both defining Carrie’s and Yuki’s respective potentials and limiting their scopes of agency along with their possibilities for self definition. While the task here is not to comprehensively address the theoretical lacunae of motherhood in the feminist literature or personal identity in the philosophy of mind/psychology, this comparison reveals what I believe to be a potentially problematic characteristic of some films in defining the agency of the main characters (specifically women with ‘power’, whatever that power may be).

In terms of the *philosophy* of film without theory, this paper starts with a close examination of the common features of these films with respect to the

ways in which the mother-daughter relationships are represented; the established psychoanalytic or cognitivist preoccupations as well as hyper-concerns for historical contextualisation bear no significant interpretive weight here, although one could say that this approach is a ‘moral perceptionist’ one as the term has been defined by Jinee Choi and Matthias Frey.¹ These discoveries may have implications for psychoanalytic, cognitivist and historical theories of interpretation and evaluation, but such work is beyond the scope or intent of this paper.

Finally, before beginning with this analysis, let me isolate the films that will be discussed. With respect to *Carrie*, the original 1976 version directed by Brian De Palma will be of sole focus, and not the sequel, *The Rage: Carrie 2* (1999), nor the more recent remake, *Carrie*, directed by Kimberly Peirce in 2013. The original novel from which the screenplay was adapted (Stephen King, 1974) will not be discussed in any length either. With respect to *Lady Snowblood*, the Criterion Collection’s Blu-ray edition of the 1973 film with revised English subtitles released in 2016 will be the film version addressed here. The 1974 sequel, *Lady Snowblood: Love Song of Vengeance*, will not be discussed. Thus, two ‘complete’ films will be compared and analysed without allusion to their sequels or remake(s).

I. *CARRIE*: THE BLOOD OF THE MONSTROUS WOMAN

Brian De Palma’s *Carrie*, released in 1976 and adapted into a screenplay by Lawrence D. Cohen based on Stephen King’s 1974 novel of the same name, presents the story of Carrie White, an awkward high school student subjected to extensive bullying and sheltered by a fanatically religious single mother. Carrie’s telekinetic powers, something she appears to have only recently become aware of, develop in intensity and lead to the unfolding of a horrific climax in which her entire school is burned down at the senior prom. Before all of this, though, the film begins with a seductively shot shower scene (almost inappropriately so, given that the subject is a female high school gym class) in which Carrie discovers the advent of her first menstruation. Shocked by the presence of blood, Carrie desperately reaches out to other classmates with her bloody hand outstretched, only to hear them scream in outrage as they throw tampons at her and taunt her with chants of ‘Creepy Carrie’. While the moment is saved by the gym teacher, the kind yet assertive Miss Collins, the event serves as a catalyst for the teenage revenge tale.

Generally, the film involves two reinforced acts of revenge. Popular student Chris, targeted by Miss Collins as the ultimate villain and central conspirator of Carrie’s traumatic experience, decides to get back at Carrie through a diabolical plan, the success of which is secured upon Carrie being elected as prom queen. This stage of the conflict in the film involves a number of elaborate moving parts, such that Chris’s friend Sue Snell is part of the plot without even knowing it as she asks her boyfriend, the well-mannered

and charming Tommy Ross, to take Carrie to the prom as an act of altruism. The final 25 minutes culminate in a scene definitive of what would emerge as De Palma's staple for dramatic effect.² After the election for prom king and queen is rigged, Carrie and Tommy elegantly accept their awards on stage, with Carrie looking around the audience in awe as the soundtrack reaches a crescendo of melodramatic proportion in accordance with Carrie's delusion that everything is as she had dreamed. All seems to be well, at least for the moment.

Suddenly, a sharp narrative sequence replete with *Psycho*-like anxiety-inducing strings slowly reveals a series of images that indicate that Chris will indeed get her revenge on Carrie by dropping a bucket of pig's blood on her (strung from above the stage) before the plot can be stopped by Sue, the only one who becomes aware of it. This, then, produces the image of Carrie that many of us who have seen the film have had imprinted upon our minds; shocked, distraught and enraged, Carrie freezes on stage after she is covered in blood, then shifts to using her telekinesis to exact her own revenge on those whom she believes to be the target: the entire school. She locks the doors, starts fires and kills everyone in the gym (effectively captured with the use of split-screen imaging and immersive red lighting). Even though Chris and her boyfriend manage to escape the gym, both are killed as they attempt to run down Carrie as she exits the gym and walks home.

The story, however, does not end there. With approximately 15 minutes remaining, we are left watching Carrie go home in shame and sorrow. This is the part where we discover who her mother, Margaret, *really* is and why Carrie's own identity has been so oppressed. In a shallow attempt to comfort Carrie (who admits that her mother may have been right in suggesting that 'they're all gonna laugh at you' before she had left), Margaret relays the story of how Carrie was the product of her own conceptualised 'sin' in being seduced by Carrie's biological father one night when he was drunk. Being the religious fanatic that she is, Margaret reveals that Carrie was essentially a mistake, that even though the act of conception was one that Margaret enjoyed (indicated by her declaration that 'I liked it'), this doesn't change Margaret's view that Carrie's existence is indicative of what Margaret herself must be tasked with finishing: redemption of her own failures to complete her mission to unification with God. As such, Margaret attempts to literally stab Carrie in the back, but her attempt is too weak, as Carrie telekinetically responds by killing her mother and then embracing her in conscious remorse as the house crashes down in flame.

This latter part of the story is what I believe to be essential to reconceptualising this film's content such that the more dominant line of thought concerns the relationship between Carrie and her mother and, of more direct philosophical relevance, how it is depicted on screen. This is not, however, an extension of the more established theoretical concerns regarding the film. On this note, it is worth mentioning that a significant body of work has ex-

pressed concerns with respect to how Carrie is especially horrifying specifically because of her transformation into womanhood rather than her destructive telekinetic powers. For instance, according to Shelley Stamp Lindsey, Carrie's discovery of her first menstruation as the establishing opening scene is of the utmost significance, implying a strong association between female puberty and monstrosity. Indeed, it is not much of a stretch from there to conclude that such an association is indicative of a latent misogyny within *Carrie*.³ Such theories are largely derived from psychoanalytic orientations in the literature on film studies. There is also a relatively popular line of thought having to do with determining what constitutes evil in the picture, and indeed, what defines the film as a work of horror. While Carrie's telekinesis is evidence of her identity as a kind of monster, in many ways, Margaret is the true definition of evil here; this is a view that draws attention to problems with hyper-fundamentalist religious commitments. Both Carrie and her mother exhibit traits indicative of what Noël Carroll would refer to as the 'monstrous' in line with his cognitivist theory of horror film, and De Palma's distinctively thrilling take effectively emphasises this duality of evil in the adaptation.⁴ Further along such lines, there have even been attempts to interpret *Carrie* as a horrific fairy tale, with the entire story being conceptualised as a teenage girl's bad dream.⁵

Casting concerns of menarche, misogyny and monstrosity aside, the mother-daughter construct that structures the narrative is especially interesting if one focuses on Margaret and her role as an intentional behind-the-scenes orchestrator of Carrie's entire unfolding. Indeed, Margaret's entire construction of Carrie's identity, beginning with her overly protective stance throughout her childhood, the attribution of blame or 'sin' throughout her life, and the blatant attempted murder indicate that there is a sense in which Carrie is objectified as Margaret's own means at self-redemption. In other words, Margaret's life goal could only be complete with either the birth of a sinless virgin or the destruction of her own child of sin ('... and Eve had sinned ...') and those negative influences around her. Thus, *Carrie* can also be viewed as Margaret's story, with Carrie serving as a subsidiary tool (or even an *asura* in the language of *Lady Snowblood*) in the formation and completion of Margaret's own deluded sense of identity. It is this interpretation, I argue, that establishes a clear narrative parallel between *Carrie* and *Lady Snowblood*.

II. *LADY SNOWBLOOD*: AVENGING A FAMILY'S DESTRUCTION

Based upon the extensive manga series of the same name written by Kazuo Koike and Kazue Kamikura, *Lady Snowblood*, directed by Toshiya Fujita with an adapted screenplay by Norio Asada, depicts the story of Yuki, a child born and cast as an '*asura*' by her mother Sayo, as she completes the latter's truncated quest for vengeance after the murder of her son and husband before

Yuki herself was even conceived.⁶ Sayo's mission to murder the four individuals responsible for the death of her family is completed by her daughter as we see Yuki murder the remaining three (Sayo had already killed the first) throughout the course of the film.

Lady Snowblood does not begin with any clear indication of Yuki's dominant role in the narrative until the story of her mother is depicted from within prison (this being due to the non-linear narrative structure with which Yuki's story is told). The film begins with the startling sounds of a baby crying in prison and her mother's later words to Yuki as she lays dying after giving birth reveal that she believes she has given birth to an 'asura demon' tasked with ensuring that Sayo gets her revenge. Thus, when we see Yuki killing a gangster in the quiet calm of an alley in 1870s Japan, we have a general idea of why this is the case, but we do not really understand the full story until later in the film. As the narrative unfolds in four distinct yet non-linear chapters, we come to learn that Sayo was the victim of a brutal attack in which her son and husband were murdered by four assailants (three men and a woman). While Sayo had managed to escape and kill one of the men, in recollection she reveals that this is why she was caught and sent to prison, where she then procured the sexual interest of anyone available in order to conceive of a baby who could carry out her quest for vengeance. The remainder of the film shows Yuki finishing this task, albeit by encountering a few obstacles along the way.

We do not learn much about Yuki from what she herself says or in her facial expressions (or lack thereof); we learn more through her actions and the explanations of them provided by those around her, including her mother, her trainer and the journalist Ryūrei Ashio (the son of one of the assailants). Nevertheless, again, as with *Carrie*, we have multiple intertwined revenge plots that merge into a focused climax. Although Yuki's quest for vengeance on behalf of her mother is the predominant narrative, with each assailant proving to be a more difficult kill than the previous one, we are also introduced to an important supporting character in Kobue, the daughter of Takemura Banzō (one of the assailants), who tracks down Yuki at the end of the film and stabs her for taking the life of her father. Indeed, revenge here seems to come full circle, for at this point, Yuki falls to the snow in despair in what looks to be her death, letting out a scream of anguish and frustration before sinking her head into the snow (only to somehow come back to life a little later).

Lady Snowblood is a beautifully shot film (e.g. here one need only consider the many top shots displaying Yuki's umbrella as she walks in the snow in contrast with the harsh red splatter of blood), one that has been defined as an important Japanese samurai exploitation film developed shortly after the emergence of the 'pinky violence' thrillers.⁷ Rich with historical contextualisation of the Meiji period and a narrative dominated by the women's own interests as opposed to those of the men, the predominant theoretical inter-

pretations in the English language literature tend to focus on the adaptation of the original manga in an attempt to lock its place in history as a distinctively Japanese film.⁸ Nevertheless, perhaps what first comes to mind when *Lady Snowblood* is mentioned is Tarantino's adaptation (or appropriation) of the role of Yuki in *Kill Bill Vol. 1* through both the character of O-Ren Ishii as well as the entire climactic battle scene. Debate is still rife with respect to the legitimacy of Tarantino's use of such content in this respect as well as the myriad other influences, meanings and techniques running through the film.⁹

Despite these more popular interests in the literature, the defining role of Sayo in both constructing and delimiting Yuki's identity is worthy of more consideration. Yuki is conceived with a life mission fully in place, and as such, similarly to Carrie, her life is defined by her mother's own interests even before she is born. Indeed, the very start of the film frames this relationship as central by introducing us to the prison scene, just as Miss Collins's reference to 'that mother of hers' in *Carrie* immediately places the blame for Carrie's ignorance of such matters on Margaret's penchant for extreme parental control.

III. PARALLEL NARRATIVE STRUCTURE IN *CARRIE* AND *LADY SNOWBLOOD*

Carrie and *Lady Snowblood* are very different films from very different cultural milieus. That being said, their definitive historical identities and the theories emerging from them may have obscured the significance of another very important part of their respective narrative structures. In other words, focusing on their definitive cultural essences may prevent us from considering how these films could, in a way, have more in common than simply being films about vengeful women from the 1970s. With the aim of drawing such comparisons, I argue that there are two key similarities in the narrative structure of these films. The first and most important would be the defining role that the mothers play in shaping the identity *construction* of the leading characters by controlling the entire lives of their daughters within the films. Second, the mothers in these films ultimately initiate a series of events that lead to the complex emotional collapse and identity *deconstruction* of the daughters. In this section, I elaborate on these thematic connections between these films, and in what follows, I discuss the deeper philosophical implications such connections may have.

In *Carrie*, as mentioned above, Margaret is first introduced to us not by her presence on screen, but by Miss Collins's allusion to her as a problem, or 'that mother of hers' in reference to Carrie when she and the school principal are debating whether or not to send her home after she discovered that she had her period for the first time. Upon realising that her mother had somehow failed her by keeping this important fact of life from her, Carrie returns home in a frustrated state, with enough nerve to say, in exasperation, 'You

should've told me, mama! You should've told me!' Margaret's response at this point isn't one of comfort but instead one of establishing both authority and distance, making her repeat, 'And Eve had sinned!' as she reads to her from a religious text (perhaps some version of the 'Book of Genesis'). To Margaret, Carrie is a mistake, but still one that needs to be saved from God as a means of preventing her own fall into sin. Thus, she sends a crying Carrie into the prayer room (here a dark closet, the move to which is captured in a single shot) not only to punish her for her apparent wrongdoing of being a sinful human being, but also for Margaret to repent for her *own* sin of womanhood. Margaret thus gains control of her own journey towards God from darkness by making her own daughter suffer in the process.

Another critical part of this film involves Carrie's fall from her mother's 'grace' and the subsequent moral disorientation she experiences after having murdered her mother through telekinesis. In this sense, Carrie's life objectives as defined by Margaret are officially dismantled; she has no one to turn to now that her mother is gone, and as a symbolic indication of her mindset at this point, the house begins to crumble around her. Carrie's actions here are indicative of someone who is clearly destabilised now that the grounding orientation of her life, namely, her mother, is forever gone. We see her panic and grab her mother after she dies, rushing with her into the protection of the very same closet that completely terrified her before. Indeed, she has no other option, and we can see her death in the house as it falls apart as a kind of symbol of a life constructed by someone else and destroyed when that same person is no longer present. The house that Margaret built, artificial in its elaborately abusive and epistemically flawed construction, burns both her and the product that it constructed: her own daughter Carrie.

There is, however, a moment of redemption when we see Carrie rise from the dead out of her grave (this is construed in the film as a nightmare that Sue Snell, the only survivor of the school burning, experiences). What this implies is that Carrie, in some way, quite simply *persists*. Although this scene could be construed as a simple scare tactic tagged on to the end of the film to garner a few screams, it could also be interpreted as a means of stretching Carrie's identity possibilities beyond those of Margaret's. That is, Carrie, even if she 'burns in hell' according to the graffiti slayed across her tombstone, is still struggling against that oppressed identity through the reach out of the dirt, whether it be in Sue Snell's dreams or in 'real life.'

Turning to *Lady Snowblood*, we see the same general pattern in terms of how Yuki's own identity is both constructed by her mother and developed as ultimately emerging or being born against that of her mother's dominant life commitments (post homicide). As alluded to above, we are shown through the prison scenes that Yuki's mother becomes pregnant while in prison solely as a means of continuing her unfinished revenge plot against those who murdered her husband and toddler son. Through a series of scenes scattered throughout

the non-linear narrative, we see Sayo's story unfold, as told through her own account to the other inmates, of how her ultimate task was to have another child who could carry out what has remained unfinished. Thus, Yuki is, as told to her by her mother on the prison bed after having given birth, an '*asura*,' born of hate and not love, with the illegitimacy of her conception established as a significant part of her complex identity construction. To Sayo, Yuki is no one outside of her identity as an *asura*. She does not have her own identity and, once born, Sayo rests with the assurance that Yuki can carry out her task somehow.

Thus, both Margaret and Sayo completely structure the parameters of their daughters' own narrative possibilities by defining them before they are even born in relation to their own life trajectories and commitments. In Margaret's case, the quest to remain pure and holy in the light of God's salvation remains, quite simply, the only thing she sees; Carrie is consequently an entity that either must conform to the world view that she has committed to or be destroyed for the sake of Margaret's own salvation. Thus, in the dialogue between Margaret and her daughter, we are never given any indication that Margaret even hears any of Carrie's words. Conversations (if they can even be called that) are essentially one-sided monologues on Margaret's part advanced toward Carrie, who struggles in turn to be heard. Consider, for instance, Margaret's monologue describing Carrie's conception after she returns home from the destruction at the prom, beginning with, 'I should have killed myself when he put it in me.' Margaret never truly hears Carrie; this is because, in her view, Carrie should never have existed.

Moments later, Margaret states, 'I should have given you to God when you were born,' before embracing Carrie to pray as a means of securing a stance from which she can stab her own daughter in the back. We can clearly hear that Margaret is speaking to herself, atoning for her own sins, with the pronoun 'you' being used in an almost aggressive way. The same can be said for Sayo's first 'conversation' with Yuki. Again, here we have a kind of monologue where Sayo declares Yuki's narrative trajectory as an extension of her own life story and as a permissive entitlement to her own death. In the scene in which both Sayo and Yuki are shown after the birth, Sayo is not holding Yuki; instead, Yuki lies beside her, with the only words Sayo says to Yuki being those solidifying her identity as one who must seek vengeance.

Of course, Yuki is too young to be able to discern anything that is said by her mother (albeit the narrative might be constructed such that she 'remembers' her mother), and so Sayo's words are more instructive to those women around her rather than an attempt at engaging with her newborn daughter. Nevertheless, what we see in both cases is a dominant ideological commitment standing above and beyond the possibility of a child constructing her own path as a free agent and, in this sense, both Carrie's and Yuki's identities are their mother's constructions.

One central difference, of course, is the fact that Yuki's mother dies after her birth, whereas Carrie is under her mother's dominion for the rest of her young adult life. Nevertheless, Sayo's words mark Yuki with a task that is upheld as her commitment by the fellow inmate who takes over her care and her trainer later in life, as shown in the borderline abusive treatment of Yuki as she learns how to both tumble down a hill inside a barrel and also bear a sword at a very young age.¹⁰ Indeed, the non-linear narrative structure also bears an indication of just how significant Sayo's interests are in shaping Yuki's identity, as Sayo's own story unfolds along with that of Yuki's. In fact, it is not much of a surprise, therefore, to see (or in this case hear) how little of the film is preoccupied with Yuki's words and in fact dictated by Sayo's own.

Carrie does, unlike Yuki, definitively struggle against her own mother, especially at the end of the film, in an effort to kill her. That being said, it is not truly Carrie herself that kills Margaret but instead the telekinetic force that spurs the onslaught of knives in her direction after she further attempts to ensure Carrie's ruination and return to God. In *Lady Snowblood*, there is evidence of Yuki's breakdown at the end of the film that shows that she is just as disoriented with respect to her identity constitution as Carrie when she says, 'You were right, mamma,' before being stabbed by her. After being stabbed by Kobue and left for dead in the snow, a close-up of Yuki's face shows her scream in agony before resting her eyes. This image, albeit as slight and insignificant as it may seem, is crucial, for it marks one of the only times at which we see Yuki show any semblance of emotion, and its timing is essential for the extraction of meaning regarding the significance of this essay. Yuki's scream here runs in tandem with Carrie's murder of her mother and her resulting scramble to the closet as the house burns down. Yuki's scream is also an act of defiance, but she is still locked in the 'house' created by her mother (here her own body).

Yuki's eyes open suddenly as she lays in the snow at the end of the film, an indication that the story isn't quite over in much the same way as Carrie's hand emerges from the grave. Again, as one may interpret both scenes as shock tactics for audience interest or to secure the potential (or entice one into thinking of the possibility) for some sort of sequel, I interpret these moments as indicative of re-emerging identity constitutions distinct from those of the mothers. Both mothers' tasks at this point are complete. What remains, therefore, is the open possibility for both Yuki and Carrie to define their own 'lives' within their own possibilities (and essentially beyond the parameters of the films).

IV. PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS

The comparative analysis above is meant to be exploratory in nature based on the discernment of structural parallels between the two films. It is not in any way intended to be normative with respect to suggesting anything morally prescriptive either about motherhood and its problematisation or the construction of personal identity itself, especially on screen.

Motherhood was certainly an issue that was thematised in women's cinema at this time, including in other films such as *Alien*, in which Ellen Ripley alludes to the fact that her daughter is left behind, compensating for this apparent abandonment in *Aliens* (Cameron, 1986) with the introduction of the surrogate Newt. Indeed, this sequel's attempts at redemption serve as a kind of indicator of how often mothers were thought to be blameworthy in films from this period. Nancy Friday's 1977 *My Mother/Myself* also emerged at this time; these attitudes toward motherhood, as problematic as they may be from today's point of view, effectively paved the way for critical evolutions in thought about intensive mothering, the problematisation of the blameworthy mother in film and other media and the complexity involved in transcending such delimiting pictures of mothers who could, in some senses, be *re-interpreted* as simply doing their best.¹¹

Mothers are clearly causing problems for their daughters in these films, and it may certainly be fair to ask if this is a subliminal (if not even overt) way of demonising the women (including the daughters) as a whole. However, the purpose of this paper is not to draw widespread theoretical conclusions or reclassify the boundaries of genre identification. Instead, the purpose is to identify new possibilities. Thus, the more modest claim that there is a problematisation of motherhood with respect to identity construction and narrative control in these films, films of very different genres and of contrasting foci of attention in the history of cinema studies, is the one advanced and defended in this paper. Historical contingencies, cultural variances and alternative normative constructions would all have to come into consideration to make any general theoretical conclusions, but such conclusions are beyond the scope of this work. Nevertheless, such issues may prove to be fruitful avenues of research through the exploration of other films in addition to those considered here.

There may also be certain theoretical implications drawn with respect to identity construction itself and, more specifically, issues regarding personal identity that are thematised within these films. Indeed, both Carrie and Yuki present themselves with a particular lack of social grace (more so on Carrie's part) but compensate for this with their violent powers to avenge personal injustice, powers brought on against the constraints of oppressive maternal pressures. But are there any strong metaphysical claims being made about the construction of personal identity in these films? And even if such claims could be extracted out of the narrative, is there anything of distinctive value

here? While I am inclined to say no on both fronts, if the answer were in the affirmative, issues regarding film's capacity to *do* philosophy would need to be brought into the fore.

Furthermore, as a result of the above analysis, one might be inclined to ruminate on the potential for normative accounts or understandings of identity construction insofar as a certain kind of oppression can cultivate specific kinds of character traits. Again, this stronger claim is not necessarily an extension or indicator of the value of the above argument. Instead, its mere possibility shows that there is even more value in comparing the narrative structure of these two films.

Finally, an objection could be raised in the sense that the connection that I have shown between these two films is (1) loose at best and (2) perhaps too disconnected from the socio-cultural context within and against which these films arose. In other words, to isolate the theory from the interpretation risks stripping away too much of interest in the films themselves. With respect to these concerns, I would respond as follows. First, regarding (2), my intentions are not to deprioritise the existing interpretive value of theoretical work on these films. Instead, I simply intend to provide some sort of alternative that allows for the mother-daughter construct to be emphasised rather than overshadowed by other concerns. Thus, I interpret this paper not as offering a competing approach to examining the philosophical significance of these films from a theoretical perspective but instead as, quite simply, another way in which to view these films, and an alternative means of connecting their narrative structure to other thematic and philosophical concerns regarding identity and familial relationships and their (problematic) representation on film. With respect to (1), I hope that I have shown that not only is there a distinctive mother-daughter construct existent within the films themselves, but that these films define their leading roles as an extension of a mother's own interests. Thus, this is not a weak connection, but instead one that could effectively delimit a new 'genre' subject to its own specific philosophical scrutiny.

CONCLUSION

Common search terms for these two films might elicit information about Tarantino's own 'favorite films' list.¹² The fact that both of these movies sit squarely on it may say something about his own cinephile status as well as his broader interest in both cultural variance and revenge cinema. That being said, we can also look at these films as belonging 'together' for other reasons which I hope to have shown to be valid in the preceding sections.

In thinking of the question of 'philosophy of film without theory', what I hope that I have advanced here is a successful attempt to refocus the lens on the structure of these films aside from intentionalist, psychoanalytic, cognitivist, or other perspectives regarding how film can be interpreted or even

valued from a philosophical point of view. Starting from the ground up by examining the empirical connections between films (e.g., similarities in narrative structure and character construction) can reveal alternative avenues of thought regarding film and its significance to our lives. Perhaps a new theoretical examination of such films and their potential for providing valuable philosophical insights (both with respect to advancing our understanding of the structure of film itself and in terms of how we identify ourselves in relation to others) can be initiated. This is not to say, however, that the sole value of such critical examination lies in its ability to feed theoretical constructs. While theoretical extrapolation might certainly be possible, sometimes such comparisons can also lead us into other conceptually tangled critical spaces, indeed the spaces of life itself, that theory cannot always explain away.

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NOTES

¹Choi and Frey 2014, 5. According to Choi and Frey, moral perceptionists ‘foreground sensorial, perceptual and perceptive engagement with a medium — rather than conscious, self-reflexive engagement — as the basis of morality’. I see my approach as consistent with moral perceptionism as defined here; that said, this does not imply that my approach to these films is theoretically laden. Rather, I use these films as a form of evidence to further advance other philosophical ideas.

²Matusa 1977; Mitchell 2013.

³Lindsey 1991.

⁴Carroll 1990, 172. Note that Carroll does not specifically mention Margaret’s embodiment of the monstrous and focuses more on the novel than the film in his characterisation of Carrie as a monster.

⁵Alexander 1979.

⁶Rife 2018 As Katie Rife points out, ‘One notable change on the Blu-ray is in the newly translated subtitles. Previous releases of the Lady Snowblood movies referred to Yuki as a “child of hell” or “demon”, but here the translation sticks with the more specific (and difficult to translate) Japanese term “asura.” In Buddhist lore, an asura is a wrathful demigod whose desires can never be slated; Yuki’s desire is for revenge, an endless cycle of violence

that can only end in her death. It’s a small but significant change, one that casts the character in a different, more tragic light.’

⁷Kozma 2012.

⁸Bolton 2017.

⁹Platz 2011.

¹⁰One might object here and say that Dōkai, the man who leads Yuki’s aggressive training program, is perhaps more responsible for her fate than Sayo herself. While Dōkai certainly conditions Yuki into a vengeful warrior, it was still Sayo who asked Otoro, one of her fellow prisoners, to ensure that Yuki was coached along this path (and Otoro herself appears to supervise and endorse the harsh training). Thus, it isn’t entirely clear that Sayo would in any way object to the treatment of Yuki; if anything, the movie supports the view that Otoro is simply carrying out Sayo’s final wishes. A further objection could be raised that Otoro may be more aggressive with Yuki than Sayo herself may have been. This may certainly be the case, but Sayo clearly demonstrated her own aggressively violent dispositions in carrying out her partially successful revenge plan before assigning Yuki with the task of finishing what she started. I thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing attention to this issue.

¹¹Creed 1993; Mulvey and Rogers 2015.

¹²Sherlock 2019.

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