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# Cannibalistic Imprisonment: Incorporating Hunger, Food, Identity, and Language in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, Mary Gordon's *Final Payments*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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**CANNIBALISTIC IMPRISONMENT: INCORPORATING HUNGER, FOOD,  
IDENTITY, AND LANGUAGE IN SAMUEL RICHARDSON'S *CLARISSA*, MARY  
GORDON'S *FINAL PAYMENTS*, AND TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED***

By

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A Thesis

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**MASTER OF ARTS**

1998

CANNIBALISTIC IMPRISONMENT: INCORPORATING HUNGER,  
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## Table of Contents

Introduction: Incorporating the Abject.....	1
Chapter 1: Devouring Language: A Study of <i>Clarissa</i> .....	21
Chapter 2: Devouring Flesh: An Analysis of <i>Final Payments</i> .....	43
Chapter 3: Devouring Love: An Investigation of <i>Beloved</i> .....	64
Conclusion: Finding Home.....	82

## Introduction: Incorporating the Subject

A discussion of the cultural relations between women, food, and the body in an eighteenth-century British, male-authored novel and two twentieth-century novels by American women, one African-American and one Euro-American, might, at first glance, seem improbable. An examination of the themes Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, Mary Gordon's *Final Payments*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* persistently raise illuminates a systematic and significant connection among these novels. In this thesis, I will use the works of contemporary feminist theorists and literary critics to read *Clarissa*, *Final Payments*, and *Beloved* as case studies of various ways in which cultural and material circumstances organize relationships among writing, women's bodies, food, and identity. In pursuing extended comparative readings of these three novels, I will show that physical instances and metaphors of imprisonment cause a breakdown of the heroines' language and identity, which, in turn, results in both literal and metaphorical cannibalism.

Maud Ellmann, Kim Chernin, Maggie Kilgour, Julia Kristeva, and Roberta Rubenstein provide the theoretical parameters for this thesis. Although Hélène Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine* could be the unifying thread linking these theorists to this project as a whole, Ellmann's work serves as a more efficient connector. In *The Hunger Artists*, Ellmann offers an extension of Cixous's ideas by viewing eating as the communicative opposite of speaking; therefore, eating is, by definition, not speaking. Women are often not seen or heard and are thus constituted as disempowered and somehow "lacking" within language. As Ellmann says, "Since language must compete

with food to gain the sole possession of the mouth, we must either speak and go hungry, or shut up and eat” (46). Eating, thus, can be viewed as both a refusal to play the game of phallogocentric language as well as a type of material protest against the ways that being obligated to speak represents a forced subjection of the self to that system of meaning. Words, according to Ellmann, “are locked in an eternal rivalry” where language emits from “the same orifice in which nutrition is imbibed” (46). The way out of this encompassing language, in which women, seeking to operate as autonomous subjects, find themselves perpetually reinscribed as objects, is to break the linguistic order of meaning. In this way, Ellmann explores anorexia and bulimia as resistant discourses. Compulsive eating and then purging or not eating at all is a type of madness—a repetitive, compulsive immersion within an altered state out of which communication is literally impossible. Compulsive eating and anorexia are like madness in that both compose a consummate physical, mental, and emotional immersion within a reality defined by the self, a reality in which others do not participate, thereby disregarding and refusing community<sup>1</sup> (Backus).

Kim Chernin in *The Hungry Self* investigates the way a troubled relationship to food is associated with the struggle for identity. What she discovers is that the problem with a female identity hides a profound struggle between the mother and daughter (xi). As a result, one must explore childhood to determine how communication about identity “takes place through food” (xi). We must explore this “to experience again how mother/daughter bonding is related to food, to examine hidden angers and needs and rages, and finally to understand the way food...both leads us back to early childhood experiences and at the same time keeps us from reliving them” (xi). Further, she discovers

in her own work that the onset of eating disorders for women often is accompanied by an underlying developmental crisis (23). Each female character of concern in this thesis experiences such a developmental crisis after which her relationship to food becomes problematic. In Richardson's text, Clarissa's crisis begins after her parents confine her and escalates once she is raped. In *Final Payments*, Isabel experiences a problematic relationship to food, which begins only after she is confronted with an extreme sense of guilt and she forces herself to live with Margaret. *Beloved*, one of Morrison's female characters, has always had a troubled relationship to food because she was killed while still an infant dependent on her mother for nourishment; in the same text, Denver and Sethe both are attempting to confront their own identity crises and, as a result, retreat to a family circle without food.

Chernin additionally seeks to answer the question about why a woman caught in a mother/daughter separation struggle as a part of an identity crisis expresses turmoil through food. What she postulates is that the relationship between food and mothers most obviously begins when the mother first nourishes the child in her womb and then gives it her milk (98). As a result, when a child becomes an adult, when we are "lonely and fearful because of our struggle to separate from the mother," it is natural to reach toward food for the "comfort and reassurance" we received from it in childhood (98). When an adult daughter moves on and leaves the mother behind, she grasps onto the object which is "symbolically equivalent to the mother" and has been always associated with her, that is, food (98). In our new hours of independence, if we are lonely for the mother, we can appease this loneliness the way she always did when she provided us with nourishment by



“sucking and sipping, soft foods and milk foods,” and if we are angry at her for this separation, we can express this rage toward food by “biting and gobbling and devouring and tearing” because food has always conjured up images of the mother (98).

Maggie Kilgour’s *From Communion to Cannibalism* combines language, the body, and incorporation<sup>2</sup> together in an arrangement that is both meaningful and useful (5-6). Kilgour sees a person’s need for food as the most basic of all needs and as a means of asserting and controlling individual and cultural identity (6). This need for food “exposes the vulnerability of individual identity, enacted at a wider social level in the need for exchanges, communion, and commerce with others, through which the individual is absorbed into a larger corporate body” (6). Eating can either alienate one from the community or can join one to it. For example, Clarissa asserts her identity by not eating and withdrawing from those around her. Isabel avoids Margaret by gorging herself in her room; and a feast in *Beloved*, begun as a simple celebration turned to excess, estranges Sethe’s family for years from her neighbors, with disastrous consequences. Kilgour looks at the ways images of eating become models for the interaction between texts and the individuals in them as well as the communities in which the characters live (6). Kilgour’s model is important because, in Richardson, Gordon, and Morrison’s texts, food or metaphors of food govern the possible interactions between these heroines and their outside communities, interactions which are important for the establishment of an identity beyond that of the pre-oedipal dyad.

Kristeva’s chief importance in this thesis is in her conceptualization of the abject, a process which begins at the moment of self-realization in the pre-oedipal dyad. Kristeva

argues that before our world has “acquired the coherence of objects for us” and before we form as speaking beings, there “exists an abject borderline state we inhabit” (Smith 149). Here, our “identity runs all over the place, and... whenever it meets with boundaries and barriers, we experience a traumatic sense of upheaval” (149). Therefore, this moment marks the beginning of the differentiation between self and other (149). Thus Kristeva writes, “...I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*... ‘I’ am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death” (*Powers* 3). It is at this moment that the *self* defines itself apart from the other and emerges as a distinct and separate being.

The pre-oedipal child is also pre-verbal and, therefore, has not yet entered the phallogocentric symbolic order of language; only upon entry into the symbolic order does sexual difference become relevant (Kristeva *Reader* 148). In the pre-oedipal dyad, which Kristeva terms a “maternal space,” a child is bound to the mother’s body but makes no distinction between mother and self, conceptualizing the breast not as *other*, but as an extension of *self*. When the child emerges from this maternal space only then does he or she develop a sense of *self* and *other* (148). This phase becomes important primarily in *Beloved* because the urge to recapture the primal unity with the mother runs counter to the symbolic other’s “requirement that the speaking subject separate from his or her objects...in order to make statements about them” (Wyatt *Reconstructing* 5). When this urge enters a text, Wyatt contends, “it disrupts the basis of linguistic structure, the singular position of speaking subject and the separate positions of his or her objects...” (5). When *Beloved* attempts to merge with *Sethe*, their language merges into one voice.

Kristeva's concept of the abject provides the rationale for the inclusion of these three texts in this thesis because each of these novels deals with the author's imaginary relationship to particularly compelling images of abjection (Backus). Richardson is concerned chiefly with the sexually violated, isolated bourgeois female and her abject Other, Sinclair. Gordon's middle-class daughter, a victim of emotional incest, lives through her own disempowerment within her relationship with her father principally by hyper-identifying with her abject Other, Margaret, the obese, commonplace woman who helped raise her. In *Beloved*, Morrison's focus is on the former slave and her daughter who invisibly and unspeakably inherit slavery's bloody legacy, imbibing it with her mother's milk; Beloved and Sethe are at once each others' and Denver's abject Other. What emerges as relevant in such a juxtaposition is society's notion of the person everyone fears to be--the abject Other. Such a reading illuminates characters who are not emanations of the author's identities or individual people but the collective consciousness of what society considers as "low" and what the people in a subculture or culture fear they may become.

Those who suffer from abjection, Kristeva believes, are either "estranged from language, or live a precarious existence on its margins" (Smith 149). While language is used against Clarissa by her family and Lovelace, both Gordon and Morrison's characters use language to incorporate their abjects instead of being consumed by them. Until each rewrites their estrangement from language, they cannot decisively distinguish themselves from their abject Others. The only way they are able to do so is through an "oral activity that is similar to eating but offers a less physical model for exchange," verbal

communication, which, as Kilgour explains, is “rooted in the body and yet detached from it” (8). Language must win the war over food to gain possession of the mouth: whereas Clarissa starves so her voice is heard in her will, Isabel skips lunch to join the community, calling her friends to pick her up from Margaret’s house. At 124 Bluestone Road, the relationship among its inhabitants and language and food is more complicated. Although they initially eat and speak in equal proportions, as the familial union becomes cannibalistic, they do not eat, but their sentences flow into each others’. When Denver leaves the house looking for food, she goes in search of it at Lady Jones’ house--the woman who taught her to read as a child--as her first step to rejoining the community.

In the exploration of the powerful emotional bonds connecting mothers and daughters in the oeuvre of Shirley Jackson, Roberta Rubenstein’s dichotomization of the opposing elements (also referred to, among other things, as theoretical dyads or simply dyads) of *inside/outside*, *mother/self*, *home/lost*, and *eat or be eaten* provides a framework of oppositions into which *Clarissa*, *Final Payments*, and *Beloved* can be placed in order to sort out and identify the relationships among women’s bodies, identity, food, and imprisonment. *Inside/outside*, the first of Rubenstein’s theoretical dyads, connotes the “fluid emotional boundaries that occur as an infant progressively distinguishes itself from his/her environment during the formation of an identity” (Rubenstein.309). Rubenstein delineates the role that food possesses as it is transformed from *outside* to *inside* the self by the mere act of consumption (309). It is this transformation by the consumption of food that permeates our texts. *Inside/outside* is bound up with *mother/self* as well as with the incorporation of food. The tension between

*inside/outside* incorporates more than the signification of the boundaries an infant encounters while establishing an identity. It is also the designation for the primary of all oppositions, which is, according to Freud, the basis on which all decisions are made once an infant has reached the primary oral phase (Kilgour 4). Kilgour quotes Freud at length:

“Expressed in the language of the oldest, that is, of the oral, instinctual impulses, the alternative runs thus: ‘I should like to eat that, or I should like to spit it out’; or, carried a stage further: ‘I should like to take this into me and keep that out of me.’ That is to say: it is to be either *inside* me or *outside* me.... The original pleasure-ego tries to introject into itself everything that is good and to reject everything that is bad. From its point of view what is bad, what is alien to the ego, and what is external are, to begin with, identical.” (qtd in Kilgour 4)

This designation implies that what is outside is bad and what is inside is good (4).

The established connection between eating and the mother/child dyad is similar to that of the relationship between the *mother/self* and the *home/lost* pairs. This mother/daughter relationship is the foundation on which all of Rubenstein’s theoretical categories are based. She explores the representations of the “primitive and powerful emotional bonds” which constitute the “ambivalent attachment” between mothers and their daughters (Rubenstein 309). The anxieties between *mother/self* as well as *home/lost* signify both a child’s passions and fears--the desires to remain as one with the mother, who is identified emotionally with *home*, and yet to be separate from her, with the possible danger of becoming *lost* (309). Rubenstein claims that a female’s food and body image

anxieties suggest that her body is or might have once been a locus of struggle for independence in the face of what she might experience as “her mother’s consuming criticism, possessiveness, or withholding of love” (309). Rubenstein’s *mother/self* dyad is the beginning of abjection because this is where a child conceptualizes the notion of other.

*Mother/self* and *home/lost*, identified together by Rubenstein, are connected in each text of focus here too. For example, Richardson’s Clarissa asserts her will only to be pushed away from home and separated from her mother. Mrs. Harlowe indulged Clarissa so much that Clarissa is quite dependent on and attached to her mother. She is continually more concerned with her mother’s opinion of her than others’ (Richardson 115), and, once she runs from Harlowe place, Clarissa yearns for her mother. Her mother’s absence becomes the “haunting presence” bearing directly on her struggle to achieve self-hood, as with the daughters Rubenstein identifies (Rubenstein 311). After she leaves Harlowe Place, Clarissa has to form her identification of *self* without the presence of her *mother* and at once is *lost*. In *Final Payments*, Isabel’s mother died when she was an infant, and Margaret was hired to keep the house. As a result, Isabel formulates her sense of self using the only (*m*)*other*<sup>3</sup> figure she has: “I invented myself in [Margaret’s] image, as her opposite” (Gordon 27). When her father dies, she leaves *home* in search of a new life, but with the absence of any familial figure, she is *lost*. In *Beloved*, slavery did not allow Sethe to experience bonding with her mother, who had to be pointed out to her by another slave, and when her mother was hanged, she was unable to look for the sign by which she would know her. This lack of bonding between Sethe and her own mother and,

subsequently, her difficulty in developing a sense of *self* in the absence of her mother cause Sethe to be *lost*. Because Sethe murdered her own infant daughter to avoid her daughter's capture into slavery, Sethe is unable to bond with her child as her own mother was unable to bond with her. When Sethe arrives in Cincinnati, she has her first feeling of *home* because she is with Baby Suggs, who acts as surrogate mother, and with her children. There, her role in the mother/child dyad shifts as she becomes the *mother* her children emotionally identify with *home*. When she kills Beloved and Howard and Buglar run off, Sethe becomes *lost* again until she resolves her feelings for Beloved and begins to find a sense of *self*.

What is important about the relationships between Rubenstein's pairs is the character's identity formation. In Freud's first stage of sexual development a child is unaware of anything outside of itself. The child is aware only of its mother's breast, which is neither seen as something outside of itself nor as a separate object, but as a part of itself (Kilgour 12). During the oral stage of development, which corresponds to Kristeva's preoedipal stage, a child discovers the difference between *self* and *mother*, between the breast of the *outside* and his or her *inside*, and comes to a realization of the concept of *self*. Significant about this sexual stage of development is that it is cannibalistic, in that the infant, discovering that the mother's breast is separate from self, *outside* not *inside*, then, "tries to recover and assimilate to itself what has suddenly taken on a threatening life of its own" (230). Of this Kilgour writes, "For Freud, therefore, cannibalism appears to be at the very basis of the concept of self and other, which occurs when the symbiotic relationships between mother and child of eater and eaten becomes divided" (12). This

division begins the breakdown of identity as the child struggles to understand the concept of self.

The last of Rubenstein's conflicting pairs, *eat or be eaten*, suggests both the literal and figurative matching between consuming and being incorporated (309). The *eat or be eaten* dichotomy results from the tensions created by the other dyads. Kristeva's conceptualization of identity formation is grounded in the pre-oedipal, maternal space where abjection begins and allows us to differentiate among all of the dyads. *Eat or be eaten* describes the relationship which results from the tensions caused by the Other where one must incorporate the abject or be consumed by it. Whereas Clarissa is ultimately consumed, Isabel, Sethe, and Denver use language to break from their abjects with the desire to eat without, in turn, being eaten and in order to find their true sense of *self*.

*Eat or be eaten* cannot be examined (new word), in these three texts without examining the relationships among the remaining theoretical dyads. When the murdered Beloved returns to her mother in the body of a woman approximately twenty years old, she is still pre-oedipal and, therefore, has no sense of self. When she appears, she drank "cup after cup of water" (Morrison *Beloved* 51). Once Sethe gets close enough to see Beloved's face, Sethe's "bladder filled to capacity," and "the water she voided was endless," (51) suggesting that Sethe was a mother drained by her child's greediness. Further, Sethe's voiding is associated with the one other time she had "an emergency that unmanageable" (51)--when the eight-year-old caring for her had pointed out her mother. Because of the stage of development Beloved had reached at the time of her death, when she returns, she remains the *eater* and her mother, the *eaten*. Sethe was still breast-



feeding Denver when she killed Beloved, so Denver literally drank her sister's blood along with her mother's milk, incorporating two of the fluids associated with motherhood into herself. Denver too had trouble with the concept of self but, despite this, was not overly dependent on her mother. She took in fluids from both her sister and mother as a child, and when Beloved returns, Denver clings to her. Denver at once would like to be the *eater* and the *eaten*. She clings to Beloved's words and thinks her sister came back only to be with her. Denver also becomes the *eater* as she plays the role of the mother when Morrison writes, "so intent was her nursing, she forgot to eat" (54). To Denver's dismay, however, Beloved is more concerned with Sethe than her younger sister. The cannibalism of this novel is not confined to motherly fluids but extends to Beloved's metaphorical feeding from Sethe, who wastes away as Beloved grows fat.

The relationships among Rubenstein's theoretical dyads function similarly in *Final Payments*. When Isabel decides to take care of Margaret, she becomes both the *eater* and the *eaten*. Margaret sucks up all her energy, her self-esteem, and her inheritance, which Isabel passively allows. Furthermore, Isabel begins to consume increasing portions of food, taking what was *outside* and incorporating it as a part of her *inside*, and obscuring her relationship to the world and herself by blurring her concept of *self* and *other*. As identified by Kilgour, eating is the most basic of all needs, and it is a means of controlling and asserting one's own identity (6). Therefore, by becoming a glutton, Isabel attempts to incorporate her own feelings of loss and shame. Because eating is the communicative opposite of verbal expression, it is fitting that Isabel eats and does not speak. What is traditionally thought of as a joyous time of family exchanges--communication around the

dinner table--becomes, for Isabel, a way to retreat from the community. Thus, the tension caused by the relationships among *mother/self*, *home/lost*, and *inside/outside* culminates in the *eat or be eaten* dyad.

Rubenstein's theoretical pairs also unify metaphors and instances of actual imprisonment in *Clarissa*, *Final Payments*, and *Beloved*. Clarissa, Isabel, Sethe, Denver, and *Beloved* all have experienced several forms of imprisonment. As a result, they experience a loss of self and a breakdown of language that results in a series of cannibalistic unions. Some form of confinement is the catalyst for this chain of events experienced by each heroine which results in instances of cannibalism. In *Clarissa* the confinement is literal as she is first imprisoned in her father's house, then at a brothel, and then in an actual prison, but also metaphorical as she comes to see her own body as a prison. Even Richardson's text itself is permeated by the very language of confinement. Clarissa says she is "entangled" (Richardson:84); she is "watched, banished, and confined" (149); and, when referring to Lovelace, repeatedly talks of the "snares" he has set for her. In Gordon's text, Isabel is emotionally imprisoned her entire life by her father and his suffocating Catholic beliefs. Once she is freed from her eleven year servitude by his death, she does not know how to cope with life, freedom, and her guilt and shame. Isabel inflicts her own confinement on herself by going to live with Margaret to absolve herself of what she thinks are sins of selfishness. There, her identity begins to fuse into Margaret's. Until Isabel regains language, she cannot break free from her past and look toward the discovery of herself in the future. Ellmann sees Isabel's recovery of metaphor as her key to breaking the spell of food and freeing her from its "suffocating literality" (51).

This progression from imprisonment through a breakdown of both language and identity resulting in cannibalism occurs in *Beloved*, too. The stories of Sethe, Beloved, and Denver are necessarily fraught with images of imprisonment. First, and most obviously, is the backdrop of slavery against which their stories are presented. Sethe is imprisoned by her own memories or, more importantly, by those she does not want to remember. Denver is afraid of her mother, the ghost, and her community; when she leaves the house, “she stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch” (Morrison *B* 243). She was so afraid as a child that she lived in her own kind of prison, one without communication, in which she neither spoke nor heard for nine years. Both Denver and Sethe regain the use of language and a tentative sense of self which allow them to break their union with Beloved.

The relationship women have to food is also a form of confinement, so, historically, representing women’s relationship to food is a problem. From the eighteenth-century on, the fictional dinner table is an important locus of interaction where characters communicate and plots are played out. Although heroines in Victorian literature figure prominently at teas, socials, and dinners, actual eating by the heroine is rarely mentioned (Michie 12). This being the case, Richardson’s lack of explicit details concerning Clarissa’s self-starvation seems understandable. Food has always functioned as the inscription of cultural forces on the body, and, because the body is determined by culture, what a starving or an obese body means to society depends on the culture. Necessarily, then, food is related to identity. Women were once encouraged to eat little so as to be lady-like and to maintain a slim waist in order to be considered handsome by male suitors,

and the importance placed on such physical attributes has not waned in recent years. This encouragement of women to eat little and have lady-like slim waists can be considered as a manifestation of society's demand that women conform to an established standard of femininity. Conforming to this accepted and expected role of what it means to be a woman and the dictates of her relationship to food represses a woman's identity along with her appetite. Therefore, the problematic relationship women have to food manifests itself in a troubled identity.

Chernin uses Erik Erickson's first stage of conflict resolution to illustrate the links between food and mothers to food and identity. She quotes Erickson at length:

"As the newborn infant is separated from his symbiosis with the mother's body, his inborn and more or less co-ordinated ability to take in by mouth meets the mother's more or less co-ordinated ability and intention to feed him and to welcome him. At this point, he lives through, and loves with, his mouth, and the mother lives through, and loves with, her breasts or whatever parts of her countenance and body convey eagerness to provide what he needs....To him the mouth is the focus of a general first approach to life." (qtd in Chernin 99)

This description is of the first basic stage of conflict resolution through which humans pass in the struggle for identity.

Chernin then continues, "The child who lives through and lives with the mouth is already constructing that hunger knot in which identity, the beginnings of the mother-separation struggle, love, rage, food, and the female body are entangled" (99). This

enigmatic relationship with food and identity begins before a child is cognizant of its situation and continues throughout the life of a child where “the struggle for autonomy is simultaneously taking place through behavior directed toward food and involving the mother as the primary giver of food” (101). She argues, as Erikson does not, that all of the issues of development a child passes through from infancy to adolescence are negotiated first through the relationship to food and feeding (101).

The heroines of the texts at hand have different relationships to food, and each necessarily relates to her identity and mother/daughter separation struggle. Clarissa’s rape at the hands of the libertine Lovelace ravishes her already diminished sense of self. Once she is raped, not only her body but her soul is violated; in order to free her soul from her defiled body, she must take control of it. The only recourse she has is to rid herself of her body by starving it. This is a step Mrs. Harlowe could never have taken, for it is obvious early on that Clarissa, although she loves her mother dearly, has little in common with her mother. While Mrs. Harlowe passively obeys her husband, Clarissa dares to disobey the family’s patriarch. Clarissa “cannot prostitute herself in the conventional marriage” as her mother has, and “she cannot enslave her will to others” (Doody 103). As Hilliard notes, when in London, Clarissa expresses her isolation from home in maternal terms, where she is “separat[ed] from the ‘indulgent bosom’ of ‘[her] dear mamma’” (1089). She further expresses her isolation in passages where she views this separation and her dying as painful “weaning-time.” (1089). Clarissa is still in the pre-oedipal stage where, as Hilliard explains, she is an adult fixated at the level of “‘raproachment,’ that juncture where the infant, oscillating between opposed desires for individuation and reabsorption

by the seemingly omnipotent mother, experiences separation anxiety" (1090). This anxiety heightens with the persecution of the terrorizing mother Sinclair and the "hovering presence" of Mrs. Howe (1090).

In contrast to Clarissa's self-starvation, Gordon's Isabel becomes a glutton. After a public scene with her lover's wife, Isabel is overcome with grief and guilt. Still thinking she caused her father's stroke by not only having sex with his protégée but also by failing to produce a child her father could claim was the result of a virgin birth, Isabel forces herself to complete a penance. For her, the extreme penance would be to love the unlovable, so she forces herself to live with her abject Other, Margaret. As Isabel eats, she begins to look more like the one person she defined herself in opposition to-- Margaret. Isabel's relationship to food is related to her mother/daughter separation because her mother was killed and Margaret often took charge of Isabel; when confronted with grief, Isabel moves in with Margaret and eats until she physically looks like Margaret. Until she can control her relationship to food and regain her lost access to language, Isabel cannot discover her identity.

Denver's original thirst was not for her mother's milk but for words. Her relationship to food is related to her mother/daughter separation struggle, for only in breaking the cannibalistic cycle of Sethe, Beloved, and herself can Denver re-enter society and find food. Beloved never had a chance to develop her identity and returns to the pre-oedipal mother/daughter fusion where she sees no distinction between herself and her mother while she feeds from her.

The relationship of language to food and, necessarily, the body in Richardson's

text is the inverse of that in Gordon's. Clarissa's family punitively identifies her exclusively with her body: in a letter to Anna, Arabella calls her "the unhappy body," reducing Clarissa to a nameless being and identifying her by the one thing she is trying to disassociate herself from (Richardson 1109). Thus, the only way Clarissa can recapture her identity is to detach herself from her physicality. This is where the relationship of body and language becomes important in her text. Ellmann sees self-inflicted hunger as a form of speech (3); Clarissa's voice is ignored by her family, but when she starves herself in protest, she is heard and realized by her family. Ellmann says "...the starving body is itself a text, the living dossier of its discontents..." (16-7). Clarissa's starvation becomes, then, her form of speech and her body the-text which we read. Clarissa is her body; the Harlowes, the Howes and Lovelace hold Clarissa as a model for the entire world to see. Ellmann's assertion that "...self-inflicted hunger is a struggle to release the body from all contexts, even from the context of embodiment itself" (14) identifies exactly what Richardson does with his text as well as what Clarissa does to her body and herself. Once she is raped, Clarissa's words and flesh consume each other in her long and complicated death; as she wastes away, Richardson's text becomes larger (27). Starving herself in an attempt to reconcile the violation of her body is the only way Clarissa can find her true identity. She is unable to be heard under normal circumstances, but her final assertion in her death allows her message to be heard. In this way, she uses her anorexia as a catharsis to affirm her identity.

On the surface, the relationships of food and language are less obvious and more complicated in *Beloved*. Actual language at 124 Bluestone Road reflects what happens in

the female family circle. Sentences flow into each other without punctuation as Beloved and Sethe consume each other. Morrison expertly links language, or lack thereof, with their hunger when she writes, “Denver, who thought she knew all about silence, was surprised to learn hunger could do that: quiet you down and wear you out” (B 239). Sethe wastes away while Beloved grows fat; the flesh between Sethe’s forefinger and thumb “was as thin as china silk,” and “Beloved held her head up with the palm of her hands...and whined for sweets although she was getting bigger, plumper by the day” (240). Just as Isabel breaks her vampiric relationship with Margaret by skipping lunch and making her “final payment,” Denver, too, breaks her cannibalistic union with Beloved and Sethe, but instead of refusing food, Denver goes in search of it. She joins the social order of language and finds food at the house of language--Lady Jones's house who, when Denver's original hunger was not for her mother's milk but for words, taught Denver to read. The relationship between words and food is then extended when Denver returns home with food from Lady Jones to see, a few days later, a plate of beans appear by the fence. Then, “...names appeared near or in gifts of food” from time to time to let Denver know where to return the plate (249).

These three texts, although positioned in different time periods and presenting very different female characters, persistently raise issues regarding the relationship between imprisonment and cannibalism. These texts embody a tenacity which forces us as readers to take note of these themes and examine their continued importance. When each character overcomes or succumbs to her varying situation of cannibalism, she has a new sense of self. In the sole male-authored text, *Clarissa*, the heroine is only able to gain a



sense of self by suicide; however, in both female-authored texts, the heroines not only do not have to die in order to achieve a sense of self but, instead, they flower.

Chapter 1: Devouring Language: A Study of *Clarissa*

Although Clarissa's rape at the hands of Lovelace is often considered to be the novel's climax; in fact, it is Clarissa's imprisonment at Harlowe Place, her punishment for being an undutiful daughter, which acts as the catalyst on which Richardson's entire novel hinges. This confinement sets the blueprint for the ensuing events in this text, including the contest over who is to consume Clarissa, a contest which she, of course, wins. It is Clarissa's language that forces her confinement early on in her text; her family misreads her and misinterprets her words, proclaiming her to be "most undutiful." She is accordingly stripped of her pen and paper and denied communication with her beloved mother.

Of great importance in Clarissa's life is her ability to communicate, and accordingly, her identity as a writer is established early in the text when she writes to her best friend, Anna Howe, and affirms that she "love[s] writing," and "those who do are fond, you know, of occasions to use the pen" (Richardson 47). Clarissa's language is different from that of her family members, which contributes to her estrangement from them<sup>4</sup>. In "The Family and 'Familiar' in *Clarissa*: Dictators and Scribes," Christopher Brooks describes a process at work in *Clarissa* termed "de-familialization" through which *Clarissa* is thrust into Lovelace's "unnatural family composed of parallels to the rigid nuclear family of the Harlowe estate" after her own family "disintegrates because of its unnatural avarice and perverted parental and sibling power" (440). Two groups emerge in this text: the writers, characterized as speakers of a "male language" and a non-literal

family of scribes who write and use “female language.” Members of this latter “(non)family,” also referred to as “peer-scribes” by Brooks, are expected to submit or be silent, so they turn to writing. The ones who speak masculine language “dictate” and “proclaim,” often in economic terms (440). Brooks never fully defines what the characteristics of these two groups are, but much is revealed by the communication of their members.

Through his proclamations, James Harlowe, who is primarily an oral communicator, begins the breakdown of the Harlowe family and emerges as the “dictator” of family business (440). He “dictates” how Clarissa should behave and then accuses her of receiving visits from Lovelace; “notwithstanding commands [she] received to the contrary” (Richardson 57, 59). His commands are important because Clarissa illustrates that her language is her honor when she makes a promise to Anna, “*upon [her] word, which is the same as upon [her] honour...*” (73). Because of language’s importance to Clarissa, James is referred to as “unbrotherly,” as Brooks argues, because “he lacks a true linguistic lineage to his virtuous sister” (443). The significance of language to James’s role in Clarissa’s downfall leads Anna later to refer to him as “insolent:” “presumptuous and insulting in manner or speech” (443).

Mr. Harlowe, listening quietly to James’s excoriation of Clarissa in which he “swore,” tells Clarissa, “with vehemence both of action and voice,” that after being met with “too much indulgence” he was now to be “obeyed” (Richardson 60). Richardson stresses twice the harsh verbal discourse of the Harlowe males: first in Clarissa’s reporting of the scene to Anna, in which Clarissa writes, “I was no sooner silent than my *brother*

swore, although in my papa's presence (swore, unchecked either by eye or by countenance)," and immediately following when Clarissa tells Anna that her father supported James's words "with both vehemence of action and voice (my father has, you know, a terrible voice, when he is angry!)" (60). Certain men in this novel, Brooks contends, "'dictate' in an unfamiliar way, while Clarissa is expected to use submissive language or be silent" (442).

Once Clarissa is stripped of all the conventions that made her a family member--she is no longer allowed to make tea, do her chores, or eat with the family (443)--she refuses to submit to her father's wishes. She protests after her servant Hannah is dismissed and her keys are taken, but her father looks at her "sternly" and orders "in a strong voice," "Clarissa Harlowe...know that I will be obeyed" (Richardson 64). He then "interrupts" her with, "No protestations, girl!--No words--I will not be prated to!--I will be obeyed--I have no child--I will have no child but an obedient one" (64). Clarissa attempts fruitlessly to blame her siblings for the situation with Lovelace, but her father orders, "Your brother and sister shall not be spoken against, girl!" (64). Here, she is silenced for not using the "submissive" language expected of women by the dictators. Although the dictators can silence Clarissa's oral communication, her written communication cannot be silenced. Writing has a subversive power--people can read it or not--but they cannot shut it up. It is through this subversive power that Clarissa is vindicated.

Richardson presents two kinds of male language--one is the language commanding control and demanding compliance while the other is the language of lies and persecution.

Lovelace, too, is a dictator, and his is the language of false promises. His fundamental broken promise is to honor Clarissa. Lovelace promises with "...God [as] my witness, or may he forever blast me!...to be a father, uncle, brother, and as I humbly hoped, in your own good time, a *husband* to you, all in one" (377). However, contrary to the protection of person and sexuality expected by a father, Lovelace rapes Clarissa. Similarly, uncles often provided economic stability and security to their nieces, but Lovelace confined her and withheld money, causing Clarissa to be sent to a debtor's prison. Finally, a brother should speak on behalf of his sister in proposing a good match, but Lovelace manipulates Clarissa. Lovelace thus systematically breaks each of his promises in a series of violations paralleling Clarissa's defamilialization at the hands of the male Harlowes. Lovelace is able to do so only because of the breaches of faith made by Clarissa's own family.

Furthermore, the vehicle by which Lovelace severs Clarissa's familial ties and through which he frightens and tricks her into running off with him is the spoken words of his servant, Joseph Lehman. Clarissa only hears a commotion and the words: "*Are you there?--Come up at this moment!--Here they are-- Here they are both together!--Your pistol at this moment!--Your gun*" amidst "*violent pushes*" against the door "*as if to break it open*" (379-80). She is sufficiently frightened to run off with Lovelace. What she could not know is that Lehman was convinced by Lovelace that "if she wavers, a little innocent contrivance will be necessary" (383). Although Lovelace uses language, like the other dictators, to bring harm to Clarissa, she also recognizes him as a fellow lover of words, and this may account for the minuscule amount of misplaced trust in him that constitutes her only part in the horrors that Lovelace inflicts on her. He begins his

seduction of her through letters and continues to trick her using language. However, in a letter to Anna, Clarissa recognizes that her language is superior to Lovelace's when she observes that his "faulty morals" can only be reflected in a fallen language to which she must "descend" in order to complain of his actions (242).

Clarissa's language--both written and oral--is not one her (non)family recognizes (Brooks 443). This language is understood only by her spiritual family of peer-scribes namely Anna and Belford. Even Mrs. Harlowe, Clarissa's beloved mother, belongs to Clarissa's dictatorial (non)family, as does Arabella. Mrs. Harlowe finds fault with Clarissa's language and thinks her words are empty. "If words were duty, Clarissa Harlowe would be the dutifullest child breathing," she proclaims (Richardson 103). Mrs. Harlowe believes that Clarissa's words lack exactly what they contain, truth and conviction, but Mrs. Harlowe is unable to recognize this when, in fact, Richardson's novel turns on the idea that Clarissa is a model for truth and conviction. Further, Brooks notes that Mrs. Harlowe employs "male language" as she refers to her daughter in terms of estate, shilling, and honor, thereby treating her as an "object of exchange." This communication, he explains, represents Mrs. Harlowe's initial process of de-familialization of her daughter (444).

Arabella's de-familialization is second only to that of James and begins as early as Clarissa's first letter to Anna. Arabella voices her "contempt" of Lovelace, and, in an abrupt departure from her previous positive compliments and comments, "declared that were there not another man in England she would not have him" (Richardson 45). Arabella is jealous not only of the way she was used by Lovelace to get to Clarissa but

also because of the estate left to Clarissa, the younger of the two, by their grandfather. Corresponding to the references of James as “unbrotherly,” Arabella, too, is called “unsisterly” by Clarissa for her treatment of her younger sister. Arabella mocks Clarissa, tries to silence her, and then teases her (Richardson 204). What is significant about Arabella’s de-familialization is that she straddles the line between the dictators, who primarily speak and use females to commit their language to written form, and the scribes, who primarily write. Brooks suggests it may be “an accident of gender” that allows Arabella to write but what she writes is in keeping with her designation as “unsisterly” (450) because she is not a full scribe but the scribe the dictators use to fight back. In London only for a short time, Clarissa receives a letter from her sister that begins, “sister that was,” (Richardson 509) signifying the completion of the defamilialization of Clarissa and Arabella. It is fitting that Arabella reports the curse Mr. Harlowe uttered<sup>6</sup> and appropriates all the family for herself, effectively erasing Clarissa’s relationship to the family when she says:

My Uncle Harlowe renounces you for ever.  
 So does my Uncle Antony.  
 So does my Aunt Hervey.  
 So do *I*, base unworthy creature! (509-10).

Arabella is a mirror to Clarissa. While Arabella, although female, is a servant to the males, taking their words and putting them into written form, thereby extending the words’ ability to harm Clarissa, Clarissa takes spoken words and puts them into a visible form-- into a story that can be told upon her death which vindicates her life. As a female member of the dictator oral (non)family, Arabella ventures into the realm of written words,

capturing the will of their father in language. James and Mr. Harlowe never enter the realm of the written word, which provides them with a plausible deniability. They cannot be held accountable for what they say--their words remain invisible. Clarissa's writings, however, hold them accountable, in language, for what they have done to her.

While Arabella and, to a lesser extent, Mrs. Harlowe, are females among the male orators, Belford represents a male presence within Anna and Clarissa's peer-scribe-family (Brooks 454). Clarissa finds a friend in Belford, a friend, who Brooks explains, is converted to "becom[ing] Clarissa's scribal link with the world and the eventual 'literal' executor of her will" (451). It is significant that Belford is converted through writing, through Lovelace's written account of his persecutions of Clarissa--the only "verifying" male account we have that these things happened. Lovelace upholds the code of the rake, which is to write with complete honesty to other men but not to women. As Clarissa's cousin Morden observes, "But, 'tis, really, a strange liberty gentlemen of free principles take; who at the same time that they would resent unto death the imputation of being capable of telling an untruth to a man, will not scruple to break through the most solemn oaths and promises to a woman" (Richardson 1283). It is through these words--lies to women recounted truthfully by men--that Belford is converted. Brooks explains that although male, Belford is able to "reach Clarissa's mind because his mind is open to feminine discourse" (453). Belford serves Clarissa much as Arabella serves James and Mr. Harlowe. When Clarissa can no longer write, Belford becomes her scribe to ensure her words remain as a physical testament to her barbarous treatment. Belford speaks with "truth and honor" and, unlike Lovelace, is able to write the truth freely to both men and



women (453).

As I've indicated previously, the orators speak with authority expecting complete compliance and are unable to write the literal truth to all whereas the scribes write as a refusal to submit. They are able to write honestly, placing great value on their words as representations of their honor. The most visible example of this difference occurs in Richardson's text after the rape. Both Clarissa and Lovelace's immediate reactions as well as their later ones are in keeping with the dictator/scribe dichotomy. Immediately after the rape, Lovelace writes only fourteen words: "And now, Belford, I can go no farther. The affair is over. Clarissa lives" (Richardson 883). His pen is then impotent (Brooks 445) because he has nothing more to write about. His machinations provided him with material for letters to his fellow rakes. Now that he has raped Clarissa, Lovelace has nothing else to write. Clarissa, too, is unable to write at first. Lovelace's one-line note to Belford after the rape is dated June 13<sup>th</sup>. On June 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, he writes two letters to Belford while Clarissa makes several attempts to write but shreds them all, sending only one short note to Lovelace. In the fifteen days following June 15<sup>th</sup>, Lovelace writes a total of thirty-two letters before Clarissa writes even one. In these letters, Lovelace extends the rape in the language of lies, secrets, and celebration, thus taking her self-value. Brooks contends that this letter, which is a chaotic and rambling account fully explaining the violation to Anna, "transform[s]" the pain into a "creative act" (445). Lovelace and Clarissa's immediate reactions after the rape with regards to their writing parallel the dictator/scribe dichotomy because Lovelace physically can barely write after the rape. Clarissa's violation was so severe that she is unable to write until she can be honest and

truthful. The scribal feminine language requires one to write with freedom and honesty to all, but the code of the rakes requires truthfulness only to men. Prior to the rape, Lovelace can provide his friends with all of the details leading up to the rape, but once it is over, he is unable to uphold the code and be completely frank. As a result, his writings become more fabulous and wild, recounting horrific dreams, which become more extravagant and further from the truth. When Clarissa successfully escapes, Lovelace entreats Belford to find her as “a subject worthy of my pen,” or he will write no more (Richardson 1026). The rape, above all, is the point of linguistic rupture between Clarissa and Lovelace: Once she looked at Lovelace as someone with whom she could share language, but now she realizes their uses of language are completely opposed. Although she believed her own language was on a higher plane than Lovelace’s, she was intrigued by his love of words. Once he violates her, she loses respect for him as a man of words and as a man of his word. At this point, there is no turning back--things between Clarissa and Lovelace can never be made right.

As we have seen, Clarissa’s family’s condemnation of her oral language and her position as the sole scribe in a family of dictators violates her very self: It is language and the tricks used by Lovelace in and with language that lead Clarissa to the situation which results in her rape. The rape is not only the cause of linguistic rupture between Clarissa and Lovelace but it also violates her relationship to language at a much deeper level--as an internal indication of her honor and self-worth. In addition to oral communication, other types of discourse are also used against Clarissa which further her violation and her defamilialization from her family.

In addition to condemning her oral language, those around Clarissa continually find ways to denounce her writing. Her Uncle Antony condescendingly belittles her eloquent letter writing as a “knack,” (154) and her family calls it, as we have seen, “impertinent scribble” (1378). Arabella even goes so far as to accuse Clarissa of “bewitching” their grandfather with her “silver tongue” (194). Continually, Clarissa is either interrupted as she tries to speak, or physically stopped from speaking, as when her mother covers Clarissa’s mouth with her hand (95), and when she is listened to, she is misread, not heard.

When Clarissa *is* allowed to speak, however, her family misinterprets what she says. Because the body and mind are so closely related for Clarissa, when she speaks, she does so from the heart. Thus, when her family distorts her words, they, in fact, distort her *self*: “Oh, that they did but know my heart!--It shall sooner burst, than voluntarily, uncompelled, undriven, dictate a measure that shall cast a slur either upon Them, or upon my Sex” (209). Further, she recognizes that her family, “make[s] a handle of my words against me...” (175). Clarissa witnesses what to her are clear statements being transformed into meanings that she never intended; in this way, her simple refusal of Mr. Solmes’s proposal comes to mean more than a rejection. “It becomes at once the sign of her general ‘disobedience’ to the parental will, her ‘pervicacity,’ her ‘pride,’ and most damningly and illogically, her ‘prepossession’ for Lovelace,” Terry Castle states in *Clarissa’s Ciphers* (68). Clarissa has already told her family that a rejection of Solmes does not imply an acceptance of Lovelace, but they misread and (mis)interpret her words so that they hear only what they want to hear.

After her refusal of Solmes, her family describes her as a “scribbler” (Richardson 257). In combining what she does with how they identify her, her family takes over the power of naming. They combine her sense of self with her mode of expression but, in doing so, they further demean her writing by terming it “scribbling”—to the Harlowes women scribble while men write. More importantly, they take over the power of naming, a power characters in literature often need in order to establish a sense of self. Until Alice Walker’s Celie in *The Color Purple* can call Mr. \_\_\_ Albert she has no sense of self. Once she takes that power of naming, she can come to gain the knowledge and understanding to access her inner being. Conversely, Clarissa’s family appropriates her power of naming. Mrs. Harlowe tells her to consider becoming Mrs. Solmes, her father will not speak to her until she changes her name to his liking, and even Lovelace says Clarissa’s name sticks in his throat. The Harlowes even, at one point, identify her as her body as they call her the “unhappy body,” identifying her as the only thing she is trying to free herself from (1109). Following the rape, Clarissa writes, “My name *was* Clarissa Harlowe—but it is now *Wretchedness!*” (1052).

Her gestures are often oppositely interpreted, so she perpetually struggles to have her family read her words and her body as she intends. When Clarissa curtsies with “reverence,” her mother charges her with a mocking “outward gesture of respect,” telling her she only wants her heart (103). She misinterprets Clarissa’s intentions and fails to recognize that the one thing she asks for is what she has always had. She accuses Clarissa of being sullen when she is silent out of respect and continues her reproach to which Clarissa is “absolutely speechless” (108). She has become a rhetorical text to her family.

They invest her body with symbols, all of which she cannot read or change. Castle notes, “Yet the significance the Harlowes claim to find *in* their daughter, what they read in her, is always a reflection only of their own desires and fears” (71). Clarissa recognizes the disparity between her intention and their perception when she says, “If I meant to show my duty and my obedience, I must show it in *their* way” (Richardson 95). Clarissa is unable to break this cycle of misreading even when she is away from Harlowè Place. Because her family believes that her running off with Lovelace was plotted and constructed by their “artful” daughter, they are unable to see past their own conception of her situation. Only in her tragic death are they able to read her accurately, and, then, only with the help of her will.

Because so much of Clarissa’s sense of self is related to her writing, her confinement and separation from her family impacts her communication. Even Clarissa’s imprisonment and continual scrutiny at the hands of her watchers cannot prevent her correspondence because she *is* her writing. Her writing is her mode of expression, her outlet, her means of self. Everything in her life affects how and what she writes. In a letter to Anna Clarissa writes, “...my sentences drag; my style creeps; my imagination is sunk” (187) illustrating that when she is upset with the treatment she has received from her family, the results are visible in her writing. In trying times, all she can do is write, which becomes her only “amusement and pleasure” (371). But when her mind cannot prevent Lovelace’s encroachment upon her body, Clarissa’s writing stops; she does not write immediately after the rape. However, it has the opposite effect on Lovelace. He cannot stop: “I *must* write on. Nothing else can divert me,” he writes to Belford (904).

As a man, Lovelace necessarily has access to language. Clarissa's one haven, her one outlet for understanding and processing her precarious situation, is her letters to Anna. Once her body fails her and she is raped, she is unable to write. She is powerless to "write her body" as Cixous entreats of women (1233) because, in a sense, it has failed her by its inability to prevent the rape. Following the rape, Lovelace doesn't mourn losing her heart or company, but "the only subject worth writing upon," (Richardson 1023) revealing that his passion is not love, but writing (Ellmann 79). Ellmann explains, "[that] Lovelace's assault upon Clarissa's virtue serves mainly as a pretext for the onanistic pleasures of his 'pen,'" so when he rapes her "out of spite rather than lust" he "finds himself frustrated and bewildered, because he has betrayed the logic of his own libido, which is to substitute the letter for the flesh" (79).

Necessarily related to Clarissa's communication is her relationship to food. As Kilgour notes, verbal communication is "rooted in the body and yet detached from it" (8). In this way, reading becomes eating, an act of consumption (9). This is partially due to its membership in a tradition which sees knowledge as food which feeds our egos (9). When we speak of devouring books and swallowing food for thought, we eat knowledge, as illustrated when Francis Bacon writes, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested..." (50). Additionally, we often talk about texts in physical terms--the meat of the text is called the body on which we read the plot, just as we read people's actions on their own bodies. Kilgour observes that we, as humans, use senses to make contact with the world outside our bodies; the most basic and bodily way to do so is with taste. But, more importantly, taste is the most "intimate and

intense way [of making contact with the world outside the body] resulting in a strict identity between the eater and eaten” (9). Ellmann’s observations of Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* offers an extension of this idea. She notes that in Woolf’s text, “speech is a form of fasting, and writing represents an even fiercer abstinence than speech...” (47). Expressions such as devouring *books*, not speech, reading, rather than *hearing* “voraciously” hint that “the written word can actually take the place of food, whereas the spoken word is too ethereal for nourishment” (47). Once she is raped, Clarissa must turn flesh back into words and does so by starving herself. For Clarissa, her writing does represent an abstinence fiercer than speech. As she starves herself, she writes more voraciously than before. The less she eats, the more she writes, the fatter the text itself becomes.

Rubenstein’s *eat or be eaten* is related to and inseparable from Clarissa’s body because self-starvation is a form of speech and the body the text on which it is read; Clarissa’s struggle to free herself from her spoiled body manifests itself in her refusal to eat. However, hers is not the typical portrait of one suffering from anorexia nervosa. Currently, anorexia nervosa is named any of various terms like *disease, illness, disorder, or phenomenon*. In *From Fasting Saints to Anorexic Girls*, Walter Vandereycken and Ron van Deth explore the contemporary view of anorexia. Literally, the term, *anorexia nervosa*, denotes a lack or absence of appetite of nervous origin, but anorexics do not suffer from the lack of an appetite; they either desire a suppression of their appetite or they develop a disturbed eating behavior rooted in the pursuit of thinness (1). Vandereycken and Deth argue, then, that *self-starvation* would be a better term for the

condition: The criteria usually considered essential to the diagnosis are:

- (a) an intense fear of becoming fat, even though underweight;
- (b) disturbance in the way in which one's body weight, size, or shape is experienced, e.g. the person claims to "feel fat" even when emaciated;
- (c) refusal to maintain body weight over a normal minimum weight for age and weight, e.g. weight loss leading to a body weight of fifteen per cent below that expected. (1-2)

Clarissa's self-starvation is not explicitly discussed but is nonetheless evident. She does not have a fear of becoming fat or experience her body weight in a disturbed manner, but we know she does not eat; she becomes "vapourish," and dies. Her body is bound to her identity, as is her writing; when she is raped she loses her sense of self. The only way she can regain it is to rid herself of her body and ascend to the next life. Subsequently, her body becomes the text upon which we can read her self-starvation and, according to Raymond F. Hilliard, her self-cannibalism.

In "*Clarissa* and Ritual Cannibalism," Hilliard identifies an important feature of Richardson's text, namely that its delineation of Clarissa's sufferings and death are an instance of ritual cannibalism (1083). In early eighteenth-century accounts, West African society is often linked with cannibalism and human sacrifice, and, in such cases, cannibalism is the result of sacrifice (1084). For this reason, Hilliard believes the sacrifice of Clarissa causes her self-cannibalism. Hilliard is fairly certain that Richardson would have been familiar with the accounts of such "savage acts" and "that their lurid language and imagery strongly color his depiction of Clarissa as a scapegoat or victim, persecuted



by her family as well as by Robert Lovelace” (1084). Richardson presents his portrait of ritual cannibalism through oral metaphors. For example, Clarissa’s siblings, James and Arabella, jealous of her inheritance from their grandfather, propose a match between the lovely Clarissa and the odious Solmes. James writes a letter entreating Clarissa to see Solmes in which he says, “Name your day and hour. Mr. Solmes will neither eat you, nor drink you” (Richardson 267). What follows in the text are references to teeth, mouths, and flesh. In this way, Richardson uses the language of consumption to set the stage for Clarissa’s sacrifice. Further, Lovelace is referred to as “a woman eater” (720), and, metaphorically, this is exactly what he is. He sees his rape of Clarissa as a “sacrifice;” through this sacrifice, he becomes a cannibal.

Hilliard claims that, in her death, Clarissa executes her family’s ends by starving herself; she carries through the ritual cannibalism her persecutors inaugurate (1092). By becoming autophageous<sup>7</sup>, Clarissa achieves their ends as her “bones cleave to [her] skin (Richardson 1221), and “weakness...shortness of breath... and the fervour of her devotions...[tear] her tender frame in pieces” (1308). Foreshadowing Clarissa’s reduction to “skin and bones” to be “swallowed up by the grave,” Dorcas exclaims that she “would have eat [her] own flesh” (919) rather than aid in Clarissa’s sufferings.

Clarissa’s struggle with her body as well as with food begins as soon as she is imprisoned by her family at Harlowe Place. When she is unable to control her surroundings or to process her predicament, her body shuts down. Once she is raped, her sexual abstinence turns to self-starvation; as Ellmann observes, “Her anorexia replaces her virginity, in the sense that her mouth rejects what her vagina proved unable to withstand.

She starves in order to refuse all the traffic with a world that threatens to invade her every orifice” (81). In the debtor’s prison, her fast is rebuked by Sally with taunts of Clarissa’s own piety. Sally says, “Your religion, I think, should teach you that starving yourself is self-murder” (Richardson 1054). This is the only time in the text that Clarissa’s actual action is spelled out. It is alluded to in other instances, however, particularly when she tells Anna how sick she is and writes, “Yet how this *body* clings! How it encumbers!” (1265). Further adding to her family’s designation of her identity as the “unhappy body,” (1109) she calls it her “vile body” (1338) and refers to her “*rags of mortality*,” (1341) illustrating her willingness and desire to die.

Images of eating continue and intensify as Clarissa leaves her father’s house. As a prisoner at Sinclair’s brothel, Clarissa refuses to see Lovelace for one week, so she orders some bread and water to be sent up. Her purpose is three fold: by refusing to dine, she is refusing to see Lovelace; she is a prisoner, and fittingly requests prison food; and by setting herself up to be left alone, she may have a chance to escape. After the rape, she sees no reason to eat, so she openly refuses food: “for what purpose should I eat? For what end should I wish to live?--I tell thee Dorcas, I will neither eat nor drink. I cannot be worse than I am “ (895). Clarissa can envision nothing worse than her present-condition, so she ceases to care about nourishment. While at the Smith’s she says, “...let coffee, or tea, or chocolate; or what you will, be got: and put down a chicken to my account every day, if you can please, and eat it yourselves. I will taste it, if I can” (1058). Clarissa knows she is expected to eat but entertains only the possibility of her being able to taste food.

John Allen Stevensen identifies Clarissa's motivation for ridding herself of her body and aptly helps weave all the threads of our themes together. He writes, "There is another, related reason that Clarissa rejects her body and departs this world, and that is her discovery that her body is an unreliable text, incapable of expressing the self she wishes to make legible. Lovelace wants to read her body, she wants it to speak reliably who she is..." (41). Time and again Clarissa's body has failed her. Her gestures were first misread by her family, and, more importantly, they made her vulnerable to Lovelace's assault. Because her body and words have failed her, she cannot comprehend any other possible choice for herself, so she refuses to eat and defeats her persecutors by taking their place as *eater*. Because her body and her oral communication were not read properly as a text in life, she chooses to rid herself of her body and leave behind another type of body instead--one of words that her family will be unable to misread.

Despite her confinement at Harlowe place and her brief stay at a debtor's prison, the most important instance of imprisonment in *Clarissa* is her confinement in a brothel. The *mother* of the bordello, Sinclair, acts as the *eater*. She is gynophageous,<sup>8</sup> she feeds off the degradation of other women's bodies--namely the bodies of the whores who live with her. Further when Clarissa finally succeeds in escaping, Sinclair invokes a cannibalistic metaphor in which she again is the *eater*: "foaming at the mouth" she commands, "...make up a roaring fire--the cleaver bring me this instant--I'll cut her into quarters with my own hands; and carbonade and broil the traitress...and eat the first slice of the toad myself, without salt or pepper" (Richardson 968).

This is significant on more than one level. First, Sinclair's brothel can be

considered a maternal space. In Female Gothic narratives, houses and mansions always function figuratively as such (Rubenstein 320). Sinclair is the mother for all of Lovelace's "whore minions" and figuratively of Clarissa. If Sinclair is the mother, the tension between the *mother/self* dichotomy is apparent. Clarissa's identity could not be more opposite from this mother's concept of self; in fact, Sinclair becomes not a mother figure for Clarissa but her abject Other, her object of revulsion. Sinclair is a "nightmarish version of Mrs. Harlowe, the original non-mothering mother," and "the relation between 'Mother' Sinclair and 'daughter' Clarissa is one founded not in 'tenderness'...but in brutality" (Castle 98). Sinclair functions as Clarissa's abject because her house acts as a grotesque parallel to what Clarissa experienced at Harlowe place. Here, Clarissa is imprisoned, in another gothic structure. Clarissa's biological mother, Mrs. Harlowe, was a part of the scheme to imprison Clarissa at her uncle's moated castle until she would consent to become Mrs. Solmes; in the same way, Sinclair was a player in Clarissa's confinement, in the attempted rape, and, finally, in the rape itself. It is even Sinclair's "'milk' that turns out to be bad, the opposite of nourishment," the "loathsome 'London milk'" with which Clarissa is drugged prior to the violation of her body (98-9). Further, Clarissa's stay at the brothel exemplifies the *home/lost* theoretical dyad. Kept from her mother, who signifies *home*, Clarissa is *lost* in a different kind of home--one in which she is treated poorly, imprisoned, kept against her will, and, ultimately, violated--a place where Sinclair acts as the mother.

Clarissa is so disconnected from her own mother by a literal distance as well as by her banishment from the family that she finds herself in a relationship with a surrogate,

Sinclair. Rubenstein's discussion of the lack of connection between mother and daughters in Jackson's fiction are applicable to Clarissa's situation. Rubenstein explains that Jackson's solution to the "problem of personal integration within the social realm illuminates the predatory element [Jackson] identifies within family relationships" (314). This "predatory element" is exemplified by Rubenstein's own *eat or be eaten* dyad as well as by the double bind Kristeva urges women not to accept (Moi 139). Rubenstein states, "In Jackson's final novels, not only sacrifice but incorporation and consumption become both literal and figurative as the expression of connection--or more accurately, disconnection-- between mothers and daughters" (314). Clarissa is *lost* in a brothel with her abject Other acting as her mother; the only way she can thwart the attempts to be consumed and incorporated by Sinclair and her family is in her final self-devouring act.

A further characteristic of the Female Gothic novel is also applicable to *Clarissa*. In Female Gothic novels, "an imprisoning structure' within which the protagonist, 'typically a young woman whose mother has died, is compelled to seek out the center of a mystery, while vague and usually sexual threats to her person from some powerful male figure hover on the periphery of her consciousness'" (qtd. in Rubenstein 312). Sinclair's bordello is just one of the "imprisoning structures" Clarissa is confined in. Her mother has not died literally, but she is dead to Clarissa. The only mystery she seeks out is a solution to her own position, which she finds in death. Additionally, her threats from Lovelace become actual not vague, but her original threats from Sinclair are such. Sinclair becomes a male figure hovering on the periphery of Clarissa's consciousness. She usurps the father role as she masquerades as a man, "and her bawdy-house of women travesties the

Harlowe's house of men" (Ellmann 80). Like Mr. Harlowe, Sinclair feeds off women's bodies, and Castle notes that her sex itself is "disturbingly ambiguous: she has 'a *masculine air*, and is a '*little forbidding at first*'" (99). Belford describes Sinclair's dying body as being "increased" in flesh with a "huge quaggy carcase...fat ears and brawny neck...broad chin...wide mouth" (Richardson 1388). She is literally devoured by her own fat (Ellmann 81). While Clarissa starves herself to rid herself of her physicality, Sinclair is eaten and drowns in her own.

Fittingly for one who has starved herself, thereby completing the ritual cannibalism her family has commenced, Clarissa leaves behind only two tangible, solid things--her coffin and the will she writes while leaning on it. Belford can relate to Morden her last words and her actions, but her "house" is the one solid item she left behind. On the lid of the coffin is, "a crowned serpent, with its tail in its mouth, forming a ring, the emblem of eternity, and in the circle made by it" is Clarissa's name and date of birth (Richardson 1320). Kilgour's observations of this general figure apply to Clarissa herself. She writes, "...the serpent with its tail in its mouth forms a perfectly narcissistic self-circumscribing, if also self-consuming, system that surpasses the relation of the mother and child by its complete identification of eater and eaten" (192). Clarissa's tale begins with her confinement in her father's house. There, by refusing to eat she can also refuse to *be* eaten, to "sacrifice her body to her family's greed" (Ellmann 80). The only way out of her situation is to free her soul from her deflowered body by finishing the cannibalism her family began and consuming herself. As we have seen, her self-cannibalism allows Clarissa to turn flesh back into words, thus returning us to the language that first devoured

Clarissa, a language which she ultimately uses to devour herself; as she writes, she wastes away. Clarissa's end provides proof of Ellmann's assertion that "...language and the body are locked in a struggle of attrition, in which the word is ultimately bound to triumph while the flesh is doomed to be undone" (27). Because one can only eat or speak, Clarissa writes and goes hungry. Her language, once the cause of her imprisonment, and, therefore, her cannibalism by others becomes her soul's escape from her confining body. Clarissa has indeed "written her body" in a discourse that resists and refuses familial community and allows her to transcend the boundaries of the physical world to ascend to the spiritual.

## Chapter 2: Devouring Flesh: An Analysis of *Final Payments*

Although Isabel Moore, like Clarissa, struggles with both her relationship to food and with her abject Other, both of which pertain to a breakdown of verbal communication, the establishment of an identity, and the isolation from the community, her conflict is the opposite of Clarissa's. In a response to her forced imprisonment, Clarissa starves herself to conclude the ritual cannibalism commenced by the Harlowes and Lovelace. Oppositely, Isabel is at once released from one imprisoning structure only to inflict another upon herself, where she confines herself and drowns in the flesh of her cannibalistic union with Margaret. Her imprisonment first at her father's house and later at Margaret's is the impetus which begins her descent into gluttony and cannibalism.

Isabel has no real memory of her mother, so while her *mother/self* identification was formulated in response to Margaret; her father's existence, to which she claims to attach "less than a murderous importance," is nonetheless vital to her concept of self (Gordon 2). Her life was completely intertwined with her father's so much so that his life gave "shape and purpose" to her own (16). Unable to cry at his funeral, she realizes, "I would have to invent an existence for myself" (3). When her father's body is lowered into the ground, Isabel is surprised that she continued to breathe. She says, "I had borne the impress of his body all my life...I felt light, as if from the removal of a burden" (7). She had always dreamt that once he died she "...would simply take up [her] life," (35) but she recognizes it is not that simple. Because his life was so enmeshed with her own, now that he is not with her, Isabel feels a distance from herself, "...a distinct sense of how easily the



business of the world could be carried on without [her]" (90). She feels lost and unsure of her place in the world. She had been her father's daughter and his nursemaid for so much of her life, that, without him, she did not know who she was or how to go on living.

As a child, Isabel's only mother figure was Margaret, to whom she owed the "certainty of [her] childhood" (26). She recalls, "Margaret's unattractiveness and stupidity made the shape of my life possible....I invented myself in her image, as her opposite" (27-8). At this point in her life, Isabel desired to have her father all to herself and to be rid of Margaret's presence. Because Margaret functioned in a way Isabel despised, she was able to construct herself, her identity, by opposition. Isabel says, "Her reading the *Sacred Heart Messenger* allowed me to read Mary McCarthy; her damp, immigrant pieties opened the way for what I believed was the ironic, elegant austerity of my adolescent prayer life. Her dull-witted absorption in my father granted me the range and timbre of my devotion" (27). Even though Isabel abhorred everything about Margaret--the "tropical discharge" she imagined her clothes giving off, her flat feet, her onion-like bunions, her attempts at furtiveness, and her clumsy endeavors to turn Mr. Moore against Isabel--without Margaret's presence, Isabel would have had to "invent [herself] entirely. An exhausting process with the charm, perhaps of originality, but with very little prospect of real quality" (27).

Because Isabel hated everything about Margaret, it was easy for Isabel to invent her own identity. She was young and certain of few things in her life. Isabel knew that the intensity of Margaret's hatred for her made her ill, and she was confident that "Margaret would not marry [her] father" (26). Because of Margaret's mother-like

position relative to Isabel, her identity formulation had to come from Margaret. As a child, Isabel could have identified with Margaret which, as Kristeva contends, would ensure her exclusion from patriarchal society, or she could repress Margaret and identify with her father which would raise herself to Mr. Moore's symbolic heights (Moi "Chinese" 139). Isabel chooses the latter, to create herself in contrast to Margaret, thereby forcing Margaret's inception as her abject Other, her "'object' of revulsion" (Moi "Freud" 238). She represses Margaret so that, as Moi explains, "The abject...represents the first effort of the future subject to separate itself from the pre-Oedipal mother" (238). In order for Isabel to reject Margaret, she must create herself as Margaret's opposite, regarding Margaret as her abject. After her father's death, Isabel says to Eleanor, "'I have a great fear of turning into her'" (Gordon 59). It is as if she has hated Margaret for so long and identified herself as not-Margaret for so much of her life that once the center of her own life, her father, dies, she worries that her identity will crumble too.

Self-identification plagues Isabel even after she had Margaret dismissed. When she was nineteen and had a boyfriend, she was proud that, for once, she was not, "the daughter of my father but someone's girlfriend" (19). Isabel cannot conceptualize an identity beyond those with whom she has had relationships. She moves from not being Margaret to being her father's daughter to David's girlfriend. She has never allowed herself to be Isabel Moore. She must understand this in order to confront her past and come to a sense of self.

Isabel's struggle with identity stems from the household in which she was raised. She recalls at her father's funeral that "our house had always been full of priests" (1). Her

father was hyper-Catholic: Isabel says, "For my father, the refusal of anyone in the twentieth century to become part of the Catholic Church was not pitiable; it was malicious and willful. Culpable ignorance, he called it" (2). He went so far as to never leave his neighborhood because then he would be too far away from the presence of his Church. He was a powerful man in the church and at the adjoining school where he taught medieval literature. He was even seen by the priests and his fellow teachers as defining the role of the Church in the modern world. John Neary in "Mary Gordon's *Final Payments: the Romance of the One True Language*," says of Mr. Moore, "...he has reigned over Isabel with the power of an autocratic medieval pope...expecting her complete submission, body and soul, to his needs and dogmas" (100). The only time Isabel was free from the burden of his reign and from her role as caretaker was the one hour allotted weekly to attend Sunday mass. Her father was unaware that Isabel had stopped going to church long ago and instead took long silent walks on Sunday mornings. The one time that she was free from her father she was still expected to be within his power at church.

This pervasive nature of religion is another type of imprisonment. Religion permeated even the way Isabel lived her daily life. Captivated by the appeal of a "pure shelter," Isabel says, "As the daughter of my father I lived always in sanctuary" (Gordon 238). She remembers, as a child, reading about the Middle Ages and being fascinated "by the idea that there was one automatic safe place, the simple inhabitation of which guaranteed safety..." (238). In viewing her life, she says, "I had won myself a place there as the daughter of my father. I had won sanctuary by giving up my portion...I had bought sanctuary by giving up youth and freedom, sex and life" (238-9). Isabel may have felt the

need for this pure shelter because of the absence of her mother. In such a place she was ensured safety, safety from Margaret, safety from everyone but those she loved: her father, Father Mulcahy, Eleanor, and Liz. There she would be free of Margaret but able to exist as the daughter of her father; she would be isolated but safe within the bosom, not of her mother or of Margaret, but of her loved ones. Because of her fierce love for her father, she voluntarily bought and won this sanctuary, a distinct confinement with sacrifice.

It is this sanctuary, an automatic safe place, that Isabel attempts to recreate at Margaret's house. The price for both sanctuaries is her life. Although Isabel thinks she is safe both with her father and, later, with Margaret, she is not so much safe as isolated. This is what she desires, though. Instead of Liz and Eleanor being a part of her circle of safety, Isabel now seeks refuge from them. She says, "I knew that it was Margaret I must go to; only there would I be safe from Hugh, from Liz and Eleanor and their talk about 'life'" (249). She thinks they do not understand her life, and, as a result, they caused her to misunderstand it. She says, "It was not possible for me to be like other people; I was not like other people. I was not satisfied with what they called 'life'" (249). She thinks in devoting herself to Margaret in this "pure act" that she can find her guaranteed safe place. In these self-imposed instances of confinement, her attempts, both to gain understanding and certainty of her life and identity and to complete a penance, actually manifest themselves on her body.

In this way, Gordon's text allows a privileged reading of Isabel's body. Alma Bennett in *Mary Gordon* recognizes that the bodies of Gordon's characters "...become a

privileged form of speech” (36). We are able to read on the body the effects of Isabel’s identity crisis by analyzing the four “shifting body foci<sup>10</sup>” employed by Gordon, which Bennett identifies as: Joseph Moore’s body and Isabel’s neglect of her body; Isabel’s body rediscovered and reaffirmed; Margaret’s body and Isabel’s extreme neglect of her own body; and Isabel’s body reclaimed (36).

The first of Bennett’s focus-shifts explores the degeneration of Mr. Moore’s body after a series of strokes as well as Isabel’s lack of attention to her own body. Mr. Moore could no longer walk or talk, his body was complete with bedsores, he choked on his own phlegm, and “the smell of sickness and medication...hung in the air like smoke in a barroom” (Gordon 39). As Isabel sees her all-powerful father’s body deteriorate, she allows her own body to suffer as if to enact a further penance. Because she feels responsible for his first stroke, Isabel devotes herself to him two-fold: first as his caregiver and further as his fellow sufferer and martyr. Isabel believed she and her father “were connected by the flesh,” (5) so it is logical that she should minister to the decay of his flesh. She does so both by caring for him but also by ignoring her own body as she watches his body deteriorate. Her father was “breeding a Mary” and, accordingly, Isabel suffers with him (28). She had never even thought of buying the lipsticks, eye shadows, and mascara she now saw advertised in her newly-purchased copy of *Vogue*, and she was accustomed to wearing clothes only for “decency and warmth” during a time when women wore clothes as adornment (48). Confronted with pictures of young, shapely models who seemed “foreign” and wore clothes Isabel doubted were even worn on ordinary streets, she wondered if she had left her body for too long (49). Because Isabel had neglected her

body while in her confinement with her father, she is now afraid she will never regain access to it.

When released from her role as care giver, Isabel rediscovers her body and begins to pay more attention to it. First she buys new clothes. She abandons her heavy underpants in favor of a pair of new dark green nylon bikini underpants “the effect [of which] was immediate and delicious” (51). She tries on a new blouse and slacks which “were light and roomy” with an “unexpected” feel on her legs (51). She experiments with makeup and plans to lose a bit of weight because, “If I’m going out in the great world, I can’t knock it over if I’m a big tub of lard,” as she explains to Father Mulcahy (62). For the first time in eleven years, Isabel has thought about herself, about her body. Her new look is at once reaffirmed: first as a man nods and smiles at her giving Isabel a reason to smile and blush (59) and later when John Ryan held her hand. “It was the first time in years that a man under sixty had deliberately touched me,” she mused (88). Even though she disliked her friend Liz’s husband, she did not withdraw her hand as she “felt the air grow bright with sexual charge” (88). It is this growing awareness of and interest in sex that leads to a significant event in her pursuit of self-identification.

One of the defining moments in Isabel’s search for self is a confrontation with her lover’s wife. This encounter provides the impetus for the third of Bennett’s body foci and can be better understood by utilizing Rubenstein’s dichotomies. Mrs. Slade grabs Isabel’s wrists, accuses her of being selfish for entering a relationship with a married man, and calls her a “filthy pervert” (241). Accusingly she says: ““you couldn't wait for your father to die so you could get a man between your legs. There's something very wrong with you.

There's something disgusting and unhealthy. People like you aren't fit for normal life'" (241). Isabel scrutinizes her life and her uncertainty to see what she has become, and, through this confrontation, believes she has learned the truth of her life. "I had murdered my father, and she had exposed me....I had wanted him to die" (241). Isabel realizes that through all those years of devotion, all those years that she catered to her father's every need, she had secretly wanted him to die so she could live her own life. It took her lover's wife's accusations to plunge Isabel into her subconscious where those feelings had been buried behind a wall of selfishness. Isabel finally understands her own feelings. She associates sexual pleasure with extravagant selfishness. In this way, she feels responsible for her father's first stroke and, therefore, his death. He caught her having sex with his protégé, and when this failed to produce a child Mr. Moore could claim as the result of rape or a virgin birth, Isabel believes he was disappointed that there was no clear punishment for her act. "So he had to invent one: the stoppage of his brain, the failure of his own body as a result of the pleasure of mine," she says (20-1). Because she believed sex was a selfish act, she was punished by losing her father. In the same way, she views her sexual relationship with Hugh as a further sin of selfishness for which she must atone. She says, "I drew my soft flesh in, inside my skeleton, so it would not be accessible to him" (243). Because sex is a sin of the flesh and of selfishness, she accordingly physically closed her body off from Hugh. She says, "My sex was infecting; my sex was a disease. But now I could make up for it. All that sorrow has come about because I had been selfish, because I had wanted too much" (265).

Finally, a painful realization hit Isabel. "My father was dead. I knew what this

meant now. I was entirely unsafe, entirely alone," she thinks (241). Until that moment Isabel had never mourned her father. She had never purged herself of guilt and grief; he was still a part of her flesh and soul. She had been unable to accept that he was actually dead. It is at this moment, with this understanding, that Isabel's whole life changed.

Rubenstein's *home/lost* dichotomy proves useful in understanding Isabel's ephphany. The mother, as Rubenstein explains, becomes identified with *home*, and when the daughter separates from her, she encounters the related danger of being *lost* (309). For Isabel this occurs immediately after the death of her father. She feels *lost*, which causes her to think, at his funeral, "It was the end of my life as well" (Gordon 3). She realizes that her father's house is no longer his without him in it, so she sells it quickly in order to facilitate the invention of her new existence. Her new apartment is not the *home* she seeks, and Margaret's house is equally lacking.

Isabel felt that Mrs. Slade had given her back her life. She had said, "you want to be a good person. I know you are a good person at heart" (241). Isabel thinks, "Yes, I had been a good person. No one had been able to question it when I was the daughter of my father. It was my great treasure, my visible goodness" (242). She realizes that she was about to give up this "treasure" by having a relationship with a married man. This selfishness, first at wanting her father to die then at desiring someone else's husband, revolted her. Isabel felt like she has been given her life back. She muses, "I had let go my treasure, and I must go down to redeem it. I would go down as far as I had to go to have them say again, 'You are a good person.' Priests in rooms, and my father, and strangers" (242). She knew she had to "dive down lower still" to regain her life, but she didn't know



how to do it.

Bennett's third body focus begins with this chastisement of Isabel by Mrs. Slade but is enacted at Margaret's house. Isabel's reaction to both the confrontation and the resulting realization is to rush into giving up her own life for Margaret in what she thinks is a supreme act of penance and charity--to love the unlovable. Instead, she actually imprisons herself again, metaphorically and physically. There, Isabel has a gynophageous relationship with Margaret, the onset of which signifies the beginning of Bennett's third foci. When Isabel arrives, we see the hateful Margaret and are reminded of Isabel's early description of her: "You can imagine how unbearable the brown patches on her skin...were to a child....I wondered how she managed to keep the house so tidy and yet look so inevitably germ ridden herself....The sound of her slopping around the house in her slippers is the sound of my nightmares" (27). It is in the presence of the odious Margaret that Isabel surrenders herself completely, ignoring her own feelings and, instead, indulging in food.

In the presence of her abject, Isabel's identity crisis culminates and manifests itself in her relationship to food. Chernin's book discusses the experiences of several women, all of whom experience a problem with self concept which then exposes itself through a troubled relationship to food. She discusses a woman who had no "bona fide self." One characteristic of this lack is a feeling of emptiness. A woman in her late twenties said, "There is no 'I'...There's just an immense hole at the center. An emptiness. A terror. Not all the food in the world could fill it" (qtd. in Chernin 20). Isabel's own situation is parallel when she thinks, "I was falling through a hole in my own body. I am completely

alone” (Gordon 258). Isabel is struggling with her concept of identity and trying to “invent” herself, but all she feels is emptiness. Her lack of sureness, her lack of a “bona fide self” creates the void through which she envisions herself falling.

Isabel’s response to this feeling is to become a glutton. Chernin says of women who eat compulsively that they “have made their bodies the recipient of feelings they cannot bear to hold in consciousness” (136). This is exactly what Isabel does; she cannot process and understand the persistent emptiness in her new life. After taking a job interviewing those who provide home care for the aged, she realizes “the immensity of human suffering” (Gordon 170). She can neither understand suffering in the religious world of her father nor turn from it and rest “with the adequacy of the secular world alone” (Seabury 41). She attempts to end this conflict by living with Margaret, “to enter decisively into the plight of suffering humanity, to take up the baggage of her religious inheritance” (41). In doing so, she views her actions as a penance for her selfishness, “as atonement for the lack of love” she encountered in the homes she visited and as well as in her relationship with Margaret (41). She ends up hating Margaret as much as she had before and cannot understand what she is doing. As a result, she makes her body the recipient of all she cannot bear.

Chernin continues, “their rage is expressed through their mouths, their need for love and solace is experienced as a longing for food, their guilt comes to them as a feeling of fatness, their shame is transmuted into a sense of dislike for their bodies” (136). It is at this point in *Final Payments* that *self/mother* converges with both *inside/outside* and *eat or be eaten* in the depiction of Bennett’s third focus-shift—Margaret’s body and Isabel’s

extreme lack of attention to her own body. While Isabel gains weight, she becomes preoccupied with what is happening to her body, her physicality; as she watches food transfer from *outside* to *inside* when she thinks, "Everyday, I could see my eyes get smaller, my face become more taken up with face, with flesh. The food I ate turned into flesh, and that is what I would think about, too, as I lay in my bed..." (Gordon 278). Isabel refuses to contact her friends and lover, thereby supplanting communication with food. Whereas for Clarissa words took the place of food as she starved herself, for Isabel, food takes the place of words.

Catholics believe in transubstantiation; that is, when receiving communion a Catholic does not merely eat bread and drink wine but actually partakes in the body and blood of Christ's body. This is what Isabel sees happening to her own body in this focus-shift. As Kilgour explains, in communion it is difficult to say who is eating whom. She writes, "It is a ritual to restore primary unity, in which man and God are returned to an original identity..." (15). She delineates the slippage in the use of the word *host* in this sacrament. She says:

Both God and man play "host," a metaphor that itself has a variety of meanings which permit both identification and differentiation. Man is a host in that he literally takes God, in some form of the Host, into himself. But the Host is the kind of food that converts the feeder into himself.... The act is one of reciprocal incorporation, as both are identified by the single word and substance, the Host, so that the absolute boundary between inside and outside, eater and eaten, itself appears to disappear. (15)

This dissolution of boundary between *inside/outside* and *eater/eaten* mirrors at once Isabel's fascination of watching her food turn into flesh but also her gynophageous relationship with Margaret, a relationship which cannot be separated from food in this novel.

When Isabel first begins her eating binges, she takes the leftovers to bed with her and eats them all with a spoon. After Liz cooks for her, Isabel takes "...the whole dish to bed...and [eats] it (beef stew, macaroni and cheese) with a teaspoon" (Gordon 247). "But Liz needn't have bothered; I would have been just as happy with yogurt or cookies," Isabel says (247). She recognizes that she is eating more food than usual but muses, "I no longer cared about the flesh on the back of my legs, about my waist and how to trim it. My body had caused me nothing but trouble: wanting David Lowe, wanting John Ryan, wanting Hugh" (247). She sees these events as a "long trail of grief beginning with [her] father's illness and stretching to Hugh's wife pointing her finger an inch away from [Isabel's] face" (247-8). She responds by taking refuge in food. She indulges alone, carrying crackers under her robe and eating them with the shade down.

Isabel's response is not uncommon among women. Chernin's quotation in reference to the woman looking for her "bona fide self" sheds light on the significance of Isabel's actions. The woman said, "'There's just an immense hole at the center....Not all the food in the world could fill it. But, I try'" (qtd in Chernin 20). Isabel, too, tries. She stuffs herself to fill the emptiness she experiences. Chernin continues, "...when an eating disorder develops at what might otherwise be a turning point in a woman's life, this marshaling of resources for growth is not taking place. Instead of freedom and liberation

we find obsession, and in it the underlying quest for identity and development is drowned” (22). Isabel should be experiencing such a turning point. She should be reinventing herself in a new life, independent of her father, but she is still *lost*. She cannot find a place where she is happy, where she fits until she deals with her guilt. In her obsession with food, her attempts to find herself are thwarted.

Ellmann sees Isabel's indulgence in food in this focus-shift as "...a kind of eating strike, [she] stuff[s] herself with all the food she can devour although she is incapable of either hunger or satiety" (49). In psychoanalytic terms, this cannibalistic regression drives her back into the "oceanic" world of early infancy, in which there is no boundary between the baby and the breast, between eater and the edible" (49). The *eater/eaten* dyad collapses so that there is no distinction between who is doing the eating and who is being eaten. For Isabel this lack of a boundary manifests itself in her continual *self/(m)other* identity crisis. Isabel tries unsuccessfully to fill the void with food. Isabel's search for self can neither be found in food nor in the obliteration of her body. She is drowning in her life and is not sure how to save herself. Although she is not hungry or ever satisfied, she devours endless amounts of food trying to find certainty in her life. Ellmann sees Isabel's gluttony as an attempt to incorporate "several incompatible desires: one, to incorporate her father in order to deny his loss; another, to devour Margaret in order to identify with her but also to destroy her" (50). This cannibalism is similar to that in *Clarissa*. By starving herself, Clarissa identifies with her patriarchal aggressors and her mother. Hilliard says, "...she is, as sacrificer and sacrificed, consumer and consumed, killing both herself and the resented mother" (1093). In contrast, Isabel attempts to consume her father to

save him and Margaret to kill her. Because Margaret is her abject, she must break from her. William N. Gray says, “Underlying Kristeva’s theological point is a psychoanalytical one: to acquire a subject position in language, in the symbolic order, requires a breaking loose from, a rejection of, the abject, ultimately the mother. The fault which is necessarily and ultimately blessed is matricide; for matricide is the condition of the possibility of subjectivity and speech” (885). In order to differentiate between *self* and *other*, Isabel must reject Margaret. To acquire a subject position in language, she must identify herself apart from and in opposition to Margaret. This is what she has always done, but when she moves in with her, the *self/other* distinction blurs.

The third of Bennett’s foci--Margaret’s body and Isabel’s neglect of her own body-- culminates in this *eat or be eaten* cannibalistic union. Isabel did whatever Margaret wanted her to do without question. Her gluttony resulted in weight gain, which even Margaret notices when she says, ““And you are growing...horizontally”” (Gordon 279). From the weight gain to her new “bubble” haircut, identical to that of Margaret, Isabel begins to look just like her abject. In fact, Ellmann notes, “The more Isobel [sic] eats, the more she looks like Margaret; she seems to take her over, like a body snatcher” (50). Isabel departs from viewing Margaret as a rival for her father’s love and attention and from identifying herself in opposition to Margaret and, instead, she almost becomes Margaret. Her new look makes her a “bloated parody” of her abject (Gilead 224). In order to regain certainty in her life, Isabel feels the need to take care of her abject in a pure act of penance for her pleasure.

As Ellmann suggests, language must compete with food for the sole possession of

the mouth, so one must choose to either eat or speak (46). In choosing to eat and not to speak, Isabel loses the only way she has to gain certainty through language. Until she makes the reverse choice to speak and not to eat, Isabel will not gain the certainty that she seeks. Neary capitalizes on this concept when he says, "Isabel's 'charitable' flight to Margaret is not a return to past certainty at all; it is a lapse into a despairing state in which all words and things -- whether certain or hypothetical -- have been dissolved. It no longer makes any difference to Isabel what she says, what she does, what she looks like (105). Isabel absolutely must regain self-expression in order to make amends with her past and hope for a future. In order to do so, she must not eat but speak. Isabel could recognize that the food she eats transforms into flesh even if religion did not pervade her life, but, because it does so, this communion metaphor becomes itself a metaphor for Rubenstein's dyad, *eat or be eaten*. As Isabel attempts to "save" Margaret, she drowns in not only her own flesh but in Margaret's as well.

Isabel forfeits herself, her bodliness, and her flesh to regain the language she has lost, which is related both to her father and to religion. Language has an amazing power of signification, as illustrated best by the Latin words during the Catholic mass, "'Hoc est enim corpus meum' [which] transforms the substance (the essential thingness of bread and wine) into the substance of the body and blood of Christ" (Neary 102). This power of language to signify is what Isabel's father and the Church of her childhood represented to her. Liz even realized Mr. Moore's power. "He signified all over the place," she said as Isabel doubts her father's and her own existence. It is only in losing and then regaining language that Isabel can begin to cope with her loss and her life. In trying to regain words

with meaning, words have ceased to mean anything at all to Isabel.

After moving in with Margaret, Isabel's only contact with someone other than Margaret is the few hours she spent with Father Mulcahy. When Isabel returns from walking him to the car, Margaret questions what she could have been doing "out there all that time" (Gordon 297). Isabel retorts, "What do you think I was doing? What can I possibly have been doing?" (297). Margaret's reply is "He's capable of anything when he's had too much to drink" (297). Isabel finally snaps and all she has not said comes tumbling out. Pushing Margaret's dishes to the floor, she shouts: "You are a wicked, wicked woman" (298). Margaret whines she is a poor woman to which Isabel roars, "The poor you have always with you," recalling a bit of her forgotten Catholic education (298). She draws strength from the heretofore mystifying passage from the Bible (which I quote in length because of its importance in entirety):

It is one of the marvels of a Catholic education that the impulse of a few words can bring whole narratives to light with an immediacy, and a clarity that are utterly absorbing. "The poor you have always with you." I knew where Christ had said that: at the house of Martha and Mary. Mary had opened a jar of ointment over Christ's feet. Spikenard, I remembered. And she wiped his feet with her hair. Judas had rebuked her; he had said that the ointment ought to be sold for the poor. But, St. John had noted, Judas had said that only because he kept the purse and was a thief. And Christ had said to Judas, Mary at his feet, her hair spread out around him, "The poor you have always with you: but me you have not always." (298)



Until Isabel recollects the passage in Margaret's kitchen, she never comprehended its meaning. What she understands now "was that the pleasures of that hair, that ointment, must be taken. Because the accidents of death would deprive us soon enough; we must not deprive ourselves, our loved ones, of the luxury of our extravagant affections. We must try not to second-guess death by refusing to love the ones we loved in favor of the anonymous poor" (298). She realizes she had been a thief. She says, "Like Judas, I had wanted to hide gold, to count it in the dead of night, to parlay it into some safe and murderous investment. It was Margaret's poverty I wanted to steal, the safety of her inability to inspire love. So that never again would I be found weeping, like Mary, at the tombstone at the break of dawn" (299). -

Isabel gave up all she loved so she would never lose it. Unable to cope with her father's death, she isolated herself from those she loved to save herself the pain of losing them. "Why had I done it?" Isabel questions herself. "For safety, certainty, for the priests, for the faceless priests who blessed my father's coffin, who had sat at my table, who had never remembered my name," Isabel answers (299). Further understanding her feelings, she continues, "For them I would give up all I had most savored, those I had most treasured: Hugh and Liz and Eleanor, even Father Mulcahy, so that those faceless priests could say, when they thought of me, 'she is a saint'" (299). Isabel realizes she cannot create a safe place, a sanctuary, with someone like Margaret whom she can never love. She cannot evade her freedom and herself by hiding from life with Margaret (Payant 138). Isabel gains the strength she recognizes that she needs in order to leave Margaret by attending Good Friday mass.

At mass, she accepts that death is a part of life, and she acknowledges she is not guilty of killing her father when she thinks, "We were here to acknowledge the presence of death among us" (Gordon 302). She realizes that her father was dead and, "[she] had loved him but [her] love had not been able to help him" (302). It hadn't made him immune to death. She realizes, "my father had died, but I had not killed him, as I had not been able to save him" (302). On the way home from church she understands, "It was life, and the body, which had been given to me for my pleasure" (303-4). When Isabel recognizes loving and pleasure are not sins and that she had not been responsible for her father's death, she has gained the strength necessary to break from Margaret.

On the way home from mass, she calls Eleanor and Liz to pick her up. She says, "Can you come up here now...I'm afraid to wait. I'm afraid if I don't go now I'll die here" (304). Now that she has purged herself of her grief and feelings of selfishness, she can understand and use language again. Her first act is to skip lunch--solidifying her entrance into Bennett's fourth focus-shifts--Isabel's body reclaimed. Isabel writes Margaret a check for \$20,000--all the money she had left in the world after which she feels "weightless" (306). Isabel does so because she realizes, "...I could give up my money; I did not have to give up my life" (305). Margaret cannot touch Isabel now-- she "was as safe as if [she] were invisible" (306).

Neary believes that Isabel "tries to regain her solid religious past, in which language transparently mediated divine reality, but the faith she finally achieves is founded on a new use of language -- not fiercely literal but metaphorical, imaginative, lightly comic" (95). This new language allows her to express herself and make the decision to

leave Margaret. Isabel "gains a real--though tentative and uncertain--religious and human faith" (99). This sense of uncertainty is seen when she "...felt the delicious shakings of an invalid, in the first stages of his cure" (Gordon 306). She realizes that it is not food or Margaret that can save her but herself and her language. She knew what she had done to her body was not final when she states, "the body changed, went on changing, and could be changed....I would lose weight" (301).

When Liz and Eleanor arrive to take Isabel away from Margaret, Liz says, "'Who did your hair? Annette Funicello?'" (307). The three laugh. "It was a miracle to me, the solidity of that joke. Even the cutting edge of it was a miracle. And our laughter was solid," Isabel thinks (307). This is the only time Liz and Eleanor get along--for the sake of their mutual friend. Now that language has helped Isabel dismantle herself from the *eat or be eaten* cannibalistic union with Margaret, her friends' laughter together with her own, allows Isabel to reclaim her body and her life, signifying her passage into Bennett's final focus: Isabel's body reclaimed. "But it was life I wanted," Isabel thinks (305). The novel is concluded with Isabel's statement: "There was a great deal I wanted to say" (307). Excluding food, Isabel has regained language, and all she has not said is ready to be expressed.

Only after attempting to do a penance for the betrayal of her father can Isabel accept life replete with its risks. She understands: "If I called Eleanor, if I wrote to Hugh, if I sang at the piano with Father Mulcahy, I was susceptible to all that loss. It came to me that life was monstrous: what you loved you were always in danger of losing. The greatest love meant only, finally, the greatest danger. That was life; life was monstrous"

(304). For Isabel accepting a life with love knowing of its attendant risks was monstrous but worth it. Morrison's Sethe, however, has trouble opening herself up to love--she does not allow herself to recognize her own inherent goodness. For her, the struggle isn't so much choosing life with an understanding that loss occurs as it is realizing that, although final payments can be made in some small way to those from our past, the strength to continue and to love must come from within.

Chapter 3: Devouring Love: Investigating *Beloved*

“124 was spiteful. Full of baby’s venom” (Morrison *B* 3). So begins the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction winner, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. A hauntingly magical text which moves forward and glides back between history and memory is much more than a look at the atrocities of slavery and its effects on those sold, bought, freed, and escaped. It is a tale consumed by abandonment, confinement, devouring love, and the search for a lost self which can only be found through the help of the community in which the characters live. As with the previous two texts, Rubenstein’s dyads and Kristeva’s conceptualization of the abject illuminate the competing and consuming elements of this text. Only by confronting their abject can Sethe and Denver free themselves and subsequently rejoin the community to establish a sense of self.

The *mother/self* distinction is more complicated in *Beloved* than in *Final Payments* and *Clarissa* partially because in *Beloved* there are three characters of focus but also because the relationship between *mother* and *self* is at its core more intricate in *Beloved* than in either Richardson’s or Gordon’s texts. Sethe knows very little about her own mother. Whereas most children formulate their identities based on their mothers as they come to understand they are separate from her, Sethe’s was a forced separation. While she was still nursing her child, Sethe’s mother “went back in [the] rice and [Sethe] sucked from another woman whose job it was” (60). So distraught was Sethe after she saw the lynched and burned body of her mother that her language breaks down. She “stuttered after that. Didn’t stop until [Sethe] saw Halle” (201). Because Sethe never experienced

all the aspects of mothering she thinks are important like a mother sleeping with her child, fixing her hair, and spending time with her, she vows to always be with and take care of her children in all the ways her own mother was unable to care for her. As an adult Sethe defines herself only as a mother thereby making no distinction between *self* and *other*.

Her love is so strong that Baby Suggs “got down on her knees to beg God’s pardon” for Sethe after Sethe told Baby that she would not live without her children (203). It is this love that Paul D criticizes as being “too thick” (164). After escaping from Sweet Home, she “...lay in bed under, around, over, among, but especially with [all her children]” (93).

Morrison shows us as early as the second page how fiercely Sethe loves her children. When Denver is talking about her murdered sister’s ghost throwing a powerful tantrum, Sethe replies, “No more powerful than the way I loved her” (4). Accordingly, the power of the baby’s rage is connected to the power of Sethe’s love as a mother (Schapiro 197). Sethe loved this crawling child so much that she slit her throat with a saw to avoid her being taken as a slave and gave her own body for ten minutes to the engraver to have “Beloved” carved on the baby’s headstone. Even while she was escaping from Kentucky to Ohio, Sethe was concerned only with her children’s survival. She thinks, ““this baby’s ma’am is gonna die,”” but “the thought of herself stretched out dead while the little antelope lived on...in her lifeless body grieved her” (Morrison *B* 31). At the novel’s present, Sethe is consumed by her role as mother so much that she has no identity of her own. In other cases, the *mother/self* pair involves the child who is having trouble finding herself apart from her mother. Here, Sethe is the *mother* and the *self*--a self she cannot find until she can distinguish between Sethe as a mother and Sethe as a person.

Contributing to Sethe's trouble with self-identification is the haunting nature of her past. For her the "future was a matter of keeping the past at bay" (42). For Sethe, once an event occurs it never goes away; it continues to exist independent of one's choosing to remember it (Page 37). Sethe says, "Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm...dies...if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you" (Morrison *B* 36). This is why *Beloved*, because she is a symbol of Sethe's past, has such power over her mother. If nothing ever really dies, then the past will always exist and memory will also (Page 37). Sethe's word for this "phenomenon," as Page calls it, is "rememory." This combination of "memory" and "remember" "doubles the process" (37). For Sethe, a memory is the true representation of a real event and a repetition of a memory, "a re-memory, a circling back in one's mind to what was previously there in both reality and its recall" (37). Even though she raises Denver by avoiding the past, it will still haunt her because it will never go away. It is this repression of memories that absolutely will not allow Sethe to see herself as her own distinct person.

So crushing was the force of Sethe's love, which led her to murder one child with the intention of doing the same to the remaining three, that eighteen years later, haunted by first the baby's ghost then later by the embodiment of the child in a twenty-year-old woman, Sethe still cannot tell Denver or Paul D what she did. She is unable to put into words how she felt when she saw Schoolteacher enter the yard knowing what he was there for, what she could see in her children's futures if they were taken, and what would happen to her. She keeps her memories repressed so she does not have to cope with

them. When Paul D hands Sethe a newspaper clipping with her picture on it, he hopes she will laugh with him at the mixup of her face appearing next to the story of someone else's misdeeds. She does not want to talk about Beloved's murder, and, instead, Sethe begins to talk about getting her family out of Sweet Home without Halle's help. She is unable to take the step to translate that horrible memory into words. Using the language of avoidance to illustrate Sethe's own, Morrison writes, "Circling, circling, now she was gnawing something else instead of getting to the point.... Sethe knew that the circle she was making around the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for anybody who had to ask. If they didn't get it right off--she could never explain" (B 162-3). Sethe does not have the language to express her actions and feelings to someone who has to ask. She thinks that if a person asks why, then he or she would not understand. By not translating her memories into spoken words, Sethe can continue to circle around them and avoid confronting them--actions which impede Sethe both from freeing herself from her emotional prison and from the banishment from her community, as well as her coming to a distinction between *mother* and *self*.

As Rubenstein explains, *home/lost* suggests a child's desires and fears, which are to remain merged with the mother who is emotionally identified with *home* but to separate from her with the attendant danger of becoming *lost* (309). Sethe did not make the choice to leave her mother; her mother was hanged. As with the *mother/self* dyad, Sethe's role in the *home/lost* dyad is two-fold. Until she arrived in Cincinnati, Sethe never had any real sense of *home*, a feeling that stays with her only until her act of infanticide. Once Sethe murders Beloved, she is *lost*. At the novel's end, Sethe is beginning to find a sense of *self*,



which will help her regain her sense of *home*. Sethe's second role in the *home/lost* dyad also begins once she moves to Ohio. There, she became the person who her children emotionally identify with *home* in their *home/lost* dyads. Of her children, Beloved has the strongest identification with Sethe, an identification which is almost destructive.

The question "Who is Beloved?" is not one that is easily answered. Of this elusive character, Carmean writes, "...Morrison's 'ghostly' creation is far too complex to be pinned down so directly, or to be pinned down at all in a final, materially defining sense" (85). Instead, Beloved acts as a "mirror" character who reflects the inner lives of those with whom she comes in contact. For Sethe, Beloved is her dead daughter come back to life who reflects her hopes and fears after Sethe's act of infanticide who becomes her mother's object. Beloved also reflects the experiences of those who crossed the Middle Passage (85) and of those who were lost or who lost others to the horrors of slavery. For Denver, she is her dead older sister who has come back to be with her, a sister who ultimately becomes Denver's object. Although she returns in the body of an adult, Beloved is still a child who desires to be one again with her mother.

The union Beloved desires with her mother is the complicating factor in her *mother/self* differentiation because Beloved seeks not to identify herself apart from her mother, who functions as Beloved's object, but to merge with her. She has returned in the body of a twenty year old woman, but because she is the ghost of the infant Sethe killed, she desires to return to the pre-oedipal mother/daughter fusion. She functions almost totally in terms of oral drives (Wyatt *Reconstructing* 196). Beloved's urges to incorporate are best explained by Freud's delineation of the oral drive, "I should like to eat that, or I

should like to spit it out” (qtd in Kilgour 4) and its resulting implication that what is inside is good and what is outside is bad (4). Beloved structures the whole family in terms of her desire; she ejects the bad, Paul D, “whose presence blocks her unqualified possession of her mother” (Wyatt *Reconstructing* 196). *Inside/outside* points to the “fluid emotional boundaries” a child encounters as he or she makes a distinction between him or herself and the surrounding environment during identity formation (Rubenstein 309). For Beloved there has been a forced distinction between *mother* and *self* which occurred when she was murdered, so her *inside/outside* differentiation was also not a choice. She did not have time to establish an identity. She seeks not to find the sense of self she has not yet totally developed but to merge with her mother. Sethe’s guilt and motherlove provide Beloved with the leverage to “make her mother comply with the infantile demand for absolute attention” (Wyatt *Reconstructing* 197).

Rubenstein’s explanation of *home/lost* describes the “ambivalent desires and fears” of a child who, as we have discussed, wants to both remain merged with the emotionally-identified mother and to separate from her with the possible danger of becoming *lost* (309). Beloved’s desire is not ambivalent at all. She is *lost* only because she has been apart from her mother for so long, and the *home* she seeks is one of total union with her mother.

It is Denver’s coming to self that is the most important in the text though, for without her Sethe would never be able to recognize the possibility of being her own best thing. At the novel’s opening, Denver is eighteen, lonely, frightened more of her mother than of the ghost, and alone. She is threatened by Paul D’s appearance because when he

arrives she experiences an intense loneliness. Her *mother/self* identification was formulated partially through fear. "She cut off my head every night....Her pretty eyes looking at me like I was a stranger. Not mean or anything, but like I was somebody she found and felt sorry for. Like she didn't want to do it but she had to," Denver thinks (Morrison *B* 206). She is unsure whether "the thing that makes it all right to kill her children" is still in her mother (206). Despite these secret fears, Denver is possessive of Sethe. She is still trying to get into Sethe's dress (11), and the loneliness she experienced after Baby Suggs's death and her brothers' departure did not matter as long as "her mother didn't look away" (12) as she did when Paul D arrived. As he and her mother talk about Sweet Home and Halle, Denver feels "that her own father's absence was not hers" (13). Denver does not leave the yard, but "...taught herself to take pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped on them; the assumption that the haunting was done by an evil-thing looking for more" (37). Denver knew no one was aware of "the downright pleasure of enchantment" she received at the haunting, so much that its exorcisement by Paul D left her world "flat" (37). Even as a child, as is the case at the novel's present, Denver, "hated the stories her mother told that did not concern herself" (62). The story she likes the best is the one of her miraculous birth during Sethe's escape from Sweet Home alone, a story she tells to Beloved. Sethe had been held down while the white boys stole the milk she produced for the child she sent ahead and brutally whipped, and, as a result, she could hardly walk. With the help of a white indentured servant girl, Sethe delivers the child and names her after the girl. This is the only story Denver likes to tell Beloved because Denver is so lost and so absent from life beyond her own that she

despises what does not involve her directly.

Even as a young child Denver was unconcerned with things outside of herself. At age seven, she and other colored children were taught to count and spell by Lady Jones. Denver was so happy with her learning that she never noticed that the other children avoided her. She attended Lady Jones' house of learning until the day Nelson Lord asked her, "Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went?" (104). Denver's hearing was then "...cut off by an answer she could not bear to hear," (103) so she "went deaf rather than hear [it]" (105). For the following two years, Denver did not hear or speak until her hearing was "...cut on by the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs" (103-4). This is why, when Beloved appears in the flesh, Denver feels so connected to her and begins to plot how to keep Beloved by her side the entire time Sethe is at work. She begins to fear that Beloved will leave her, and she "cr[ies] because she has no self" (123). She would rather stay in the cold house and "let the dark swallow her like the minnows of light above" than suffer life without Beloved (123). Denver has never had anything to call her own, so she lays claim to Beloved. Life without her would erase all Denver had identified with.

Denver has a sense of identity but it is tentative and uncertain. When Paul D tells Denver the last time he saw her she was still in the womb pushing out of her mother's dress, Sethe replies, "still is...provided she can get in it" (11). Denver fully differentiates between *mother* and *self* for the first time only when she steps off the porch to find food. Morrison writes, "Somebody had to be saved, but unless Denver got work, there would be no one to save, no one to come home to, and no Denver either. It was a new thought,

having a self to look out for and preserve” (252). Here, Denver accepts the burden of overcoming her fear of leaving the yard, of severing her emotional attachment to her mother and Beloved, and makes her first step toward self, a self she had not previously realized should could look out for alone.

Many of Morrison’s texts are told using the language of food. In her “The ‘Sweet Life’ in Toni Morrison’s Fiction,” Elizabeth B. House discusses the types of foods Morrison often uses and explains what they represent. She says that Morrison links simple natural foods like raw fruits with “life-giving idyllic values” (182). Oppositely, she connects sweets, especially commercially prepared pies and candy, with “competitive-success dreams” (182). She continues to explain that “by comparing the alluding facades of sugar and outward success, [Morrison] shows that neither is truly nourishing to human life” (182). Milk is the exception to this dichotomy. House explains that Morrison, perhaps because of its color, links milk with sugar to the “unhealthy success dream which she credits Caucasian society with propagating” (182). In *Sula*, whereas sweets and milk are associated with the outside world, “simple, natural foods, often fruits are connected with the ideal values of the Bottom” (188). Plum, close to his death, leads an unhealthy life in which “in the corner was a half eaten store-bought cherry pie. Balled-up candy wrappers and empty pop bottles peeped from under the dresser” (Morrison *Sula* 46). These sweets, representing the competition of the outside world, are akin to his returning to the Bottom from World War I. On the other hand, Nel and Sula as young girls have an ideal relationship, until, as adults, Sula seduces Nel’s husband. As a result, Morrison describes Nel’s love for her children as being “...like a pan of syrup kept too long on the

stove, cooked out, leaving only its odor and a hard, sweet sludge..." (165). The best example of Morrison's earliest usage of sweet foods and milk to describe women who "...assume facades which please dominant white society" (House 183) is in *The Bluest Eye* where Geraldine is described as a "pretty milk-brown lady" who allows her son to play only with white children and is a member of a group of women described as "sugar-brown" and "sweet and plain as buttercake" (76,68).

The majority of the references to sweets and candy in *Beloved* occur when Beloved materializes. "Sugar could always be counted on to please her" because "it was as though sweet things were what she was born for" (Morrison *Beloved* 55). Beloved ate "...sugar sandwiches, the sludgy molasses gone hard and brutal in the can, lemonade, taffy and any type of dessert" (55). Beloved's continual yearning for sugary snacks suggests her need to incorporate her mother. Beloved will eat as many sweets as Sethe and Denver can provide, and the stories Sethe tells her became a way to "feed" her desire. Her insatiable appetite for sugar parallels her appetite for Sethe's attention. Beloved is able to draw her mother into a dyad in which Beloved desires total union. She will feed from both Denver and Sethe until she is unable to continue.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison links Pecola's "self-rejection and success values" with the Mary Jane candy she has purchased (House 186). "Each...wrapper has a picture on it," Morrison writes, "...of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort" (*BE* 43). Pecola recognizes the sweetness of the candy, and Morrison continues, "To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane.

Be Mary Jane” (43). Pecola’s compulsion with eating the Mary Jane candy leads her to think she is actually consuming the little girl whose picture appears on the wrapper. The last sentence, “Be Mary Jane” is like Beloved’s intended consumption of Sethe. She wants to eat Sethe in order to become her. The significant difference between Pecola and Beloved’s fantasies are that Pecola wants to be a little white girl whereas Beloved wants to be Sethe, her black mother. The “competitive success dreams” sugar is linked with in Morrison’s texts are ultimately destructive to the self, and in *Beloved* this distinction is twofold. Beloved almost destroys Sethe by trying to become her; but because Sethe is a willing participant in this cannibalistic cycle, she and Beloved have merged and the distinction between the two is temporarily blurred. Because of the nature of their mother/daughter relationship, Beloved’s intended consumption of Sethe is almost able to destroy both of them:

In using the Morrison texts published at the time she wrote her own article, House accurately categorizes and links Morrison’s uses of milk with unhealthy dreams propagated by white society, but in *Beloved* milk is treated not as an “alluring facade” of success but as literal nourishment. Several examples in *Beloved* illustrate a linking of milk with the natural wholesome foods associated with life-giving ideals. Sethe is continually more concerned with the milk Schoolteacher’s nephews stole from her than the subsequent brutal whipping she received because her milk represents the bond she had for Beloved, who she had sent ahead, and Denver, who growing inside of her. It is this milk that Denver imbibed with her sister’s blood as nourishment. Further, Sethe cooks snap beans and corn for Paul D, Denver, Beloved, and herself because “just like the day she

arrived at 124...she [has] “milk enough for all” (Morrison *B* 100). Her dead daughter has come back to her which may allow Sethe the opportunity to explain her actions, Denver is with her and now she has a sister, and Paul D has become her lover. Sethe has something she has not had since her first twenty-eight days after first arriving in Cincinnati--family and something to look forward to again.

The most important use of actual food in the text, however, is to signify first Sethe's family's break with the community and, later, their gradual acceptance back into it. When Sethe and Baby Suggs baked pies from the blackberries Stamp Paid brought, they realized they had too many, so they decided to share. They added a few chickens to roast. Then a feast exploded with the addition of perch, rabbit, corn pudding, and watermelon punch--all of which fit into House's food dichotomy as representing life giving ideas. They celebrated Sethe's safe passage, the birth of Denver, and their family, minus Halle, being safe and together. They were happy and attempted to share their happiness with their neighbors, but, instead, they alienated them by giving too much. Later, when Denver goes to ask Lady Jones for help, she is given some rice, eggs, and tea--all of which fall into the category of “life-giving.” Lady Jones gives Denver the elements to give life back to Sethe. Next, food like white beans, cold rabbit meat, and a basket of eggs appear near Denver's fence from women in the community. It is these offerings from the community that help Sethe regain her strength, combat the ghost, and nourish her back from the cannibalistic vacuum in which she's been living. Morrison uses life-giving food to give Sethe life, both physically and metaphorically, necessary to rejoin the community.



*Beloved* culminates in a mother-daughter *eat or be eaten* fusion that becomes destructive, a cycle beginning with the language of food and ending with everyone “limp and starving but locked in a love that wore everybody out”-(243). Of Denver’s relationship to Beloved, Morrison writes, “To go back to the original hunger was impossible. Luckily for Denver, looking was food enough to last. But to be looked at in turn was beyond appetite; it was breaking through her own skin to a place where hunger hadn’t been discovered” (118). Beloved is Denver’s abject, but Denver wants to possess her. She becomes jealous of the time Beloved spends with Sethe but is unable to prevent it. Denver thinks, “Whatever her power and however she used it, Beloved was *hers*” (104). Denver was shamed because if she was given a choice “...the choice between Sethe and Beloved was without conflict” (104). Denver has spent most of her life afraid of her mother and as kin to the ghost. Now that the ghost is flesh, Denver feels she is the one thing that alone can be hers. If given the choice, so powerful is the spell Beloved has cast on Denver, her mother would lose.

Beloved is still in the early stages of infancy, so she is a preverbal child. As such, she has not yet reached the point that she can substitute a symbol for the thing itself. When Sethe has no more gifts, Beloved wants her. “When Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire,” Morrison writes (240). She wants “to have her and to be her” (Wyatt “Giving” 482). Beloved really has not moved beyond the stages of nursing so she wants to consume all of Sethe; Sethe becomes thin while Beloved grows fat. In her fantasies, Beloved repeatedly states that her mother “chews and swallows” her, “while the metaphor of Beloved chewing and swallowing Sethe is almost literal: ‘Beloved ate up

her life, took it, swelled up with it, grew taller on it” (Schapiro 198). Later in this cycle of objects where both Sethe and Denver want Beloved and Beloved wants Sethe, Beloved has the upper hand as long as the memories Sethe is repressing remain unacknowledged; “therefore...through her emotional hold on Sethe, she can exclude Denver and draw her circle even more tightly around herself and Sethe” (Page 33).

As the women become hungrier physically, they feed off their objects metaphorically. Beloved is greedy and demands of Sethe her love, attention, and person. Denver knows she must leave the security of 124 and escape the “narcissistic vacuum” (Schapiro 206). She knows if she does not “leave the yard; step off the edge of the world; go ask somebody for help” they would all die (Morrison *B* 243). Denver withdrew herself from the play and watched Beloved’s desire change her mother: she got fired and spent the family savings on fancy foods and ribbons for Beloved. It is Denver who does not revert to infantilism but goes to find help. She sometimes could not even tell her mother from Beloved because she recognized the role reversal. It shamed her to see her mother “serving a girl not much older than herself” (242). She sees that, “Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother; Sethe the teething child, for other than those times when Beloved needed her, Sethe confined herself to a corner chair. The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became” (250). Not only do Morrison’s female characters seek to possess their objects but they also seek to become them; Beloved and Sethe succeed. Beloved becomes Sethe, the mother, the strong one, while Sethe becomes the child, but more importantly, Sethe once again becomes a slave--this time to Beloved’s desires.

Not only is Morrison’s language of food a powerful force, but so is language

as an entity. Morrison describes Denver's "sentences rolling out like pie dough" (121). It is words that close up Denver's ears and words that, years later, free her mind. Further, Sethe's inability to talk about her past hinders her personal growth. She lacks the language to communicate her infanticide to Paul D or Denver. When Beloved uses language, it becomes a tool of assimilation (*Reconstructing* 197). Beloved depends on her mother's mirroring face for her own existence when she says, "[Sethe] smiles at me and it is my own face smiling" (Morrison *B* 214). She insists on incorporating her mother and, according to Wyatt, prevails as the voices of Denver, Sethe, and Beloved merge in a dialogue between the women "that becomes in effect a monologue, too" (Wyatt *Reconstructing* 198). Stamp Paid stands outside 124 and hears what he does not understand: "But something was wrong with the order of the words and he couldn't describe or cipher it to save his life. All he could make out was the word *mine*," Morrison writes (*B* 172). The first sentences of the chapters of the three women illustrate both a breakdown of the borders between *mother* and *self* and the complicated relationship between these women and their objects as each woman articulates her desires. Sethe's chapter opens, "Beloved, she my daughter. She mine" (200). Denver's begins, "Beloved is my sister. I swallowed her blood right along with my mother's milk;" (205) and Beloved's sections starts, "I am Beloved and she is mine" (210). The repetition of the word *mine* illustrates their possessiveness.

What follows Beloved's opening sentences are small paragraphs with the absence of any punctuation. This highlights the "fantasy of merging and oneness" at the core of her ramblings (Schapiro 202). Beloved says, "I am not separate from her there is no

place where I stop her face is my own ” (Morrison *B* 210). The spaces between her phrases and sentences signal the timelessness of her presence and “the un-lived spaces of her life,” according to Mobley (362). The dialogue which becomes a monologue collapses the *self/other* distinction:

Your face is mine....

I love your face....

I needed her face to smile....

I want her face....

She is the laugh; I am the laughter....

You are my sister

You are my daughter

You are my face; You are me....

You are my face; I am you....

You are mine

You are mine

You are mine. (Morrison *B* 215-217)

Beloved depends on her mother’s mirroring face for her own existence; if Sethe laughs, Beloved is the laughter (Wyatt *Reconstructing* 198). When Beloved says, “You are my face; I am your face, I am you,” she completes the logic of the preoedipal because it excludes absence-- “if I am you, there is no leeway for separation” (198). They all repeat “mine” as the voices merge to claim the other and collapse the *self/other* dichotomy.

The only way for this cannibalistic fusion to end is for Denver to leave the

destructive circle and search for food. Only Denver notices that they have no food and overcomes her agoraphobia to leave the yard. She “stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch” (Morrison B243). Denver rejoins the world and looks for help at the only place she felt comfortable outside of 124-- Lady Jones’ house. She knows Sethe and Beloved will continue to feed off each other if she does not take on the role as mother and find food and a job. It is in this stepping off the porch that Denver gives birth to her *self*. Trapping her as an infant with his words, Nelson Lord also frees Denver when he says, ““Take care of yourself, Denver”” (252). Denver hears it “as though it were what language was made for” (252). She finally has a self “to look out for and preserve” which might not have occurred to her without Nelson’s kind words (252). Denver discovers herself in a return to community, and once Sethe realizes she is her own best thing, Beloved vanishes.

In this text, the *inside/outside* dyad is best illustrated not as part of identity formation or physical food transference but as community boundaries. Sethe is outside the community, but the catalyst that set the community against her is what helps save her-- food. After a simple act--a bucket of berries turned into a pie making and a few chickens to share with friends--turned into an excess, 124 was shunned by the black community. “The reckless generosity on display at 124” led neighbors to “whisper” about “uncalled for pride” (137). Baby Suggs felt these whispers in the air. She knew that her friends and neighbors were “angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess” (138). Usually someone would have gone ahead to warn Sethe and Baby Suggs that Schoolteacher was coming, but the community was so offended by their pride

that no warning came. When Sethe garnered the hatred of the community by murdering her child, she incurred eighteen years of spite from those who made her so happy for the twenty-eight days she was free. It is no wonder that Denver is afraid of her mother, but her fear of the world outside her house or her bower of boxwood trees outweighs even that, so she stays. It is this community that bands together to help Sethe get rid of Beloved. Ella is the driving force because, “whatever Sethe had done, [she] didn’t like the idea of past errors taking possession of the present. Sethe’s crime was staggering and her pride outstripped even that” but she would not bear “...sin moving on in the house, unleashed and sassy” (256).

Sethe’s departure from community values forced a separation of her family from the rest of the community. Only when she returns to the community and they embrace her can Sethe find herself. Further, her relationship to Paul D is important because he helps her see herself for the first time as a person beyond her identification as a mother. At the novel’s end, the women of the community have driven away Beloved, and Sethe laments, ““She was my best thing,”” but Paul D tells her, ““You your own best thing, Sethe. You are”” (272-3). The novel closes with Sethe questioning, “Me? Me?”” (273). With Paul D’s story next to hers and looking finally toward the future instead of allowing the past to consume her, Sethe can regain the sense of self she lost so long ago. With this self-realization, Sethe ceases being *lost* and will have a sense of *home*.

### Conclusion: Finding Home

A sense of completion in each of these novels can be found only in the resolution of the tension between the elements of the *home/lost* dyad as mediated through language. In her discussion of the development of the modern notion of the family, Kilgour explains, "...there is a tension between the representation of an idealized home, the place of harmonious relations, and that of the battle zone for the contest of wills" (146). Clarissa leaves her once idealized home-turned-prison for a series of other imprisoning structures, each more horrifying than the previous. In death Clarissa is able to win the battle of wills and find *home*. It is only in this death and through language that she is vindicated and her family held accountable for their mistreatment of her.

Isabel cannot find *home* with Margaret because she is her abject. Isabel has to break free from this (m)other figure in order to find not only a home but herself as well. She has not yet found such a place at the novel's conclusion, but she has conquered her abject and made peace with herself and her past, so that she will be able to break the cycle of being *lost*. The only way she is able to do so is to refuse food and leave Margaret. At the novel's conclusion Isabel thinks, "there was a great deal I wanted to say," signifying her passage back into the speaking community (Gordon 307).

The only way Denver and Sethe can find a true sense of self is to rejoin the community they have never truly been a part of since they arrived in Cincinnati. Denver must separate herself from 124's protective and consuming enclosure in order to save her mother and herself. She finds help first from Lady Jones and later from neighbors. In doing so, "[she] replaces the closed and self-consuming maternal circle with an enlarged

maternal embrace: individuals in the community provide food for the family, bringing them into a communal give-and-take that replaces the self-consuming fantasy of feeding on the mother” (Wyatt *Reconstructing* 200). Once Denver tells the Bodwins the truth about what is going on in her house, in order to find work, the whole community hears that Sethe’s dead daughter had come back in the flesh “to fix her,” so thirty of them come “murmuring and whispering” to excise the ghost (Morrison *B* 255, 258). For both Denver and Sethe, as with Clarissa and Isabel, finding *home* is necessarily tied to finding a sense of self. Sethe begins to understand that she has a self beyond being a mother when Paul D tells her she is her own best thing. Denver’s journey to self comes only after Nelson Lord’s words, which once blocked up her ears, now “opened her mind” (252).

The *home/lost* theoretical dyad which Richardson, Gordon, and Morrison investigate is presented, explored, and resolved very differently in each of their texts. As an eighteenth-century white male, Richardson’s position as an author is much different from that of either Gordon or Morrison. Richardson’s voice is obscured first through his choice of a woman’s first person point of view and then through his epistolary format. Clarissa’s eloquence with language seems to be unnatural in her dictatorial male family so that only in death are her words valued by her family. Richardson is able to reassert his position in the patriarchy by further silencing Clarissa. Her voice is heard but only in death and mediated first through the converted rake Belford and ultimately through Richardson.

Both Gordon and Morrison refuse to write women into history as somehow inferior to men. Instead, they create heroines who do not have to kill themselves to



overcome their abjects but who choose life, assert themselves, and succeed. Gordon does not abandon her Catholic roots to write the typical 1970s novel about love and friendship. Instead, she creates Isabel who returns to her faith and uses it as a tool to find herself. Gordon works for change, not by abandoning her traditional faith to search for spiritual development in a system that is not centered on men, as many other feminists of her time did, but by working for change within Catholicism (Payant 129). Isabel's self-discovery is not complete when the novel ends but it is nonetheless certain.

Sethe and Denver's struggles appear to be over at *Beloved's* close, but Morrison, like Gordon, does not provide us with a definite ending as Richardson does. Like Gordon, Morrison does not create female characters who rely on men to tell their stories. Her goal as an author has always been "to expose the injustices of black life in America," and because of the history of black women being marginalized, abused, and excluded, these women are usually the focus of Morrison's texts (166-7). From that tradition, Morrison creates black women whose story must be passed on in order to continue their growth as women and to ensure their race's history.

Each of these novelists write their place in patriarchal history--Richardson as one of the "fathers" (a fitting term indeed) of the novel, Gordon by balancing religion and feminism, and Morrison as black feminist. How they pass on their stories of heroine triumph differs as widely as their backgrounds and social circumstances. Although others might interpret Richardson's ending as proof that change is possible and that Clarissa is, in fact, a martyr, what is important here is that Richardson's narrative structure and conclusion perpetuate the patriarchal status quo. As women, Gordon and Morrison are

able to see beyond the binds of history and gender to question and change the role of women in their works. They present us with women who do not bow under social pressure or commit suicide in order to achieve a sense of self, but who triumph in the face of their abjects.

## Notes

1. The assertions made here are the result of both discussions with and E. mails to Margot Gayle Backus dating September 29, 1997 to October 22, 1997.
2. Incorporation as Kilgour uses it and as it will be employed elsewhere in this thesis is the process by which bodies--both the corporal body and metaphorical bodies like food and language, that is, reading, writing, and speaking--are brought together and, often, absorbed. Eating is "the most basic model" for all acts of incorporation because it assumes "an absolute distinction between inside and outside, eater and eaten, which...obscures identity and makes it impossible to say for certain who's who" (Kilgour 7).
3. Rubenstein explains that Madelon Sprengnether distinguishes between "'mother' as a 'fantasy of plentitude' and '(m)other' as a sign for 'the otherness contained in the figure of mother' or as 'that which cannot be appropriated by the child's or infant's desire and hence signals a condition of division or loss'" in "(M)other Eve: Some Revisions of the Fall in Fiction by Contemporary Women Writers," in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. eds. Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989. p. 300, n. 5. This quotation appears on p. 331 of Rubenstein's text.  
This term aptly describes how Isabel sees Margaret. She is not her actual mother and does none of the nurturing commonly received from a mother; instead, she is the emanation of what Isabel fears she may become.
4. Inside the family, women's language is silenced, while outside the family it is discounted. If Lovelace makes an assertion about Clarissa, it is regarded as true because his language is backed by his economic privilege; in the same way, James's language is supported by his familial position. Because Clarissa is a woman, she is disregarded and silenced. The written word is the only place she cannot be controlled and have her story not be re-framed by the male dictators
5. Brooks uses the term "(non)family" to refer only to the peer-scribe family as opposed to Clarissa's biological family. The term "spiritual family" better suits the scribes, and "(non)family" better suits the Harlowe family as each family member becomes defamilialized. I will use "(non)family" from this point on to refer only to the Harlowes as they become defamilialized and not as Brooks uses it.
6. Arabella reports, "My father, in the first agitations of his mind on discovering your wicked, your shameful elopement, imprecated on his knees a fearful curse upon you....No less than 'that may you meet your punishment, but *here* and *hereafter*, by means of the very wretch in whom you have chosen to place your wicked confidence'" (Richardson 509). It is important to note that Mr. Harlowe does not utter this curse directly to Clarissa but it is dictated to his scribe, Arabella, who, in turn, dictates it to Clarissa.

7. Ellmann's term, autophagy, is synonymous with self-devouring. Her chapter of the same name (pages 1-27) discusses the similarities between anorexic women starving themselves and the Irish Hunger Strikers doing the same. She explores the "cultural milieu in which the ritual occurs" in order to interpret the self-starvation of these groups (7).
8. Ellmann's chapter (pages 29-57) on gynophagy deals with the "tortuous affinities of food and sex" and the relationship of metaphors of food and sex to language. Autophagy refers to the eating of one's self, so, accordingly, gynophagy refers to the eating of women.
9. Rubenstein uses Claire Kahane's discussions of the Female Gothic's characteristics as background-information to discuss elements of Jackson's novels which fall into this genre. The full citation is Kahane, Claire. "The Gothic Mirror." *The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytical Interpretation*. Ed. Shirley Nelson Garner, Kahane, and Madeleine Sprengnether. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985. 334-51. The quotation cited here appears on page 334 of Kahane's text.
10. Bennett uses the term "foci" to refer to shifts in attention to and focus on the physical bodies of Gordon's characters. She also refers to them as "focus-shifts" (36). Both terms will be used here.

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