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Trinity of Consciousness: Body, Mind, Soul and Female Identity in the Novels of Gail Godwin

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TRINITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS:
BODY, MIND, SOUL AND FEMALE IDENTITY
IN THE NOVELS OF GAIL GODWIN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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in the Novels of Gail Godwin

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Gail Godwin's novels emphasize the forging of the female self/identity. Even Godwin's earliest critics stress the ways Godwin consistently chooses to portray female protagonists as complex female characters; as Godwin's critics point out, the crafting of female identity becomes central to the analysis and understanding of Godwin's "vision" of/for female identity.

My analysis of Godwin's work extends from and beyond the groundwork laid by earlier critics. I contend that, even as Godwin's earliest novels emphasize the forging of female identity, her earliest novels highlight their heroines as "objects," that is, their identities are fashioned by "outer" qualities—the female body. For instance, Godwin's two earliest novels, *The Perfectionists* (1970) and *Glass People* (1972), both emphasize the female body and how the body is objectified by both "the self" and the "othering gaze." A "shift" in location of female identity takes shape in Godwin's *The Odd Woman* (1974), *A Mother and Two Daughters* (1982), and *A Southern Family* (1987); here female identity is associated with an emphasis on creativity, education, career, and the "female mind." With Godwin's later novels, *The Good Husband* (1994), and *Father Melancholy's Daughter* (1991) and its sequel *Evensong* (1999), we see another

shift—the focus changes from an emphasis on female identity forged through “female body” and/or “female mind” to a focus on the strong spiritual characteristics/aspects of female identity, the soul.

By examining the shifts in Godwin’s writing, we see a progression in her writing, a maturing voice, as well as an emphasis on female spirituality, a female identity that embraces Godwin’s vision of “wholeness.” This “wholeness,” conceived early in Godwin’s novels, remains unrealized until later work, thus revealing the complexity of Godwin’s vision of/for female identity.

A study of the interconnectedness of body, mind, soul and female identity in Gail Godwin’s novels reemphasizes the complexity of Godwin’s work. An examination of the female identity in terms of the “trinity of consciousness” unifies Godwin’s vision, revealing a progression in her work, emphasizing her roots in Southern Appalachian Literature, tying her work to Feminist Theory, while reflecting the richness of her female protagonists who embrace body, mind, and soul.

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For strong women and vivid storytellers,
for grandmothers, mothers, and daughters:

Reatha Smith McLaughlin

Violet Baker McLaughlin

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Judith McLaughlin Applegate

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CHAPTER ONE

WHOLE(HEARTED)NESS: AN INTRODUCTION

Most of us, whether we admit it or not, still live our lives under the influence of the great rift between heart and head that fractured seventeenth-century thought. This rift, concurrent with the Industrial Revolution of the next two centuries, utterly changed the landscape of human relations, splitting us into divided kingdoms of intellect versus feeling, provables versus intangibles, and a host of other “either/or” dualities. Wholeness, and *wholeheartedness*, are concepts to be achieved all over again, but this time on a sturdier level of consciousness. (Godwin, *Heart* 112)

The above passage is from *Heart: A Natural History of the Heart-Filled Life* (2001), a work of nonfiction by Gail Godwin where the author traces the historical meanings—the derivatives, connotations, and denotations—associated with the word “heart.” This book, however, supplies more than the etymology of a word; it also allows a glimpse into the underlying worldview espoused by its author. Primarily, Godwin indicates here that the lingering effects of dichotomous thought are unavoidable, that they remain embedded in Western theologies and ideologies, and that these effects even continue to permeate the literature produced by contemporary westernized cultures. More than that, however, with this passage, Godwin, in a way, reveals central ideas connected to her own prose—first, the notion that human beings are not “whole,” but are instead divided and fragmented, and second, that human beings not only seek “wholeness,” but also that “wholeness” is achievable through the reconnection of

“heart” and “head”; in essence, by interrogating dichotomous thought and by actively seeking “wholeness,” or unity within the self, specifically through “spirituality.”

Consequently, with her major novels, Godwin often explores the remains of the “either/or” dichotomy; often, she utilizes, interrogates, and/or abandons the binaries supported by a legacy of western thought, binaries which serve to complicate the ultimate quest in her novels, her characters’ searches for “wholeness.” The search for “wholeness” or “wholeheartedness” is one that infuses much of Godwin’s prose. However, while her characters remain in search of “wholeness,” Godwin frequently uses elements of dichotomous thought to (re)invent and inflate her female protagonists’ identities; in fact, from her first novel, *Glass People* (1970) to *Evensong* (1999), her female characters are presented with challenges which require that they either embrace or reject dualistic thinking. Godwin’s most complex novels, however, are the ones that involve characters actively in search of “wholeness”; those characters are generally female protagonists in search of various ways to heal their fragmented identities—the remnant of the “heart” and “head” split Godwin mentions above.

In turn, since the 1970s, Godwin’s novels have focused on the steady, multidimensional character development of her female protagonists; that is, her novels place a strong emphasis on the forging of the female self/identity, what it means to be identified as “woman.” In fact, several of Godwin’s contemporary critics, among them Lihong Xie, author of *The Evolving Self in the Novels of Gail Godwin*, and Kerstin Westerlund, author of *Escaping the Castle of Patriarchy*:

Patterns of Development in the Novels of Gail Godwin, emphasize the distinct ways in which Godwin's novels tend to trace the evolution of female identity through the fictional lives of her strong female protagonists. Even Godwin's earliest critics, among them Jane Hill and Karen Gaston, stress the ways in which Godwin consistently chooses to portray her female characters; as all of Godwin's critics point out, the crafting of female identity becomes central to the analysis and understanding of the complexity of Godwin's work.

My analysis of Godwin's prose, then, extends from and beyond the groundwork laid by these earlier critics and, in addition, connects Godwin's work to the quote above. I contend that, even as Godwin's earliest novels have this emphasis—the forging of female identity—these earliest novels highlight their female heroines as “objects,” that is, their identities are mostly fashioned by their “outer” physical qualities—the female body. For instance, Godwin's two earliest novels, *The Perfectionists* (1970) and *Glass People* (1972), both place a distinct emphasis on the female body and how the female body is objectified by both “the self” and the “othering gaze.” With these novels, female identity seems to be located mainly in/through the female body. A “shift” in the location of female identity takes place in Godwin's *The Odd Woman* (1974), *Violet Clay* (1978), *A Mother and Two Daughters* (1982), and *A Southern Family* (1987); here we see female identity largely associated with an emphasis on creativity, education, career, and the “female mind.” With Godwin's later novels, *The Good Husband* (1994), *Father Melancholy's Daughter* (1991) and its sequel *Evensong* (1999), we see another distinct shift in focus—the focus changes from an emphasis on

female identity forged through the “female body” and/or “female mind” to a focus on the strong spiritual characteristics/aspects of female identity—the soul. Particularly, with *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* and *Evensong*, this shift is mainly evidenced by the actions and portrayal of the female protagonist, Margaret Gower (though the two novels also comment on the “spirituality,” “soul,” and “self-hood” of the other major female characters as well). By examining the shifts in Godwin’s writing, we see not only a progression in her writing, a distinctive and maturing writer’s voice, but also an emphasis on female identity in/through embraced spirituality, that is, a female identity that actively seeks “wholeness.” In turn, Godwin’s later novels also connect her more fully with her Southern Appalachian heritage where spirituality is central to the culture. Further, through a close analysis, it is clear that Godwin’s later novels focus more fully on spirituality, “wholeness,” and female identity—that is, the merging of body, mind, and soul in significant ways. It is interesting to note that this “wholeness” is something that is conceived early on in Godwin’s novels, but a theme that largely remains unrealized until her later work, thus revealing the complexity and depth of her work as her writing matures.

This dissertation, then, is a study of the “trinity of consciousness,” an analysis of body/mind/soul and female identity as depicted in the novels of contemporary Southern Appalachian writer Gail Godwin. I intend to examine three decades of Godwin’s novels; from the 1970s, her earliest novels, *The Perfectionists* (1970), *Glass People* (1972), and *The Odd Woman* (1974); from the 1980s, *A Mother and Two Daughters* (1982) and *A Southern Family* (1987);

and from the 1990s, *Father Melancholy's Daughter* (1991), *The Good Husband* (1994), and *Evensong* (1999). Because I want to narrow the focus of my study of Godwin's novels, I have chosen to exclude three of her major novels as well as her shorter novel, *Evenings at Five* (2003), for close analysis. Even so, though I will not be giving them close examination, Godwin's other primary novels, *Violet Clay* (1978) and *The Finishing School* (1984), as well as Godwin's latest published novel, *Queen of the Underworld* (2006), will be mentioned throughout my dissertation.

With this dissertation, I intend to investigate two primary aspects of Godwin's novels. First, I seek to examine the ways in which Godwin (re) shapes female identity through her writing over the decades, from the 1970s to the 1990s. I will pay particular attention to the ways in which Godwin formulates the female identities of her protagonists in terms of what I call the "trinity of consciousness"—the intermingling of body, mind, and soul to forge female identity. While Godwin creates female protagonists where these aspects of identity simultaneously exist in a number of ways, I maintain, as many other Godwin critics do, that there is ultimately a progression in her female protagonists' self-awareness and self-actualization toward a more realized, "whole" female identity as her writing career develops; it is my contention, however, that even as this is true, that there is a progression of female self-awareness, I maintain that it is Godwin's "location" for the self-actualization of female identity that shifts over the decades of her writing. That is, in the 1970s, in her earliest novels, there is a definite focus on female identity in/through the

female body; in the mid-1970's and 1980's that "location" shifts to a female identity located in "the mind"; in the 1990's the "location" of female identity again shifts to an emphasis on female identity and "the soul." And, while I believe there is a steady progression in the location of female identity from body to mind to soul over the decades of Godwin's writing, I also contend that these elements (body, mind, soul) exist, blur, and overlap throughout all of her novels in interesting ways, and that these are the ways in which her female characters are ultimately defined in each novel. Therefore, the second aspect of my dissertation will examine the overlappings, the blurrings, of body/mind/soul as they (re)surface and recur to (re)form the female identities of Godwin's most memorable female protagonists.

A study of the intersections, the interconnectedness, of body, mind, soul and female identity, in the works of Gail Godwin is important because it reemphasizes the complexity of Godwin's work as well as her important contributions to Southern Appalachian Literature. With this study, I hope to show how Godwin's work reflects both a progression of female self-awareness and the shifting location of female identity in/through an analysis of body/mind/soul. In addition, an examination of female identity in terms of the "trinity of consciousness" unifies Godwin's collection of novels, revealing the complex progression of thought found in her body of work, one which not only emphasizes her roots in Southern Appalachian literature and culture, but also ties her work to Feminist theory and reflects the richness and depth of her female protagonists as they steadily progress toward Godwin's ultimate vision of "wholeness."

Contextualization: An Interlude

Gail Godwin & the “R” words--Regional and Romance

I suspect that trying to separate a writer's work from his background is a little like trying to separate a turtle from its shell... Remove home and its influence from my back, and I will have lost not just shelter but an essential part of me. (Koger qtd. Ballard and Hudson 3)

Where you're from is not who you are, but it's an important ingredient. I believe you must trust your first voice—the one tuned by the people and place that made you—before you can speak your deepest truths. (Lyon qtd. Ballard and Hudson 169)

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, but raised near Asheville, North Carolina, author Gail Godwin is a prolific writer of prose who has steadily maintained a solid literary career since the 1970s. With a total of twelve published novels, two published collections of short stories, one published work of nonfiction, and one collection of journal entries—not to mention countless contributions to various literary magazines and journals—Godwin's contributions to American literature are vast. With her first novel, *The Perfectionists*, published in 1970, and her latest novel *Queen of the Underworld*, published in 2006, Godwin has continuously and tirelessly produced a body of extraordinary literature, literature representative of not only her heritage, one rooted in Southern Appalachia, but also the broader American contemporary culture.

However, despite her constant and excellent literary contributions, Godwin's work remains largely outside of the “canonized” American literature

typically used in the academic classroom; her work is consistently excluded from not only courses on American literature, but even those literature courses designated “Southern” and/or “Appalachian.” And even though her writing career spans nearly 40 years, her work is seldom recognized as “academic,” worthy of scholarship, nor is it regarded as “serious” literature; rather, many critics view her writing, particularly her early writing, as more associated with the demands of popular culture, her work, then, better suited to the “mass paperback” markets of pulp fiction and romance novels.

Even so, excerpted novels, such as *A Mother and Two Daughters* (1982) and *A Southern Family* (1987), works from Godwin’s mid-career, do show up occasionally in regional anthologies and literary collections. Most recently, Godwin’s work has been anthologized in collections such as *New Stories by Southern Women*, *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers*, and *Listen Here: Women Writing in Appalachia*. Her publication in such collections only further establishes and aligns Godwin as a Southern Appalachian writer.

Though she has been living in Upstate New York for over thirty years now, the legacy of her Southern Appalachian heritage runs deep in Godwin’s fiction. With most of her novels taking place in mountainous North Carolina or Virginia, Godwin, like her literary foremothers Flannery O’Connor and Eudora Welty, uses “place” as means to pay homage to her Southern and Appalachian roots. In a recent email from Godwin, she comments that she would “definitely put [herself] in the Appalachian camp” of writers (Personal Email). Even when her novels’

settings are far removed from the South, her female protagonists are often characters who, like Godwin, were raised in Southern Appalachian culture; and therefore, those ties to Southern Appalachia remain ever present. In her fiction, associations with Southern Appalachian culture can then reflect either a sense of comfort or feelings of apprehension and anxiety—feelings both embodied by Godwin’s female characters, but also feelings Godwin frequently expresses about her own Southern Appalachian upbringing. Marilyn J. Smith from “The Role of the South in the Novels of Gail Godwin” concludes: “The role of the South in Godwin’s novels is best seen as a welcome retreat from the harsh realities, sometimes from the North itself, but also as the root of an ambivalent perception of an illusive world of artificial conventions which prevents one’s happiness” (103). Smith continues with her analysis of Godwin’s female protagonists and their ties to the South: “Although they philosophically reject the ways of the Old South, they are not emotionally ready or able to cut the ties totally” (104). Smith’s observations resonate as true, especially in Godwin’s earliest novels where the female characters simultaneously reject but still hold onto their ideas about “ideal womanhood” and traditional roles of women. Even so, Godwin’s fiction is such that it relates heavily to the Southern (Appalachian) literary tradition; solid ties to “genteel Southern ideals,” a concrete sense of place, and an attention to a particular people and their origins invigorate Godwin’s fiction, often garnering Godwin the label of “regionalist writer,” and her region is assuredly Southern Appalachia.

Just as Godwin's writing has largely been labeled "regional," it has also been identified as "women's fiction," and therefore, it would seem, critics have often attempted to limit the range and scope of the appeal of her prose, especially in terms of its appeal to a more "academic" audience. The labels of "Southern," "Appalachian" or "Woman," however, have not stopped Godwin's novels from appearing on various best-seller lists for decades, another fact that may contribute to Godwin's ongoing exclusion from the "canon" and the classroom. The recognition of her work by the mass population has probably detracted more from her appeal to academia than any other factor. As Mary Ann Wimsatt confirms in "Gail Godwin, the South, and the Canons," Godwin's omission from "the canon" and/or the academic classroom can be associated with both her best-selling status and the feminist ideology found in her novels. Wimsatt explains the connections this way:

The two main reasons for Godwin's exclusion from the canon are probably her consistent appearance on best-seller lists, which undermines her claim to be considered a serious writer, and her feminism—or perhaps, more accurately, the standard perception of how she handles feminist issues in her work.... Because education in America has historically been the domain of the privileged classes, both makers of the canons and so-called canonized writers have been suspicious of popular writers, particularly of women writers.... (Wimsatt 87)

Most assuredly, Godwin's feminist leanings tend to be another source of controversy and complexity.

As mentioned earlier, other explanations regarding Godwin's proscription from "the canon proper" may be associated with her regionalist flare and her appeal to largely a female readership; this appeal to a female readership is also reflected in the feminist ideology espoused in her fiction. Jane Hill in her study on Godwin's work maintains, "gender-specific praise has limited Godwin and many of her contemporaries" (Hill 9). Assertions like this one, however, tend to denigrate both Godwin's writing and women's writing in general. Furthermore, Godwin has consistently been criticized for her "pale portrayal" (Dickstein 4) of male characters. And while Godwin's novels are about women, with strong female protagonists, her work is certainly more complex than most of these critics acknowledge. Even so, in her critique of Godwin's work, Lore Dickstein writes, "As a novelist whose books tend to pivot on classic feminist issues, Gail Godwin will undoubtedly be shelved as yet another women's writer" (4); this is a simplistic characterization of Godwin's work, to be sure.

Godwin's associations with feminism remain a source of controversy. While critics of Godwin's fiction consistently analyze her writing in terms of its "feminist appeal" and "feminist agenda," Godwin herself has long been a critic of such easy categorization. Once criticized for her scathing, "anti-feminist" critique of the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, Godwin's continued ambivalence regarding feminism and its role in women's writing remains tangential to the role feminism plays in the fiction she creates. Even while

Godwin opposes such easy categorization of women's writing as a vehicle for a feminist poetics, her own fiction typically addresses feminist issues—namely the construction of female identity within a patriarchal society. This tension regarding feminism in Godwin's writing remains a crucial point of investigation in my dissertation project.

Consequently, those critics that disregard or (mis)label Godwin as simply a "women's writer," often associate her with the genre of "romantic fiction" rather than "serious literature"—a gross misinterpretation, which of course, again acts as a means to further subjugate, delineate, and marginalize her work. Ironically, Godwin's mother, Kathleen Krahenbuhl Godwin, as a single mother, made a living in-part from writing "women's romances" in the 1940s; therefore, in passing years, Godwin has been very conscious of the ways in which a (female) author's writing can be stigmatized by such labels. In fact, Godwin interrogates her mother's romance writing in her essay, "Becoming a Writer." She reflects that in her mother's stories, the plot went something like this:

GIRL MEETS MAN. MUTUAL ATTRACTION. THINGS DEVELOP.
A PROBLEM ARISES. CONFLICT AND DOUBT. RESOLUTION
OF CONFLICT. FINAL EMBRACE. All the stories that bought my
clothes, my storybook dolls, my subscription to children's
magazines, were contained by, were imprisoned in, a plot. (234)

Godwin continues, "My mother's specialty was the representative heroine, not the singular, the 'passing strange'" (236). Godwin, aware of the contrived and "imprisoning plots" her mother was forced to write in order to support her family,

becomes, then, a writer who is, in part, continuously writing and reacting against such stifling plots associated with (romantic) “women’s fiction”; Godwin instead, with her writing, embraces the “singular” and the “passing strange.” Godwin’s fiction is diverse, each plot very different from the next, but still focused on the creation of strong female characters, female characters who often embrace a feminist ideology, either implicitly or explicitly, another factor which, as Smith notes, may contribute to Godwin’s exclusion from the canon.

In an interview with Lihong Xie found in the *Mississippi Quarterly*, Godwin addresses the issue of feminism and the writing of fiction where men play secondary characters and/or supporting roles:

I didn’t set out to and say, ‘I’m going to write female-centered fiction.’ I just wouldn’t say it or even think about it. But, naturally being a woman, being born into a woman’s body, going through fifty-three years as a woman, I’m going to be more attuned to that kind of character. Whether it is the feminine or the female or the feminine part of a man—there are large amounts of the feminine in men. There is both of us; there is both in all of us, the masculine principle and the feminine principle. The fiction I write calls for much of the feminine treatment, I mean the relatedness, the deep concern with relationship and subtle relations and motives. (Xie, *A Dialogue with Gail Godwin* 171)

Godwin’s commentary here reflects, in part, her writing process and her mindset. Godwin’s continued classification by critics, however, as a writer of “women’s

fiction” is one that simply does not do her fiction justice, nor does it accurately reflect the truly complex plots and female characters that Godwin creates with her fiction.

In attempts to analyze the complexities of Godwin’s fiction, contemporary literary critics of Godwin’s work, including Lihong Xie, author of *The Evolving Self in the Novels of Gail Godwin*, and Kerstin Westerlund, author of *Escaping the Castle of Patriarchy: Patterns of Development in the Novels of Gail Godwin*, examine the “progression” of Godwin’s female protagonists in terms of their female identity. Female identity, though, in and of itself, is something problematic to define. What exactly does it mean to be “female”? Is it tied up in biology, related to the female body? Is it related to the sociological construction of gender roles? Is it related to women’s ways of knowing, a specific woman’s epistemology, or “women’s knowledge”? Or does the construction of female identity extend beyond gender, beyond body, beyond the workings of the female psyche? Is female identity, rather than delineated to one of these layers, instead located in the “wholeness” of the being, in a combination of collective “selves” which encompass the elements of body/mind/soul? Or is (female) identity a fluid construct, a *rhizomatic* construct without pattern or design, without form, indefinable, dependent only upon individualized female experiences? The last option, it seems, would leave the artist little to work with as she attempts to (re)create representations of what it means to be female, to exist as female. So then, how exactly does one define and/or (re)construct female identity in general? In turn, how does the artist then portray this (re)construction in/through

fiction/art/poetry/music? Further, how does the legacy of western metaphysics, which often posits dualities of mind/body or soul/body, inform the (re)construction of (female) identity? Does a dualistic (mind/body or soul/body) construction and/or a sequestered approach to identity, that is, the division mind/body/soul exist in the novels of Gail Godwin? Are Godwin's female protagonists complex representatives of "wholeness" or rather simplistic "slices" of female identity served up for the reader's delight?

Westerlund in *Escaping the Castle of Patriarchy* categorizes much of Godwin's work as written with a feminist perspective. She maintains that because many of Godwin's novels were written in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when American women had begun to question more fully their societal roles and (socially constructed) female identities, Godwin's work is indeed reflective of that time period in some way. She writes, "Individual female development—its possibilities, preconditions, and limits—is of primary importance in Godwin's fiction" (11). Westerlund maintains, however, that throughout Godwin's novels, she advances a "vision of transformation" (12) for her female characters. According to Westerlund, though, this "transformation" is always limited by the patriarchal structure intricately woven throughout the novels to encapsulate, and often to entrap, Godwin's female characters in a way that disallows them from achieving a sense of "wholeness."

Lihong Xie in *The Evolving Self in the Novels of Gail Godwin* expands on this idea of "transformation" of female identity. She maintains that there is a steady "progression" of female identity, a steady action toward female "self-

definition” or “self-actualization”; that is, Godwin’s female protagonists, with each sequential novel, are able to better define themselves. Xie writes, “...for Godwin and her characters, [self definition] is a continuous striving for coherence and control, of contesting versions of the self, with each effort brings more self-understanding, self-knowledge, and self-awareness” (36). At the same time, however, after asserting that Godwin’s characters (and Godwin herself?) are in a constant search for self-actualization, Xie is also quick to point out that in many of Godwin’s earliest novels, such as *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*, this search is always within a proscribed “context of patriarchal marriage and culture,” and thus this search for identity through self-actualization remains incomplete (36).

In somewhat of a contrast to Westerlund and Xie, Susan Kissel, author of *Moving On: The Heroines of Shirley Ann Grau, Anne Tyler, and Gail Godwin*, states that there is indeed a steady development in the female identities of Godwin’s characters; however, rather than interpreting this development as self-actualization of the individual, Kissel points to the ways in which Godwin’s later female characters move beyond themselves, outside themselves, to form relationships that extend and expand their identities; she writes: “Godwin’s latest heroines come to value inclusion and connection over exclusion and isolation in their lives” (100). Connecting with others, extending beyond the self, are elements that Kissel determines as factors most important to the development of Godwin’s later female protagonists.

Forging female identity, then, definitely emerges as a theme in Godwin's work, as well as in the literary criticism associated with Godwin's novels. Female identity, however, remains difficult to define, and we see this struggle emerge not only in the female characters that Godwin constructs, but also in the literary criticism regarding Godwin's work. Even as Westerlund maintains that Godwin has a "vision of transformation" of female identity in her work, Xie also maintains that there is a "progression" towards female self-awareness. We must also keep in mind Kissel's theory that "inclusion and connection" are the keys to Godwin's heroines. Foremost, however, one must acknowledge that the quest for female identity is a common thread woven throughout Godwin's novels, but then, we must continue not only to interrogate how that transformation/progression/connection regarding female identity might occur, but also where that transformation/progression/connection is witnessed and located. At times, it seems as though Godwin herself struggles to know just how to define/locate female identity or how to demonstrate "transformation" and "progression" in her female characters' identities. And, while I do believe there is both a steady "progression" and a "transformation" of female identity demonstrated in Godwin's work, I also believe that Godwin purposefully shifts the focus of *location* of female identity in her novels from the body, to the mind, to the soul.

Methodology To Study Body, Mind, Soul

Even as each forthcoming chapter will separately address the concepts of body, mind, and soul, this section of the introduction will foreground how I intend to examine each of these topics in both a more generalized fashion, as well as in

terms of a specific, close examination relating how a Christian Theistic worldview is reflected in/through Godwin's novels as well as my own analysis of Godwin's work; this worldview indicates foremost that human beings, and the human experience, are first intrinsically valuable because they have been crafted and uniquely created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and second that human beings and their identities can be understood in terms of the relationship(s) among "body," "mind," and "soul" (Deuteronomy 6:4)—all elements equally valuable, working together to form a distinct human identity.

Throughout the study, then, I use both diachronic and synchronic techniques, that is, I trace the uses of "body," "mind," and "soul" both individually and collectively as recurring elements/themes used throughout Godwin's twelve novels as a means to explore, define, and locate female identity. This approach means that, at times, my analysis will extend from the western dualistic tradition, examining one element in terms of another; yet, as my dichotomous analysis expands to include exploration into the concept of "wholeness," I will also shift to a more monistic analysis where reality and human beings are viewed more so "as a whole...as one absolute substance" (Cooper18). This type of analysis indicates that this dissertation also examines the intermingling, overlapping spaces where Godwin's texts reflect and build on each other, for even as Godwin progressively builds on these concepts of "body," "mind," and "soul" as a basis for her female characters' identities, she also merges these concepts to reflect a theory or vision of "wholeness," something her female characters ultimately seek. This part of the study is synoptic, in that, I believe each of Godwin's novels

advances a single theory/vision of “wholeness,” wholeness being the ultimate state achieved, reflecting a self-actualized female identity—“wholeness” becomes the remedy for a fractured, fragmented female identity, a notion upheld by Westernized Christian theology and a Theistic worldview, mindsets reflected in/through Godwin’s Southern Appalachian culture as well as in her nonfiction work *Heart*, as mentioned above.

Before I continue, however, I must establish my use of certain terminology. Of primary importance are the terms “body,” “mind,” and “soul.” While these terms are often tossed about in daily conversation, all with various slippery and sundry meanings, meanings that have shifted through time and translation, it becomes immanently clear that these terms require solid definitions in order to establish common ground.

Each of these terms I define by using combinations of Feminist theory, Feminist theology, and/or Christian theology along with westernized concepts of philosophy and a generalized Christian Theistic worldview. Each of these ideologies and theories first defines, in my estimation, elements of what it means to be human, and secondly, each of these elements explains, in some way, that human life and the human experience are intrinsically valuable. Altogether, these ideologies place value on the shared human experience, but they also value the experiences of the individual. The value placed on human experience, then, connects Christian Feminist Theology and Feminist Theory even as both of these ideologies relate the value of the human being by emphasizing a trinity of consciousness, a human identity that is composed of body, mind, and soul. As

Carol Ochs points out in *Women and Spirituality*: “We need our full humanity to achieve spirituality” (5). Ochs continues to explain that theology and epistemology are two components of spirituality and that spirituality is ultimately related to achieving “wholeness” (5). My analysis of Godwin’s novels extends from this foundation.

Body (*Soma*)

Making a spectacle out of oneself seemed a specifically feminine danger. The danger was of an exposure. ... For a woman, making a spectacle out of herself had more to do with a kind of inadvertency and loss of boundaries. (Russo 318)

In Western Christian theology, the intimate connection between religion and sexual experience has its basis in Incarnation—the Word made flesh, the spirit joined with the body—and the promise that humans participate in this divine conjunction. (Morey 3)

The human body can be defined as the “main portion of the human, a portion of matter, a material organism, the corporeal nature of a human, flesh” (*OED*). Or perhaps more commonly described, the body is, “a thing which exists and occupies space, that which is perceptible to the senses, matter” (*OED*). Regardless, the body is “outer,” it is often referred to as “the shell,” or a “covering,” and it risks exposure because it exists as “outer,” matter existing in both time and space. Such definitions are problematic, however, because they fail to give the body any kind of value beyond “matter” or “flesh.”

Christian Theology complicates these definitions and maintains that while the body is certainly the physical, the material element of the human being, this

material element was created from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7), crafted in the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27), and ever remains the living corporeal container, a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Corinthians 6:15, 19). In fact, the body itself, and its symbolism, remains vitally important throughout Christian theology, especially with the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, God in human flesh. Further, the “flesh” throughout Christian theology begins to be perceived as the “corruptible,” the “lesser” part of the human being, an element to be subjected by/through the mind or the soul, thus creating a hierarchal dichotomy where “body” routinely becomes the lower form. Even so, with Christian Theism, the body remains valuable, important to the human physical and spiritual experience.

Feminist scholars, too, understand the value and importance of “the body” in terms of how its appearance contributes to the (re)shaping and formation of female identity. Feminist theorists, however, often seek to undermine and subvert harmful dichotomous trends of thought mentioned above, instead embracing the (female) body as inherent to the female experience. Nevertheless, the body remains vitally important to both theories of feminism and (feminist) Christian theology. For even as feminists note the body as important, they seek to explore the body and its meaning(s) as something more immediate, more tangible—as a text, a politically inscribed surface. Likewise, feminist theorists contend that the body is a gendered, culturally and socially constructed text. The body, then, is generally recognized as each or a combination of these definitions, even as each element is important to the construction of identity.

As Lilian Calles Barger writes of the female body in *Eve's Revenge*, "Our body tells us something about who we are. My body is not simply a hunk of flesh. My femaleness and my race are not irrelevant biological accidents; they inform my very being" (31). Therefore, in my analysis, I use the term "body," in several distinct ways, ways that both incorporate and expand the aforementioned definitions. The introduction to Chapter Two, "Writing the Body," further defines the term "body" as I specifically apply it both to female identity and Godwin's first two novels, *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*. When I refer to "body," in general, however, I mean first the fleshly incarnation of human beings, their outer coverings. This definition, however, must be expanded to include body as related to physicality, the flesh, carnality, sexuality, and the body as appetitive.

In addition, body, is also referred to as *soma*, meaning the outer part of an organism in its entirety, or the central part of the human being in opposition to the mind and/or spirit. As Alison Piepmeier contends in *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America*, the body is a representative of the "inner" life/self forced or made "outer." Piepmeier uses the phrase "out in public" to identify the "outer" qualities, the physicality of the body, when she writes, "the phrase connotes visibility, freedom, agency. It suggests a body taking up space and moving through the world of commerce, government, or celebrity...the phrase may also suggest transgression or deviance" (1).

Here, the "body" comes to represent not only "outer," the public, but also the political, linking the (female) body to Feminist theory. Bodies move through space and time; they are the (inner) "self" on display; bodies encapsulate

movement and freedom, agency. In Chapter Two, then, I examine specific aspects/types of the female body—the Southern Belle figure, the female body as object, the body as testimony, and the grotesque figure—as they pertain to Godwin’s first two novels. In addition, Chapter Two examines the mind/body and soul/body dichotomies. Chapter Three and Chapter Four continue this analysis as I examine the grotesque and the dis-abled (female) body as it pertains to female identity. Chapter Four will also address “sin” and “sex/uality” as they relate to female identity and the female body.

The “body” remains central throughout Godwin’s fiction, even as the primary focus on the body as female identity from her first novels shifts to mind as the locus of female identity in her later novels. Further, concepts of feminist theology, feminist theory, and women’s spirituality all latch onto the female body as not only an engendered site of positive identity formation, resistance, and wholeness, but also as a site of contestation and divisiveness. The gendered, biological body showcases difference, a difference which can be used both positively as a site of resistance and agency and negatively as a predetermined site of weakness, of femaleness often viewed as “other.” Feminist theory seeks equality through the body, seeks to abolish the viewpoint of female body as “other.” Similarly, Feminist theology is also a

critical, contextual, constructive, and creative re-reading and re-writing of Christian theology. It regards women—and *their bodies*, perspectives, and experiences—as relevant to the agenda of Christian theologians and advocates them as subjects of

theological discourses and as full citizens of the church. (Watson 2-3)

Further, theories of “women’s spirituality” *begin* with the female body just as Maria Harris, in *Dance of the Spirit*, writes that “[spiritual] awakening begins with our senses and our bodiliness,” by accepting, valuing, and loving the female body (8). Harris continues, “Too much spirituality from the past, both in the Eastern and Western worlds, has taught withdrawal from and denial of the body, and even doing violence to the body” (8). In a later chapter Harris makes the connection of the body and spirituality, relating this to a “fullness” and “wholeness” of female identity. One of the strongest links between Feminist theory, Feminist theology, and women’s spirituality, then, is that of embracing the female body as a vital aspect of female identity. In fact, while, in general, the frameworks of Feminist theology, Feminist theory, and women’s spirituality may seem at odds with one another, they are not, for even as French feminist, Helene Cixous advocates that:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies...woman must put herself in the text—as into the world and history—by her own movement. (Cixous 334)

Natalie Watson, in *Feminist Theology*, calls not only for “inclusion” of feminist ideas into Christian texts, texts including the Bible, but also for liberation, for the transformation of theological concepts, methods, language, and imagery into a more holistic theology...not by discarding the key

symbols of Christianity altogether, but by identifying dis-empowering readings of them and constructing and proposing new readings that advocate the full humanity of women. (Watson 3)

Watson contends that the Christian tradition, then, becomes a conduit, a resource for feminists who seek “the full humanity of women and their equality with men—[values] inherent within the Christian tradition, but also distorted through patriarchal thinking” (3). Feminist theology, then, becomes an advocate for “wholeness,” one which embraces the female body, mind, and soul.

The second chapter of this dissertation will first introduce, historicize, and contextualize conceptualizations of the female body as a social construct to female identity. This introductory section will be brief, but based in feminist theory; it will be used as an introduction to the section of Chapter Two entitled, “‘I am divided against myself’: Female Identity and the Body in Godwin’s *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*.” This second chapter will closely examine the ways in which Godwin uses the female body to construct and/or deconstruct female identity and/or how Godwin uses the female body as a means to (dis)empower her female protagonists. Largely the chapter will focus on female identity in/through the portrayal of the female body in Godwin’s earliest novels, *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*. In addition, this chapter will examine briefly female identity in relation to hunger, appetite, and sexuality—all elements pertaining to conceptions about the female body.

Mind (*Geymynd*)

In this chain and continuum, I am but one link.
The story is me, neither me nor mine. (Minh-ha,
Woman Native Other 122)

Intense belief in and love for the Southern
legend had been bred into them as children and
could not be bred out again simply by taking
thought... (Cash 377)

But always for [the Southerner] the point of the
story is the story. (Weaver 16)

In today's American culture, the word "mind" conjures up ideas about an immaterial, internal site, a space where human thought processes originate and take shape; the mind, in general, becomes defined as the site of the unconscious, subconscious, or preconscious states, and/or the seat of rational thought. Carol Ochs, however, contends that the mind has to do with perceptions of reality, that the mind contains the "categories of ... understanding that filter all our perceptions" (49). The sensory information gathered by our bodily experiences are interpreted, sorted out, by the mind—body/mind, in that way, are not separate, but unified, working together. In contrast to this idea, however, many western philosophers have maintained that "the mind is a faculty of the soul" (Moreland and Rae 21), merging then mind/soul instead of mind/body. All of these may be accurate descriptions of the mind; however, with this study, I would like to both keep and elaborate on the above definitions of the word "mind," for the mind can certainly be associated with many of the above

descriptors; however, for the purpose of this study, we must complicate the usage of the term “mind.”

To be sure, the “mind,” is representative of the “interiority” of the human experience; however, defining the “mind” needs expansion, especially in terms of its application to Godwin’s fiction. The Old English word, “geymynd,” and Middle English word “minde,” relate that our contemporary American English word “mind” springs more so from the concepts of “memory,” “reminder,” “recollection,” or “remembrance” (*OED*). Each of these terms can be related directly, then, to the study of the Southern Appalachian literary tradition, where the story and the storyteller, history and myth, the past and the present, recollection and memory, collide into a discussion about the role of the individual versus the role of the individual within a community, a community which is largely dependent on specific legacy, on heritage, on the (re)circulation of stories and myths of the Southern Appalachian region. Louis D. Rubin writes of the importance of the community and individual relationship in *The Mocking Bird in the Gum Tree: A Literary Gallimaufry*: “...to live where one’s identity is embodied in rituals and institutions, involves a prescribed and conspicuous community role, against and within which the nature of one’s personal needs and wishes may be delineated and the costs identified and understood” (33). Here, Rubin underscores the conflated role that the individual plays within a community, this role that has been particularly relevant to Southern Appalachian fiction, but also specifically germane to Godwin’s fiction, a fiction that grows from that Southern Appalachian literary tradition.

Because each of these aforementioned elements has to do with continuity—both of the community and of the individual—a particular “mindset” is required, a “mindset” related directly to humanity and to its relation to a particular place and culture: “Human identity in time becomes human involvement in a place—a specific, concrete, tangible locus of emotional states” (Rubin, *Mocking Bird* 33). Further, the term “mind” often then connects to a “particular way of thinking,” a pattern of thought which influences and determines behavior, that is, a “particular way of doing things”; in this way, then, “mind” becomes related to a particular tradition, to the ideals, customs, and social conscience—the social mores—of a particular culture or a particular region—in Godwin’s case that region is Southern Appalachia. An emphasis on this aspect of the “mind,” “memory,” and “mindset” is highly important to understanding Godwin’s fiction, for her fiction emerges out of a particular “mind,” a particular culture, and a particular literary tradition. Godwin’s creative nonfiction piece, “Uncle Orphy,” from Joyce Dyer’s collection *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers*, underscores Godwin’s love of place, as well as the role of the individual within a community and/or family; in this instance, the figure that binds together community, family, storytelling, and place is Godwin’s real-life great uncle, Orpha Rogers—fictional incarnations of “Uncle Orphy” show up in the form of Uncle Osgood in *A Mother and Two Daughters*, Uncle Ambrose in *Violet Clay*, and Uncle Iz in *The Odd Woman*. Though the fusion of the “real” Uncle Orphy to his fictional counterparts of Uncle Iz and Uncle Osgood is just one instance of the

conflated roles of the individual, community, storytelling and place, there are countless others woven throughout Godwin's fiction.

The act of storytelling remains extremely relevant to Godwin's fiction and this, too, relates to the "mind," with the (re)generation of stories which help piece together the human experience and individual identity as they relate to a particular people and a particular place. Central to the plot of *The Odd Woman*, *Violet Clay*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *The Finishing School*, *A Southern Family*, *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, *The Good Husband*, and *Evensong* is the heavy emphasis on interwoven community and family stories, stories remembered and retold by the novels' primary characters; within each of these novels, there is a deliberate and constructed mythology that helps to (re)stabilize Godwin's larger narratives. Further, in each of these novels, the act of storytelling generates a necessary healing—for the individual and, at times, the community. The individual protagonist's identity is linked strongly with her ability to both listen to and (re)tell the family and community stories. With the second shift, then, it is clear that Godwin focuses far more on the "mind" and female identity than she does on the body and/or the soul and female identity.

In addition to storytelling and "mindset," the "mind" also has associations with formal education as well as psychological implications and associations; these too are relevant to the second shift in Godwin's writing. I will be using the term "mind" in a number of ways, ways which encompass not only its contemporary meaning as a site/space where our thought processes take place (including the thoughtful acts of creativity and analysis), but also in terms of how

the mind relates to the memory (including the particular and collective memory of family/community/culture through the acts of mythmaking and storytelling). In addition, the “mind” in Godwin’s novels is often explored through the subconscious/unconscious life (through Godwin’s use of dreams, sleep, and sleeplessness in her novels). Further, with the second shift in Godwin’s writing, it is clear that Godwin uses “the mind” as a means to further establish a changing female identity; she uses the mind, though, in specific ways—as a site of thought/intellect/creativity. In addition, Godwin employs the “mind” in terms of its connection to memory and storytelling and also by using the themes of sleep, dreams, and sleeplessness throughout her work. Using the mind, then, in these specific ways, we find that the mind becomes the central location for female identity. As Godwin’s writing progresses and her female characters develop more agency, her characters consistently become more associated with the mind as a way of determining their primary identity.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, “Writing the Mind,” I will first further develop, historicize, and contextualize the concept of “the mind” as it has been developed in and through a legacy of western metaphysics and/or American, particularly Southern, literature/culture. As mentioned previously, Godwin’s female characters in the mid-1970s and 1980s seem less apt to associate their identities with their female bodies, but rather these female characters begin defining themselves by their careers, many of which are careers linked to “the mind” in some way. For instance, both Jane Clifford in *The Odd Woman* and Cate Strickland from *A Mother and Two Daughters* are professors whose

identities are very much related to their “minds.” In *A Southern Family* and *A Mother and Two Daughters* education, writing, and creativity are points of contention among several of the key female characters. In addition to an emphasis on female identity and “the mind,” through her characters’ careers and education, Godwin also begins using intertextual literary references in her novels. This, too, seems like a rhetorical strategy geared toward associating her female protagonists’ identities with “the mind.” For instance, the title of *The Odd Woman* is itself an intertextual reference to George Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893); in addition, because Jane Clifford is a literature professor, there are countless intertextual literary references to investigate in this novel, references which, in turn, help illuminate the text. In addition, we see beginning with this novel, Godwin’s journey into the “female mind” via the (re)construction of dreams and memory. Another section of Chapter Three entitled “In Search of the Enema Bandit: Mind, Memory, and Intertextual Madness in Godwin’s *The Odd Woman*,” specifically examines *The Odd Woman*, its emphasis on “the mind” as a means to define female identity, its themes of memory/storytelling/mind, and its intertextual literary references.

Intersections of female identity and the body will also be examined to show the contrast and shifts from Godwin’s earliest novels. Another part of this chapter on the mind will examine *A Mother and Two Daughters* and *A Southern Family* in terms of Godwin’s emphasis on the mind and the construction of female identity; the tension between female empowerment and education that exists between the female characters in these two novels will be examined.

Largely the female characters in these novels are defined by one another in various ways. This chapter will explore the differences in female identity as they pertain to defining female identity in/through “the mind.” Because intertextual literary references remain a constant in Godwin’s works, they will also be identified and explored as support for Godwin’s shift in emphasis to “the mind” and female identity.

Soul (*Psyche*)

We must see our travails not as punishments but as birthpangs attending the emergence of a “new creature” who is evolving to the limit spiritually as well as merely biologically. (Webbe, *The Night and Nothing* 16)

The novelist doesn’t write about people in a vacuum; he writes about people in a world where something is obviously lacking, where there is the general mystery of incompleteness and the particular tragedy of our own times to be demonstrated, and the novelist tries to give you, within the form of the book, a total experience of human nature at any time. For this reason the greatest dramas naturally involve the salvation or loss of the soul. Where there is no belief in the soul, there is very little drama. (O’Connor 167)

The soul, in contrast to the mind and the body, often refers more so to one’s “emotional consciousness” (Gutzke 32). Sometimes, the soul pertains to “a life principle, a ground of sentience” (Moreland and Rae 203), or “the soul can be a thinking or feeling state” (203), thus merging mind and soul. J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney maintain that “the soul is the nonmaterial ego of man in its ordinary relationships with earthly and physical things” (564). That statement

alludes to the relationship between “the physical,” the body, and the spiritual, the soul, creating again a point of convergence within human personhood.

Additionally, however, the soul is often regarded as distinct, as separate, from the body and mind. Other times, the soul is obviously merged with the body or merged with the mind to form a more cogent form of human existence, one that functions harmoniously or holistically. For instance, in Christian theology, the actions of the body or the thoughts of the mind can certainly impact the state of the soul; thus, in this instance, body, mind, and soul converge because of the way they interrelate. Regardless, it is generally agreed upon in western thought, as well as in the Christian tradition, that the soul is the immortal coil, the non-physical portion of a human being, the element that lives on after the death of the body—thus separating soul from body in some way; it is the soul that transcends the temporal (material, body) and is capable of either (eternal) damnation (via sin/death/Hell) or redemption (via salvation through a relationship with God) in a future state of being (Heaven/Hell). This concept of the body being separate(d) from the soul is one that emphasizes a classic dichotomous rationale supported by western thought, a mode of thinking, a mindset, very much present in Godwin’s earliest works.

Often referred to as the “principle” part of humans, or the “disembodied spirit” (OED), the soul is sometimes viewed as the antithesis of the body; in western tradition and Christian thought, the soul can be elevated, can transcend and control the appetites and drives of the body. Further definitions indicate that the soul can refer to the central, integral part, the *vital core*, that is, the *soul part*

of an object, a property-thing, or a human being. With this dissertation, however, I define the soul as that intangible, spiritual part, the immortal essence, of human personhood, the part that is directly linked to “the spirit” (*esprit*). “Spirit” is often defined in Christian theological terms as the essence of being alive, traced to the “breath of God” (Genesis 2:7). This definition of the soul, then, is central to western modes of thinking, those supported by Christianity and upheld by a particular mode of thinking related to Southern Appalachian culture just as Flannery O’Connor reiterates in the above quote and also in her essay, “The Grotesque in Southern Fiction”: “...the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted. The Southerner, who isn’t convinced of it, is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God. Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive” (45). Here O’Connor traces the notion of being “created in the image of God” to a particular mode of thinking (and culture), and just as O’Connor embraces the “mystery” associated with the soul, with Christianity, so does Godwin. Godwin’s associations to Christianity (and the soul), however, are linked more concretely with the Episcopalian faith tradition rather than Catholicism.

Godwin’s ties to religion and Christianity are mostly linked to the Episcopalian denomination, a denomination dependent largely on ritual, liturgy, and a strong sense of tradition. Two of Godwin’s later novels, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* and *Evensong* in particular, focus directly on the role of the Episcopal Church and its relationship to the cultivation of the “soul,” “female identity,” and “wholeness.” Interestingly enough, one of Godwin’s most influential

mentors was the late Reverend Gale D. Webbe, an Episcopal minister, with whom Godwin cultivated a mentor relationship for over thirty years. Godwin writes of his influence and that of the Episcopal Church in the introduction to Webbe's book, *Sawdust and Incense*, and in her article, "Farewell to a Mentor," in *The Living Church*. The associations with the Episcopal Church then are relevant to Godwin's fiction—both as a source of inspiration and as a means to unraveling the importance of "the soul" to (female) identity and Godwin's fiction—concepts which will be further explored in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

Historically, then, while Christianity has had a profound impact on the Southern Appalachian literary tradition, with its solid emphasis on redemption and/or damnation, the Episcopal Church has had a solid influence on Godwin's fiction; this again, connects Godwin to the larger Southern Appalachian literary tradition. O'Connor concludes this about such connections: "The Southern writer is forced from all sides to make his gaze extend beyond the surface, beyond mere problems, until it touches that realm which is the concern of prophets and poets" (45). Extending "beyond the surface," then, certainly encompasses the "realm" of the spiritual and the soul.

The soul is, of course, a combination of the definitions mentioned above; however defined, it remains the core of human existence because it is always linked to something more than the tangible, something both inside and outside the self, an essence that both extends beyond the material, the physical, and also unites the tangible with the intangible—it "makes whole." "Wholeness" emerges with the ultimate theme of Godwin's later work. In Godwin's later work,

there is again a definite shift toward female identity and its connections to the soul; this is a shift inward, not to the mind, but instead to the yearnings of the soul, the desire to be connected to more than the dictates of the body and mind, but as O'Connor relates to "a total experience of human nature at any time" (167); this emphasis most clearly relates to the call of the soul, the call for a connection greater than that of family or community or culture.

The fourth chapter, "Writing the Soul," will first briefly introduce, trace, and examine the complex concept of "the soul" as presented by contemporary western philosophers, (Christian) theologians, and psychologists as it pertains to the understanding of Godwin's work and the continued shift in "location" of her female protagonists' identities. Godwin's novels of the 1990s have a heavy focus on the relation of the soul to female identity; three of her later novels, *The Good Husband*, *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, and *Evensong*, all transverse the concept of the soul or the soul's journey as it pertains to female identity and self-actualization. One particular section of this chapter entitled "*The Good Husband* & 'The Great Uncouth,'" will focus again on the intertextual literary references. But more than that, this section of the chapter will also examine the ways in which Godwin begins to merge body/mind/soul in compelling ways to reformulate female identity around the concept of "wholeness." This chapter will demonstrate how body/mind/soul intersect—converge and collide—to reshape female identity. In turn, the last section of this chapter, entitled "'A falling short from your totality': Sin, the Soul, and the 'Self' in Godwin's *Father Melancholy's Daughter* and *Evensong*," will closely analyze the character of Margaret Gower. This chapter

will show that these two novels comprise a pilgrimage, a spiritual quest of the soul, for Margaret so that she can become “whole”—her female identity becomes a convergence of body, mind, and soul. Margaret’s quest for self collides with the journey of her soul to make her identity more complete—“whole.”

The last two chapters of my dissertation will not only pinpoint the ways in which Godwin shifts to an emphasis on the soul and the forging of female identity, but they will also examine the concepts of “wholeness” and “spirituality” (as it pertains to the concept of “wholeness”). Feminist theologian and scholar, Ursula King writes in *Woman and Spirituality* that: “Spirituality...has to do with an age-old human quest to seek fulfillment, liberation...transcendence amidst the welter of human experience” (5). King’s definition resonates throughout Godwin’s fiction, in that, so many of Godwin’s female characters are on a quest; they are seeking “fulfillment,” “liberation,” in the transcendent human (female) experience. King, then, emphasizes the dynamics of spirituality: “Spirituality must not be understood as something apart from or as something added on to life. Rather, it is something which permeates all human activities and experience rather than being additional to them. Spirituality can be described as a process of transformation and growth, an organic and dynamic part of human development, of both individual and society...” (King 5). King’s assertions here allude to Godwin’s concept of “wholeness,” the merging of body, mind, and soul to forge female identity. Maria Harris in *Dance of the Spirit* explains that women must be awakened to their spirituality, and that “awakening begins with our senses and our bodiliness” (8). Harris continues, “Too much spirituality from the past, both in

the Eastern and Western worlds, has taught withdrawal from the denial of the body, and even doing violence to the body” (8). This can be denial of sexual pleasure, denial of food in order to (re)shape the body, denial of voice or act/ion agency; this denial of “body” and the bodily experience permeate Godwin’s earliest novels. As the location of female identity shifts from body, to mind, to soul, a theory of “wholeness” becomes quite evident. For this reason, the “spiritual,” in a sense, relates most to Godwin’s theory of “wholeness” and female identity, for it is with the “spirit” that body, mind, and soul may merge.

As Carol Ochs points out, spirituality is “the process of coming into relationship with reality” (10); this process of “becoming,” then, is one which blossoms from an exploration of the “body” and the “grotesque” discussed in Chapter Two to a more mature concept of “wholeness” as a “process.” Ochs continues to define spirituality as a “process,” one that involves not only the individual, but also the community and a collective history (10), thus linking the term “mind” as explored in Chapter Three. Ultimately, however, the theory of “wholeness” is not one which separates or divides, but rather it is one that emphasizes all parts working in conjunction with one another. Ochs writes, “Spirituality has been defined in a general, inclusive manner as an exploration of what is involved in becoming human” (10).

Ochs’ definition is significant to Godwin’s work in several ways; Ochs’ emphasis on “becoming” rather than “being” is of particular interest. “Being” versus “becoming” are central to understanding Godwin’s work. Simply stated: Godwin’s early female protagonists focus on “being,” on existing, coping with

their current lives, their current states of being; later protagonists focus on, and almost embrace their imperfections, accepting their flaws as part of the process of “becoming.” “Becoming,” then, is vitally important in its connection to “wholeness,” female identity, and spirituality. Further, the “spiritual” in many ways relates significantly to the “mystery,” the “mystical,” and the “divine” elements associated with the Southern literary tradition.

Maria Harris in *Dance of the Spirit* emphasizes the ways in which “mystery” specifically relates to the merging and reconciliation of body, mind, and soul, and thus to a better understanding of “wholeness” as located through a “practiced spirituality,” “Practiced spirituality” requires action, and therefore, incorporates and involves the integration of body to the mind and soul. Harris writes, “As we reflect on our lives...we will undoubtedly be able to name the practices that foster the integration of our bodies to our spirits...things we do regularly that lead us to experience wholeness: Among them are art, sports, and sexuality...we need to take ownership of the bodily work we do” (130), the physical actions that link body to mind and soul, to wholeness. Harris also maintains that spiritual beings must recognize the ways in which the “self” has been carelessly and systematically divided by cultures and societies; the acknowledgment of that division will then lead to “healing,” to the reconciliation of body, mind, and soul. Harris clarifies the connection:

Awakening to the pervasiveness of division alerts us to the power in recognizing and cultivating those practices in our lives that at first we may not think of, or realize, as practices of spirituality. These

are the practices that are bodily in origin, but move in the direction of making us and our societies whole. Those practices may not be named as 'spiritual,' but in actuality they are, for they place us at the center of living and enable us to dwell with wholeness in the Mystery. (Harris 129)

Embodiment is another concept important to the study of body, mind, soul and the fiction of Gail Godwin. Embodiment relates directly to spirituality, to "wholeness," to "becoming" versus "being." As Harris points out, embodiment is caught up in action, in doing and claiming; she writes that when we embody, we "take ownership of the bodily work we do" (130). Further, "embodiment as a spiritual discipline strengthens several dis-coveries. One is the truth we have already considered that in today's spirituality we find God not by escaping from life, or from our bodies, but in a more complete involvement in life. We find God in the integration of body and spirit" (129).

Spirituality, then, becomes an integral part of understanding "wholeness" and the "holistic" side of the human experience—it is the merging, in essence, of body, mind, and soul. An emphasis on embodiment and spirituality, then, helps to better illuminate Godwin's emphasis on "wholeness" in later novels.

The conclusion, Chapter Five, "Collisions & Convergences: Body, Mind, Soul and Female Identity," will focus on the overall findings from my close examination of Godwin's novels. Mainly the chapter will reiterate the progression of the "location" of female identity from "the body" in Godwin's earliest novels, to "the mind" to "the soul"; the last chapter will also focus on the overlappings of

body, mind, soul as they form a “wholeness” (through spirituality) in female identity. That “wholeness” is something Godwin seeks to achieve with her female characters and does so—but not until her later novels. This final chapter will again contextualize Godwin as a visionary Southern Appalachian writer; it will reiterate the complexities demonstrated with her novels/female characters; it will express a need for Godwin to be included not only in local, regional American literature courses and anthologies; and it will also express a call for Godwin’s work to be accepted on a wider scale.

CHAPTER TWO

WRITING THE BODY

There is something molten in me. I do not know how else to begin. To begin again, all over again, as if in each attempt something needs to be recast, rekindled, some bond, some compact between flesh, clothing, and words. There is something incendiary in me and it has to be with being female, here, now, in America. And those words, markers of gender, of time, of site all have an extraordinary valency in me. When they brush up against each other, each of those markers—"female," "here," "now," "America"—there is something quite unstable in the atmosphere they set up. I do not have a steady, taken-for-granted compact with my body. Nor indeed with language. Yet it is only as my body enters into, coasts through, living in language, that I can make sense. (Alexander 144)

Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth. (Cixous 338)

"I am divided against myself": Female Identity and the Body
in Godwin's *The Perfectionists* & *Glass People*

Introduction: Manifestations of the Female Body in the Novels of Gail Godwin

My analysis of the female body as portrayed throughout the novels of Gail Godwin is three-fold. It is my contention that Godwin deftly utilizes three different traditions when constructing the identities of her female protagonists, each in conjunction with a specific understanding of the female body: 1.) the legacy of the mind/body dichotomy, 2.) the figure of the Southern Belle, 3.) the element of the Grotesque. Further, Godwin's use of these three "traditions" is central to understanding the "progression" toward wholeness and the autonomous female

identity found in her later novels. Moreover, the depiction of the female body—while peripherally important in each of her twelve novels—remains vitally important in her first three novels, for with these novels Godwin establishes the female body as a paradigm for interrogating and negotiating the construction of female identity. Two of these novels, *The Perfectionists* (1970) and *Glass People* (1972), will be discussed in detail. *Violet Clay* (1974) will be used throughout the dissertation as point of comparison to the novels written before and after its publication. Before analyzing Godwin's use of the aforementioned traditions of thought associated with the body, it is important, first, to establish a context and provide a base definition for "the body" and each of the "traditions" that I believe Godwin uses to define the female body. The first tradition relies heavily on an investigation into the legacy of the mind-body dichotomy present in Western thought; the others rely more on an investigation of another legacy, that found in the Southern Appalachian literary tradition.

The Mind/Body Split and the Female Body

The block quotations at the beginning of this section demonstrate a renewed awareness of "the body" or the role and importance of "the body" as portrayed in/through literature and theory, an interest that has (re)surfaced within the last several decades, particularly as a concern among feminist scholars/theorists. Driven by the need to understand and express femaleness as something related to the body, but not limited by the body, feminists of the 1970s begin reacting against the Western tradition of thought that separates mind/body into a dichotomous hierarchy and then often casts "woman" as "the lesser" (the

body). During this time, feminists began countering the neat dualisms and binaries defined in/through most patriarchal cultures/societies, reacting strongly against the “oppositional definitions [where] one term has historically been privileged at the expense of the other, and [where] one has been linked with male, one with the female” (Warhol 331). Elizabeth Spelman in “Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views” elaborates on this traditional dualistic construct:

Part of the legacy from philosophy “proper,” that is, the issues that philosophers have addressed which are thought to be the serious province of philosophy, is the soul/body or mind/body distinction. ... Western philosophical tradition has not been noted for its celebration of the body, and ...women’s nature and women’s lives have long been associated with the body and bodily functions....
(33)

Spelman continues with her analysis: “...the body, or the irrational part of the soul, is seen as an enormous and annoying obstacle. ... The body’s relation to the soul is such that we are to think of the body vis-à-vis the soul as a tomb, a grave or prison, or as a barnacle or rocks holding down the soul” (36). So then, the body, through this legacy of Western thought, is always pitted against the soul; there is rarely a harmonious reconciliation between the two. The body is the “grave” or a “prison” of the soul; its connotations are negative. The body’s associations then with femaleness are mostly negative as well. The “fleshly”

representation for this “barnacle” of the soul becomes “woman’s body” or simply “woman.” Helen Michie in *The Flesh Made Word* explains:

Women...occupy an uneasy and shifting place at the intersection of body and its representation. While...throughout history [it has] been used as a metaphor for apprehending and domesticating the unknown, the normative body of...discourse is male. Women’s bodies occupy no such stable and comforting relation to the unknown; since they themselves are the unknowable, the impenetrable mystery, they are not so much vehicles of epistemological consolation as they are sources of change, disruption, and complication. (7)

Hence, historically and culturally women have been more linked with the body, less associated with the mind—divorced from the mind, from intellect, from creativity, from the act/ion of writing itself. Early French feminist theorists, then, were reacting against this ingrained system of thought, where even a woman’s access to words was confined to a patriarchal language and system of thought not her own. And, instead of thinking negatively about woman’s connection to the body, these theorists desired to celebrate woman’s association to the body, at the same time refusing the subordination of body to mind, sometimes even refusing to accept the separation between the two. As Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran discuss in *Scenes of the Apple*, held within this act of separating “woman” from writing, from creativity, there remains an intrinsic need to break “down the dualism of flesh and spirit that has traditionally devalued and silenced women”

(2).The task of “breaking down,” of “undoing” the hierarchy of the mind/body dualism is a daunting one; perhaps even more daunting is the task of solving the equation of *woman as body*. For even as there is the desire to break the dualism of mind/body, there is also the call to embrace “the body.” As Trinh T. Minh-ha points out in “Write Your Body and The Body in Theory,” “...we do not *have* bodies, we *are* our bodies” (258). Minh-ha continues, “We write—think and feel—(with) our entire bodies rather than only (with) our mind or hearts” (258). This sentiment is an echo of Helene Cixous’s cry for women to “write their bodies” heard two decades earlier. Perhaps then it is best to conclude that if women are to be body, then women should take control of how that body is represented in/through writing, literature, and images.

So then, how can one “write the body”? Is it possible to break the binary of mind/ body by reprioritizing the body and in essence “woman as body”? For centuries, the body has been relegated to a role of lesser importance when it comes to addressing the mind/body dichotomy found in the legacy of Western Metaphysics. Through Western ideology/cosmology/philosophy/religion, the body has often been regarded negatively—as anything from overly appetidinous, that is dependent upon rudimentary appetites and “primitive” drives (i.e. those “basic” needs associated with sexual desire, hunger, emotion, etc.), to a medium completely unreliable, depicted as a deceiver and a distracter from all things reliable and “pure.” “The body as animal, as appetite, as deceiver, as prison of the soul and confounder of its projects: these are the common images within Western philosophy,” explains Susan Bordo in *Unbearable Weight* (3).

According to this legacy of Western thought, “the body” has appetites, urges, and desires—irrational, “primitive” needs which must be repressed and subjugated for the betterment of the individual. Traditionally then, the mind (and at times, the spirit or the soul), is in direct contrast to (or even at war with) the body; the mind (or soul) in return is elevated to: “that which is not-body is the highest, the best, the noblest, the closest to God; that which is body is the albatross, the heavy drag on self-realization” (5). The mind/body “split” thus has had a lasting legacy, as reflected and recorded in the works of countless Western philosophers from Plato to De Cartes; that “split,” in turn, has been one that has continually haunted and informed the traditions of Western philosophy, ideology, and religion and is even reflected in today’s contemporary (westernized) societies, ideologies, and literatures. So then, what exactly is “the body”? Is it an “albatross”? And how is its portrayal in postmodern or contemporary literature significant to a discussion of literature as a whole?

Investigating the role of the body in literature seems important in many ways, for as Foucault points out in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, “the body is an inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity)...” (Foucault qtd. McNay 15). The body, then, is both a cultural and a historical—a socialized and a politicized—entity, one which is (re)inscribed by the daily actions/routines of a given individual; moreover, one’s culture has a direct grip on the body: “through routine, habitual activity, our bodies learn what is ‘inner’ and what is ‘outer’” (Bordo 16). The body, then, is the canvas, a visual,

physical representation of the “internal” *externalized*—a distinct cultural product. Further, not only are bodies the physical representation of the “inner,” part of the “self,” but as Bordo points out, bodies are what “mark” and define masculinity and femininity: “Not chiefly through ideology, but through the organization and regulation of time, space, and movements of our daily lives, our bodies are trained, shaped, and impressed with the stamp of prevailing historical forms of selfhood, desire, masculinity, femininity” (166). Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* further complicates this analysis:

...the body is figured as a mere instrument or medium for which a set of cultural meanings are not only externally related. But “the body” is itself a construction, as are the myriad ‘bodies’ that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender. (12-13)

Butler’s statement brings into the analysis of the body, the gendered body, and thus further complicates the concept of the body and its role in literature. The female gendered body (culturally constructed, an inscribed “text”) is one that has long been associated with “lack,” “absence,” or “otherness” as explained above. Even if gender is culturally constructed, historically and representationally, “woman” has historically and culturally, been “marked” as “other” by her “visible” body—first. How “woman” has been marked and defined as body then seems even more significant in understanding Godwin’s first novels.

Working through the philosophical legacy of mind over body, and using this same progression of thought, a series of hierarchical dualisms then emerge.

As Cixous points out in “The Newly Born Woman”:

Where is she?

Activity/passivity

Sun/Moon

Culture/ Nature

Day/Night

Father/Mother

Head/Heart

Intelligible/Palpable

Logos/Pathos

Form, convex, step, advance, semen, progress.

Matter, concave, ground—where steps are taken, holding-and

dumping-

ground.

Man

Woman (37)

Cixous concludes: “Always the same metaphor: we follow it, it carries us, beneath all its figure, wherever discourse is organized. If we read or speak, the same thread or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection” (37).

Traditionally, then, certain bodies (male bodies) have been privileged—culturally, politically, socially, historically—in Western ideology. Elizabeth Grosz maintains this hypothesis in *Volatile Bodies*: “Most relevant...is the correlation and the association of the mind/body opposition with the opposition between male and female, where man and mind, woman and body, become representationally aligned” (4). Female bodies, then, are not only “marked” as somehow “inferior” due to their association with the body, but more often, in the Western tradition, femaleness is designated as the body (i.e. female = body). Woman becomes body. And then, woman as body is “negativity, distraction from knowledge, seduction from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death” (Bordo 5). These connections and connotations become centrally important then as we think about femaleness and portrayals of the body in literature. The body understood as “inscribed,” a living “text” of culture, society, history is coupled with the tradition of Western Metaphysics, and that tradition of history, culture, and society has been recorded as markedly male-dominated—patriarchal. In this way, then, Bordo reminds us that contemporary constructions, representations, and depictions of the female body reflect that legacy of patriarchal reign: “imagination of the female body was of a socially shaped and historically ‘colonized’ territory, not a site of individual self-determination” (21). This access (or lack of access) to self-determination/self-actualization becomes vitally important as we examine the ways in which femaleness/the female body/woman has been portrayed

in/through/by (American) literature. Bordo asserts in *Unbearable Weight* that due to this legacy, this hierarchical dualism of male (mind) above female (body),

female bodies become docile bodies—bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, “improvement” through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress—central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women—we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification. Through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and the conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough. And at the farthest extremes, the practices of femininity may lead us to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death. (166)

It is clear that female bodies through this legacy of Western culture become “lack,” “other,” or even a physical “prison.” Not only that, but these bodies lack agency and the independent ability to “transform.” These internalizations of the female body’s “lack” then manifest themselves physically/somatically through:

Loss of mobility, loss of voice, inability to leave the home, feeding others while starving oneself, taking up space, whittling down the space one’s body takes up—all have symbolic meaning, all have political meaning under the varying rules governing the historical constructions of gender and the female body, often leading to female victimization. (Bordo 168)

Moreover, in Godwin's novels, "loss of mobility" becomes "containment" and "paralysis"; in her earliest novels, both Dane Empson and Francesca Bolt suffer from their inability to "transform," to define themselves. In addition, the "loss of voice" becomes extremely significant as Dane's words and thoughts slowly disintegrate into a self-imposed silence, while Francesca's husband constantly wishes she would not speak; both of these characters come to be primarily defined by their bodies in a number of ways.

The "othered" female body has at times been used as a physical site (a "text") of resistance to the often colonizing/disembodying/disempowering forces of patriarchy. The female body can be used, viewed, and "commonly considered a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private (ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, affects)" (Grosz 9). Thus, the physical presence of the (female) body makes external what is internal; it is an "exposure" of the inner self to the outside "world"; with bodily contact, a bodily encounter, the "interior" becomes "exterior"—exposed. Jean-Luc Nancy uses an analogy of the "skin" (the body) as the very outer covering of the internal, the means by which one can "expose" him/herself to others. Sara Ahmed concurs, stating that the skin (the body) is what "opens out," "[it/the skin] may open out a moment of undecideability, which is at once a rupture or breakage, where the subject risks interiority, where it meets and leaks into the world at large" (91).

Such is the case with the early novels of Gail Godwin where "the body," an "exposure" of the inner self, is expressed through the bodily re/actions;

resistance to/by/through the body then plays a central role in the (failed) development of her early female characters. In both *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*, the body, particularly the (female) body, is used as a “space” to “open out,” to make exterior what is interior, to make explicit those struggles toward “wholeness” and autonomous female identity. In these two novels the female body acts both as repressive and expressive. In addition, the (female) body is also objectified throughout these two novels; even as the body becomes a paradoxical site of enactment and resistance, it is also a source of pain, passivity and violence, in addition to a foundation for understanding and action—all which ultimately serve to illuminate, expand, or limit female identity through/by the body. With these two first novels, Godwin “writes the body”; she explores what it means to be “marked” female in a male-dominated culture. And while these two novels have somewhat ambiguous endings, I will argue that Godwin uses the female body throughout as both a living “text,” a “testimony” of sorts, as well as a site of resistance against the patriarchal representations of the mind/body dichotomy.

The Ideal of Southern Womanhood and the Objectified Female Body

The second way that Godwin uses the body is by subtly interrogating the traditional notions historically, culturally, and mythically associated with the figure of the Southern Lady. The Ideal of Southern Womanhood (as represented in the image of the Southern Lady and/or the Southern Belle) is another long and tedious tradition, one woven through Southern mythology and depicted throughout Southern literature. As pointed out in *Southern Women's Writing*:

Colonial to Contemporary, a collection of biographies and excerpts of Southern women's writing edited by Mary Louise Weaks and Carolyn Perry, "the myth of the southern lady finds its roots in the earliest years of settlement, and before that in the patriarchal system of England, which was transported over the seas by these immigrants to the New World" (3). This legacy, while started on another continent, in an earlier time, continues on American shores and finds a particularly strong footing in American mythology during the Antebellum period of the South. This is where an often embellished and idealized notion of Southern Womanhood was further (in)formed by a region's burgeoning culture and/or (re)produced by that region's literature. The Southern Lady or the Southern Belle has been a "type" long associated with both the South and its literature; this pervasive image has been used as a regulatory and normative image of (Southern) womanhood and is one that shows up in Godwin's novels, where her female characters' identities are once again "marked" by their bodies.

As defined by Anne Goodwyn Jones in the preface to *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, Southern ladies were raised to be "physically pure, fragile, and beautiful, socially dignified, cultured, and gracious, within the family sacrificial and submissive, yet if the occasion required, intelligent and brave" (xi). Further, Weaks and Perry explain that this "ideal" is one that, "depicts women in relation to their traditional locale, their home" (3); therefore, "[the] ideal wife was a lady of charm and delicacy, an ornament not to be blemished by work...[a] wife free from labors, a woman settled firmly on her pedestal..." (5). The Southern Lady becomes an "ornament," an "object," to be placed on a pedestal—admired from a

distance. Historian Anne Firor Scott, in *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics*, elaborates: “This marvelous creation was described as a submissive wife whose reason for being was to love, honor, obey and occasionally amuse her husband, to bring up his children and manage his household” (4). The life of the Southern Lady “was one long act of devotion—devotion to God, devotion to her husband, devotion to her children, devotion to her servants, to the poor, to humanity” (Page qtd. in Scott 5). Typically, these women were, “instructed to please their husbands, attend to their physical needs, cover up their indiscretions, and give them no cause for worry” (15). These combined, and often contradictory, concepts of the “ideal,” then, begin to formulate a specific “image,” an ideal that encompasses what it not only means to be a an Ideal Southern Woman, but also it is a comment on what it means to be part of a Southern culture in general. Richard King reiterates the vital role of the Southern woman and its complications: “...she was supposed to display competence, initiative, and energy. But she remained a shadowy figure, always there and ever necessary, but rarely emerging in full force...” (35). She is an “image,” a “shadowy figure,” one necessary to keep in place a certain ideology, for as Jones reminds us, the Ideal of Southern Womanhood represented “more than just a fragile flower, the image of the southern lady represents her culture’s idea of religious, moral, sexual, racial and social perfection” (9). Jones continues, “...the function of southern womanhood has been to justify the perpetuation of the hegemony of the male and upper middle classes, and the white race” (10). As Jones concludes in her introduction, the Ideal of Southern Womanhood, “did not

serve only as a norm for individual behavior; it became always a central symbol for the South's idea of itself" (xii). Therefore, as Scott concludes in "The Image: Queen of the Home," there is a tension between the "real" and the "ideal," for the "ideal" is "an unattainable perfection" (13). Even if "unattainable" in reality, the South's cultural identity came to rest on this image, this "ideal" of Southern Womanhood.

This "ideal," however, was problematic in a number of ways. As King's *A Southern Renaissance*, Scott's *The Southern Lady*, Clinton's *The Plantation Mistress*, and Seidel's *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* all conclude, there was no way in which the image could overcome reality long term. Reality would always interfere with attempts at perfection. Also problematic are the racial and social class implications of the "ideal"; this "ideal" could only exist for those white women of an upper social class. Thus, especially during the Antebellum period of the South, the "ideal" was *embodied* by only a certain few. Even so, as Minrose Gwin points out in *Black and White Women of the Old South*, all women of the Old South—black or white—lacked a right to their own bodies: "Plantation Mistress or slave, southern womanhood served the patriarchal master" (46). Race here complicates gender roles (and vice versa), but both race and gender are relevant to understanding the body as a "marker," as "identifier." Despite the racial implications of such an image, it remains, and the Ideal of Southern Womanhood becomes inextricably connected to the "embodiment" of those aforementioned "virtues," and the embodiment of those aforementioned "virtues" of Southern Womanhood becomes an important link in analyzing Godwin's work.

The *embodiment* of the standard—that of the Ideal of Southern Womanhood—becomes associated with the flesh, the body. In Godwin’s fiction, the female (white) body is the incarnation, the concrete representation that often challenges the traditional “ideal” of Southern Womanhood. The body is the site of resistance, the fleshy “canvas” on which the “ideal” of Southern Womanhood is etched, challenged, and/or transgressed. We see this specifically in Godwin’s earliest novels, where Dane, from *The Perfectionists*, is a reluctant wife and mother, resisting the “traditional” roles associated with Southern Womanhood. While Francesca, the main character in *Glass People*, is *the embodiment* of the Ideal of Southern Womanhood (though many of her actions in the novel may align her character more so with what Betina Entzminger calls the “bad belle”).

The “ideal” or “image” of the Southern Lady or Southern Belle carries over from the Antebellum South to the Twentieth Century. In a 1975 article in *Ms. Magazine*, Godwin specifically discusses the role of the Southern Belle: “I know of no place in this country other than the South where a girl growing up has an image of womanhood already cut out for her, stitched securely by the practiced hands of tradition, available for her to slip into, ready-made, and henceforward ‘pass’ as a ‘lovely person’” (49). She continues, “...her image [is] firmly before us. Her image pervades the entire South like an aura” (49). The “image” of the female body then remains resolutely in place in the Twentieth Century, ready to be challenged and interrogated by Godwin’s fiction. In the Twentieth Century, the “icon,” however, becomes caught up many times in “parody” or as part of a “performance,” part of a continued mythology rather than linked to a source of

reality. This performative aspect of the Southern Lady (or the Southern Belle) reflects Judith Butler's assertion in *Bodies that Matter* which maintains that traits labeled masculine and/or feminine are part of elaborate performances, behaviors learned through imitation. In this way, the Southern Lady's body becomes again inextricably linked to the performance of her body. Part of a regulatory system, those daily routines can then be ascribed to a culture's gender definitions reflecting Simone de Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" through cultural regulation(s) imposed on the (female) body (267). The Southern Belle/Southern Lady icon becomes just that, a cultural icon caught up in an elaborate performance of the mythology associated with her figure.

The Grotesque (Female) Body

A common element associated with the Southern literary tradition is that of the grotesque. Defined a number of ways, the "traditional" grotesque (found in art, architecture, and literature) is a complex mixture, a representation of the repulsive and the comic, or as John Ruskin contends in *The Stones of Venice*, the grotesque is the combination of the ludicrous and the terrible. The tension resides in "the play" between those two competitive elements. Mikhail Bakhtin, however, in "The Grotesque Image of the Body and Its Sources," states that "The grotesque body...is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (226). This "act of becoming" coupled with the combination of the comic/tragic seems vitally important to understanding the female characters in Godwin's

fiction especially as Godwin's emphasis shifts from one where identity is centered on "being" to one centered on "becoming." Moreover, Flannery O'Connor's definition in "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction" also relates that within those works labeled grotesque, "we find that the writer has made alive some experience which we are not accustomed to observe every day, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life" (40). The pretense of making the "ordinary" "extraordinary" also seems relevant to Godwin's fiction. Later in this essay, O'Connor also alludes to the spiritual dimension of the grotesque, thus further relating the grotesque to the Southern Appalachian literary tradition. Here she maintains that to "recognize the freak [i.e. grotesque], you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still, in the main, theological" (44). O'Connor maintains, then, that the "lack of wholeness" might be considered grotesque; this lack of wholeness, however, can reside in the realm of the spiritual as well as the physical, something to consider when analyzing Godwin's fiction. Delma Eugene Presley, in his article, "The Moral Function of Distortion in Southern Grotesque," seems to agree with O'Connor: "The function of distortion in recent Southern grotesque literature is to set forth an interpretation either of the whole man or what might make him whole" (44). "Wholeness" again becomes central to the definition of the grotesque; the "act of becoming" "whole" is a thread woven throughout each of Godwin's novels; for her characters, it is always a matter then of uncovering that path toward "wholeness." When Godwin's characters fail toward that aim of "wholeness," they become grotesque figures, or

if they remain a body caught up in the act of becoming, these characters also exude a sense of the grotesque, for they are never able to fully realize their “whole” selves.

Patricia Yaeger, however, takes a somewhat different stance in understanding the grotesque; her definition further complicates the “act of becoming.” Commenting directly on the use of the grotesque in Southern women’s writing, Yaeger makes a connection to the “body as testimony,” a concept which will be further explored below. When investigating the element of the grotesque in Southern women’s writing, Yeager asks: “What is the source of this impressive display of misfits, dimwits, giant women, and lunatics” (219). She then posits an answer: “One answer is the need to invent new forms for thinking about the unthought known and to circumvent the rigid systems of race and gender, the ‘normal’ deformities of southern culture” (219). This concept of the (female) “body as testimony” becomes vitally important to the understanding of Godwin’s female characters.

Bodies are political – they are gendered, sexualized, racialized, classed and otherwise used as a means to help (re)formulate identity through fleshly inscription. The body is a visible reminder that can be used as “witness,” as testimony. Patricia Yaeger, in *Dirt and Desire*, maintains that body can be used as “testimony,” linking once again “the body” to the use of language, to creativity, and “the word.” Female bodies, “freaks,” “grotesque bodies,” “othered bodies” are encrypted; the body is again seen as an encoded text, one which needs to be decoded. The grotesque bodies found in the fiction of many Southern women

writers come from a long tradition of orality, of the spoken word, linked to the tradition of “testifying,” and thus a connection to the body as testimony is made; these bodies bear witness. Just as bodies perform (even as gender, race, sexuality are culturally encoded and performed), grotesque and “othered bodies,” female bodies, perform and bear witness. Yeager maintains, “we need to acknowledge the ways in which testimony departs from ordinary forms of communication, stretching the word beyond its expository limits and in the direction of the world” (233). Yeager’s research reminds us that:

To testify—to vow to tell, to promise and to produce one’s own speech as material evidence for trust—is to accomplish a speech act, rather than to simply formulate a statement. As a performative speech act, testimony...addresses what in history is action.

(Felman qtd. Yeager 233-34)

A physical beating that leaves scars, and thus a body disfigured, grotesque, also leaves a body that testifies, a body, that in this instance, bears witness to an act, an act of often “unwitnessed trauma.” This “body as testimony” becomes a powerful tool, a witness, to the atrocities and injustices hurled against it. It becomes a site of resistance, a place where the body speaks. In connection with making the “inner” (the spirit/mind/the unthought, the unconscious) “outer” (the body), in making strange the ordinary, Godwin manifests the female “body” as testimony,” as witness to “silenced” and “secret” acts/actions.

The scarred, disfigured, dying, grotesque or “othered” bodies that recur throughout Godwin’s novels are there to bear witness to something—this could

be a spiritual, physical, or psychological grotesqueness or a reminder of some silenced, secret part of the past. Either way, this “grotesqueness” reflects an individual not yet whole—caught in the perpetual state of “becoming.” And while examples of this “body as witness” are limited in Godwin’s first two novels, *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*, instances of “body as witness” show up later in *The Good Husband* and *A Mother and Two Daughters*, especially as the female protagonists struggle through the concepts of “being” versus “becoming.”

Conclusion: Writing the (Female) Body

With Godwin’s earliest novels, “writing the (female) body” becomes an act of empowerment, a way to reclaim lost voices and lost visions, a way of (re)claiming different modes of expression, those associated with female identity. Cixous explains the relevance of “writing the body”: “Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time” (338). Writing the body becomes an act of re/vision and reclamation of identity, of the female self.

Godwin’s first two novels place a major emphasis on female identity as it is related to the body. Dane Empson from *The Perfectionists* is confounded; she at once wants to be “body” but also more than “body.” Complicating this is that Godwin sets up Dane’s husband John to symbolize “the mind.” Dane’s “inner” tension, being at war with herself, tends to manifest itself bodily, through her interactions with her husband—a definite mind/body dichotomy is represented through Dane and John’s marriage. Ultimately, though, at the conclusion of the novel, Dane’s attempt to break free from the mind/body dualism are lost for she cannot bring herself to be more than “body.” Francesca Fox Bolt’s character from

Glass People, perhaps even more so than Dane's, is one that is "objectified" by her beauty, and thus her body. She is trapped by the image of the Ideal of Southern Womanhood; she is objectified and contained by her body, part of the "ideal image," and longs to break free. Yet, even as she attempts to do so, she cannot do so completely, for her own vanity is what finally ensnares her. These two female protagonists are largely defined in/by/through their female bodies, and though they achieve some identity this way, ultimately, their identities are stilted; they lack a sense of "wholeness," and in that way, both of these characters share an element of the grotesque.

Yet, by exploring "women as body" through the mind/body dualism, the Ideal of Southern Womanhood, and elements of the grotesque, Godwin challenges the long held legacy of woman as body and brings to the forefront the complicated issues that remain pertinent to the examination of female identity; in this way she answers Cixous's call to "write the body."

The "Divided Self": Mind vs. Body in *The Perfectionists*

"For some minutes, she had been staring at a pale, wraithlike woman reflected in the glass of the open door of the customs building. Now she realized that this was, unfortunately, herself" (*Perfectionists*, Godwin 5).

"She read in a psychology book that a person could be driven mad by lack of acknowledgement, somebody consistently denying your reality" (15).

Gail Godwin's first published novel, *The Perfectionists* (1970), is a complex novel which traces the life of female protagonist, Dane Empson, an

American living abroad in London. Dane, once a writer for a magazine in London, quits her job upon her marriage to Dr. John Empson, a British psychotherapist. Dane is now involved in an unhappy marriage, one which offers her little opportunity for her to forge her own identity—a point of contention which builds throughout the novel. Godwin's earliest novels have been criticized for their lack of depth and simplistic female characters. Susan Kissel, author of *Moving On: The Heroines of Shirley Ann Grau, Anne Tyler, and Gail Godwin*, maintains that in Godwin's earliest novels, particularly in *The Perfectionists*, but also in *Glass People* (1972), "Godwin's heroines remain trapped in formulas of the past—in ideal images of the self and family that deny them vitality, maturity, identities of their own—real lives in the ongoing, ever-changing present" (101). So while these female characters may seem underdeveloped, Kissel argues that these characters are only so because they are a reflection of the times where women's roles were more limited. Kerstin Westerlund would concur as she examines the ways in which the influences of the feminist movement of the 1970s finds its way into Godwin's early work as "thematically ... representative of American women's dilemmas at this time" (11). I would also maintain that though Godwin's early female protagonists are not nearly as developed as her later characters, these early characters, as well as themes from the novel, seem to revolve around a new sense of understanding "difference," and that difference is located in how one sees, perceives, and understands the female body as it pertains to female identity. This first novel was published in 1970, even as French feminists begin crying out for silenced women writers to "write themselves": "Woman must write

herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—from the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” (Cixous 334); Godwin answers that call. Godwin’s earliest novels indeed reflect the awareness of difference in biological terms—the body; the female body in these earliest novels is used as a means to (de)construct female identity, and it is, in fact, the mind/body dichotomy which drives the plot of Godwin’s first novel *The Perfectionists*.

Kerstin Westerlund, in *Escaping the Castle of Patriarchy: Patterns of Development in the Novels of Gail Godwin*, draws some conclusions about Godwin’s use of “the body” in *The Perfectionists* when she maintains that Godwin very purposefully sets up a mind/body dichotomy in this earliest novel by allowing even the setting to represent the aforementioned tension between mind and body. According to Westerlund [Shands], Godwin strategically removes John and Dane from a dismal, sterile setting in London, a setting Godwin notes in this novel as gray and “impervious,” “sealed in the gloom of winter,” a setting representative of the “cool,” “passionless” mind (1). By contrast, Godwin then (dis)places these characters in Majorca, a setting noted for its “burnt sienna earth,” and to be “raw and primeval,” thus representing by contrast, the passion-filled “body.” With such textual observations, Westerlund [Shands] concludes that, “Mallora is made to represent body” (45). Similarly, there is a contrast set up between the two main characters where John, the psychotherapist, is very clearly

marked as “mind,” and Dane is representative of “body.” With this dualism set in place, the entire novel revolves around resolving this tension of mind vs. body, a theme in the novel which I will explore below. To be sure, Westerlund’s observations and conclusions are a starting point, but they fail to elaborate fully on the concept of “woman as body” or on the female body as site where female identity takes shape.

Certainly Gail Godwin’s first novel *The Perfectionists* offers a glimpse into a female psyche struggling to forge an identity among shifting surroundings, surroundings which have the ability both to trap or to free her. Dane Empson, the novel’s female protagonist, is newly married to her psychotherapist husband John Empson. This marriage is not one which embodies fulfillment, but rather the marriage is mostly strained, without pleasure. To set up this definition of female identity through the female body, Godwin first describes Dane’s perception of herself: “For some minutes, she had been staring at a pale, wraith-like woman, reflected in the glass of the open door of the customs building. Now she realized that this was, unfortunately, herself” (5). The reflection is that of the female *form*, “pale” and “wraith-like.” We see emerge here, then, woman as body. Her “inner” turmoil is made “outer” through her body, and thus, Dane’s struggle to locate her female identity in/through the body begins in this opening scene. Along with her stilted marriage to John, not only has Dane been mitigated to an unsatisfactory role as wife, but she has also been cast as a reluctant mother to John’s illegitimate, three-year-old son Robin. Robin has been abandoned by his biological mother and sent to a foster home where he gets

only periodic visits from his father John. It seems from the onset that John is more determined to make Dane a mother figure to his son rather than a true companion for himself; on one of their early outings together, John reveals Robin's existence and ends the admission with, "According to the law, I can adopt him when I marry...you are just the person who should be his mother.' She said nothing. Again, there was a funny numbness in her face" (Godwin 67). It is evident here that Dane begins to lose herself as revealed in the way her body (re)acts to John's statement, even though she says nothing to dissuade him from his ultimate objective: to "colonize" and complicate her existence—to make her "mother" in the process of making her "wife." The (female) body, silence, and the "unspoken" become necessary components to the unfolding plot of the novel, components which serve to illuminate Dane's shifting character as well. Robin is representative of the grotesque (body) in this novel; he is a child who rarely speaks and often throws violent, almost animalistic tantrums, refusing the affection of his father or rejecting Dane's attempts to "mother" him. These actions further frustrate Dane's quest for "traditional" female identity and alienate her from these prescribed roles of motherhood and wifedom that have been foisted upon her.

Just as Dane's reluctant role of mother distresses her, Dane's role of wife is also problematic. Since John is a psychotherapist, he more often than not objectifies his wife, the workings of her mind, and her bodily (re)actions, using her mostly as a "specimen" or "object" of study. This objectification, too, functions in a way that separates Dane from a role of "traditional" womanhood,

for she is unable to function (independently) in the traditional role of wife; not only is she lacking identity, but she also lacks agency and (self) expression. To John, Dane's body (and mind) are "objects" to observe, record, study, and classify; she is, a case study, available for close observation and examination, and John believes that studies of her (and humanity in general) may positively impact his research, his career, and ultimately *his* identity. In fact, often John will communicate with Dane solely through written notes, observations he has taken of her, regarding her behavior. He will then conveniently leave his psychotherapist's notepad lying around the house for Dane to stumble upon and read. Later in the novel, Dane eventually searches for John's notes each night for herself in order to uncover more things about her identity; it is *his* observations which define her; each night, "she usually found a new analysis of herself" (53). Other times John blatantly requests that Dane read his observations of her, especially after an argument: "I made some notes on what happened last night. I understand you much better now. Would you like to see them?" (91). Dane complies, even though, "exposed," "openly offered like this, the prospect repelled her. But what new things had he learned about her? She couldn't bear not knowing" (91). This "communication" between husband and wife is grossly distorted, reminiscent of the grotesque, a trait often found in traditional forms of Southern literature. Even though Dane resents John's "analysis" of her, she uses the act as a means to attempt to better know herself—something she longs for. Therefore, Dane is somehow complicit in her own "entrapment," for her

compliance only further encroaches on her identity, in that, she passively lets John define her rather than actively defining herself.

In another disturbing instance, Dane is reading a book, underlining a pertinent passage to her; John, looking over her shoulder, questions her reason for underlining the words on the page: “Can’t I have anything of my own,” Dane questions (43). This interaction ultimately leads to another argument in which Dane’s (bodily) (re)actions are “observed,” noted, and further “tested.” After the argument, John leaves Dane alone per her request; this does nothing, however, to alleviate the inner angst she is feeling. Without John to question and identify her, she is trapped—both physically and mentally. This is demonstrated in the scene just after John leaves Dane alone in their house:

She needed to go to the bathroom, but couldn’t face that hallway. Feeling thoroughly isolated from reality, she squatted over a flowerpot and urinated in that. She supposed that plant would die. She lay on top of the bed, still wearing her clothes, and waited for him to come back to free her from that room. But he stayed gone till dawn, came back refreshed and alert, knocked on her door and offered to take her to breakfast somewhere. Exhausted, punished, she accepted gratefully. (Godwin 44)

Here, after she has been adequately “punished” for her petulance, her body subjugated and “imprisoned,” her will obliterated, John “feeds” her body, her physical hunger, sating her body in some small way. But this does little to aid Dane in her quest for “wholeness” and identity. She is only left further divided

against herself because her own body has been used against her (i.e. her body's demands of hunger or urination, the body's physical imprisonment in the room) as a means to control and manipulate her, thus stifling her identity.

This interplay of roles—psychotherapist/patient rather than husband/wife—only serves to complicate Dane's search for selfhood. And while Dane and John's dysfunctional marital relationship is vital to understanding Dane's quest for identity and selfhood, it is Robin's presence in this novel that further complicates and challenges Dane's search for identity and self-actualization; in fact, it is her developing relationship with Robin that proves to be the most telling of her character and the importance of "the body" to the plot.

Since Robin chooses not to speak, refuses to interact with others verbally, his character is often "reduced" to his bodily functions—his appetites, the wants, needs, and desires of his body. And while at first Dane finds Robin's refusal to speak something aggravating to the point of violence, Robin's silence is something that Dane later comes to admire and use as one of her own (bodily) acts of resistance. At one point Dane tells Robin, "You know what? ... I prefer your company to all the rest of them" (149). Because Robin does not communicate verbally, he is often relegated to a "body" in the scene. He will be slung on Dane's hip or gripping Dane's hand—a bodily appendage. Further, Robin's character is most often depicted through the (re)actions of his body—he is seen crying, wailing his discontentment. Other times, he's revealed in almost animalistic terms—left in his own urine, hungry, naked, vulnerable, silent. Yet, these depictions, while associated with Robin, are often doubled in Dane. Using

his body as resistance, Robin expresses with his body's external (re)actions, the internal frustration Dane feels, but cannot always physically demonstrate. In fact, Dane later takes on Robin's silence, using her own silent body as a form of resistance: "She had been playing Robin's game and noting its advantages. When you didn't speak, then people were obliged to interpret your silence. And that was where it got interesting. They usually interpreted it according to their own guilts and needs" (188). Here, Robin's body acts as a testimony.

Jane Hill in her treatment of Godwin also sees Robin as a doubling figure, but in slightly different terms; according to Hill, Robin is a *doppelganger* figure for both Dane and John, "in his conflict with his father and a surrogate for John as an outlet for Dane's hostilities and frustrations" (27). While there is evidence to support this reading of Robin's function as "double" for John/Dane, there is also evidence to support Robin as a *doppelganger* figure solely for Dane as well. Despite the fact that Robin is not Dane's biological son, the two are often mistaken as such—their strikingly similar eye color bonds them, and strangers often comment on their physical similarities. Further, Robin's anger toward John (for abandoning him) mirrors Dane's anger and resentment toward John (for smothering her). Dane and Robin share a bond that surpasses biology: "Something about the small naked body pulled at her" (32). There is a link between Dane and Robin, one manifest in the portrayal of their bodies (and their bodies' [re]actions toward others). After another argument with John, Dane is consoled by Robin: "the answer to her future seemed to be contained in those big staring eyes...she felt absolved" (170). This particular instance acts in part

as foreshadowing for the conclusion of the novel. Dane's relationship with Robin is fluid; it is complex and often violent; it oscillates between admiration and detestation—feelings she has internalized about herself, due to her lack of agency, lack of identity. Robin incites in Dane a passion—a bodily (re)action—that John does (can)not: “She kissed the cool little face forcefully. She opened her mouth and ran her tongue quickly along the base of his neck. So clean. Then she kissed the soft brown hair smelling of baby shampoo, she kissed each of his eyes, which fluttered closed at her touch. He neither aided nor resisted” (33). Robin's body causes Dane to (re)act in passionate ways—even if that passion is on the verge of violence. This kind of animalistic response is repeated again at the novel's conclusion.

Still, despite Robin's importance as a silenced body, a grotesque character, it remains important to realize how fully the (female) body functions as a means toward understanding female identity in *The Perfectionists*. As the novel opens, the family is embarking on a vacation on the Spanish island of Majorca. The tropical setting proves important as the oppressive heat of the island paradise reflects the building tensions within Dane as she struggles to better understand herself. It is revealed that Dane is the one who had handpicked their family vacation spot: “shying away from pictures of the spacious open beaches alive with international youth and beauty, she had pounced at once on the small, secluded spot. Nestled in a cove, surrounded by a shield of dark pines, possessed of a private beach, the austere whitewashed hotel had called to her own needs” (5). With this vacation, Dane hopes to “fall in love with

her husband...to feel herself lucky, to cope brilliantly with the child, to excite the envy of some few others and to feel alive, really alive" (5). Initially, she is optimistic; she picks this getaway as a place to "recover balance and confidence in herself" (5). Yet, when she finally arrives at this secluded island paradise, she does not find the "privacy" or "recovery" she so desires, but rather, her first reaction to the island is that of "exposure." She feels vulnerable: "This island made her feel exposed" (1). Dane feels "naked," uncovered by the island (the inner made outer); her body then becomes a conduit, a means, the outlet, to achieve a better understanding of herself:

Anchored by the heavy bright heat, she closed her eyes and ears and let it press her down. Let the sun bake her senseless in the hottest part of the day. Let it broil her brain free of all complexities. Let it burn her back into the same earth which held the bones of ancient peasants and the decayed petals of bygone flowers. She did not wish to compete, or to understand or to participate anymore. After ten months of this mentally and spiritually exhausting marriage, she wanted to be just a body—and left alone. She felt tight in the head, like something was growing—a flower someone planted in a pot too small. (22)

This long passage reveals one of the major factors in this novel: Dane's desire to be solely "body," her desire to rid herself of anything else, especially those mental and spiritual parts of herself that would further complicate her identity. However, Dane's quest for selfhood is full of contradictions, for while this

“simplistic” view of self is something she seemingly desires, it is not something she exemplifies in the majority of her enacted life.

This theme of exposure, “nakedness,” or vulnerability of the body, however, is one that is revisited throughout the novel and traced directly to Dane’s identity; it is a theme which also reflects Dane’s search for self and her views of the body. Interestingly enough, as Jennifer McMullen points out in her article, “Gail Godwin’s Message: To Those Who Want Wholeness,” Godwin’s later novels focus on “completeness” and the complexities of embracing a multi-faceted, evolving female identity. Still, Godwin’s earliest novels tend to reflect female protagonists divided against themselves, with a focus aimed not toward “wholeness” of mind, body, spirit, but one aimed toward the role of woman as “body.” That is, in this novel, Dane’s character deemphasizes a search for “wholeness” and evolution of female identity and rather embraces the sense that female identity is fixed, found only in distinct stages of defined “womanhood,” in “containment” of the body, or through censoring gaze/observations of the female body, and, this is despite Dane’s deepest desire to see herself, her identity, as unique and multiplied, ever evolving.

In one instance, Dane sees various women along the streets of Majorca; she quickly categorizes them: “[she] counted three kinds of women: the young and virginal, with their white missals and fresh skins; the married and pregnant; and the old and widowed, draped in funeral black. She envied their definitive stages of womanhood” (17). Lihong Xie in *The Evolving Self in the Novels of Gail Godwin* points out that Dane’s inventory of the stages of traditional

womanhood” is problematic: “...maiden, wife, mother, widow—all of them defined in relation to a man and each reducing the woman to an object of male desire or the consequences of male action” (38). While it is true that the Spanish women here are male-identified, they are also identified solely by the physical states of their bodies, their “skins”: “young,” “virginal,” “pregnant,” “old.” This depiction of woman as body (re)surfaces throughout the novel. Easy bodily descriptors associated with the female characters aim to simplify the quest for “ultimate” female identity without interrogating it, thus reinforcing patriarchal domination in some way.

Later, however, after a conversation with an elderly woman, Dane begins to (re)examine herself, questioning her perceptions of herself/her identity: “What had she imagined herself being as a child? She had contained a sort of future image, but it never took the form of any profession exactly. It had been more a matter of holding onto what she had, refining it. Her destiny was to be the result of her becoming supremely herself with as few concessions as possible” (115). Yet, in her current situation—as reluctant wife and mother—she has ultimately denied herself that “future image.” She has attempted to content herself to become something other than what she had hoped to be: “supremely herself, with as few concessions as possible” (115). Instead, however, she has become a body, a “colonized” identity—fragmented, detached, and silent, all the while longing to be more like John—a holistic, “collection of selves” (4); she covets John’s “rhizomatic identity,” while also claiming to be envious of the definitive, prescribed stages of womanhood—virgin, mother, wife, widow. Dane seems to

contradict herself often, for while she is envious of these women and their distinct, “clean” stages of womanhood, she also envies John and his acknowledged messy “collection of selves”; this further demonstrates Dane’s divided self—she longs for *both* a stable and fluid identity, she desires both past (mis)conceptions of “womanhood” and her present disequilibrium when it comes to forging her own identity. Jane Hill points out that “Dane is typical of Godwin’s female protagonists in several... important ways. Her desire for a safe, programmed life is in direct conflict with her longing for a transcendent existence in which she feels neither constricted nor pressured, alone nor invaded” (20). It is this difference—invasion versus union—that continually complicates her relationship with John: “He kept encroaching on her space, trying to collide and merge with her like those horrible zygotes” (97). In this instance she refers not only to his “invasion” of her body, but his “invasion” of her mind/her psyche as well. She desires a separateness from John, a separateness from Robin, a separateness from the traditional roles of womanhood. She wishes to be “multiplied.”

“Multiplicity of the self” is exactly what initially attracts, but eventually repels, Dane to her husband; John has embraced the contradictions within his own life, constantly referring to himself as a “collection of selves,” but Dane has been unable to latch onto this same cosmology (4). When John and Dane first meet, she is intrigued by John’s multi-faceted identity; she is drawn to him because of the complexity of his mind. At one point, John tells Dane,

I've been a math scholar, philosopher, computer programmer, doctor who delivers babies...and, of course, I was almost a Jesuit. I've been all those things and I'm none of them now. Next year I may be something else again. I'm evolving all the time. I'm not your 'finished' man, I'm afraid. To be finished is to be circumscribed, to have stopped growing. Then one might as well be dead. (41)

Dane envies this concept of multiple selves, but ultimately lacks the agency to accomplish such an identity in her own life. And it is her marriage to John, in fact, that has further diminished her own agency, her own will to power/authority/control over her own life/destiny and identity. John's mere existence problematizes Dane's life on many levels, for while he embodies this concept of "becoming," Dane struggles to simply "be." Xie explores the role of the male protagonists in Godwin's novels, commenting that they often have vision and voice; they often articulate an idea of "self-in-process, constantly striving and continually evolving," which the female characters desire for themselves (32). Xie sees this limited view of womanhood as "an embodiment of patriarchal power that reduces women to the status of the 'other'"(32). Xie also views this as female victimization in Godwin's earliest novels. And Xie's explanation is accurate to some extent; throughout the novel, we see that Dane has very little power, control, or authority over her own life, and this is directly reflected in the ways she interacts with others, particularly with how she interacts with the two male figures (signifying patriarchal dominance) in her life, John and

Robin. The male figures in her life consistently impede Dane's quest for self-actualization in some way, leaving her desolate, frustrated, and unfulfilled.

This desolation and frustration then lead Dane to react the only ways she can, that is, by abusing/misusing her relationships with those she comes in contact with—namely John and Robin—those who have “trapped” her into an unacceptable existence rooted in traditional patriarchy. As Xie points out:

In contrast to the hero's [John's] theoretical explorations of an evolving self, the heroine's [Dane's] struggle for self-identity takes place in the context of patriarchal marriage and culture. Attracted to John's vision of an expanding and evolving self yet disturbed by a loss of self-identity through a ten-month old marriage, Dane Empson feels acutely the chasm between an ideal self she aspires to and a stifled, compromised self she has become. (36)

Through all of this Dane remains in flux. So then, how does Dane attempt to negotiate these unwanted roles of wife and mother? She is in a constant state of disequilibrium—questioning whether she should submit to these set “roles,” and thus a set female identity or reject them in some way. Unable to reconcile this tension, this disequilibrium is what causes the division in her psyche, the concept of “the flower...planted in a pot too small” (22). This division of the self, Dane's dissatisfaction with her prescribed identity, then manifests itself in physical, bodily ways; Dane often has headaches or an aching body which negatively affects her interaction(s) with others: “Her head ached slightly,” (51) or “she slipped [Robin] from her aching body” (89). “She pressed her headache into Robin's soft

hair...what shall I do little sage...I am divided against myself" (153). Dane's frequent headaches are the physical, bodily manifestation of her lack of agency, of her divided self.

Dane's lack of agency—agency, in its simplest definition meaning the power to do something, to (re)act—is reflected in her obsession with her own body and the bodies of those around her, namely John and Robin. In particular, the violence and passion Dane shows towards Robin serves as the main determining factor in Dane's character development. Dane's encounters with John's body are mostly characterized by dissatisfaction and disappointment, chiefly because it was not John's body which first attracted her to him, but rather it was the workings of his mind (again setting up the mind/body "split"), his ideas about humanity, and his theory of shifting identities. Dane fell in love with John's mind, and as it is revealed throughout the novel, she is consistently disappointed with his body. When John and Dane first met one other, there was a distinct attraction of "minds," rather than that of the body. Often, when they first dated, she denied the needs of her own body (i.e. her physical drives—sexual desire, hunger, sleep)—prioritizing mind over body—because she saw their burgeoning relationship as so much more: "she had felt as though she were being transformed" (27). This transformation, however, ends once John's quest for his multi-faceted self overpowers Dane's. There is a definite distinction between John's body/mind for Dane:

His body wasn't bad, if he would take care of it. He seemed often to forget he had one; forgot to shave or brush his teeth or comb his

hair. She had to remind him and then they fought over it. Other times, he dramatized his body. They would be listening to a symphony in the living room when suddenly he would rise and begin to move about the room, swaying his hands and arms, an ecstatic, faraway look in his eyes. She couldn't bear this; she always left the room. When they made love, he kept his eyes open. He would look at her intensely, his whole consciousness intruding between her and the oblivion she wanted to feel. (23)

While John embraces the different facets of his own being—particularly his mind—Dane resents this, often feeling repulsed by the presence of John's body. In fact, it is his body that first disappoints her: "she hadn't like his teeth when he smiled. They were dusky and grew inward...they were her first disappointment about him" (58). Later Dane reveals further distaste for John's body in favor of his mind: "She was glad the wall hid his body. She liked his head best anyway. The rest of him gave her problems. His flesh-and-blood failings which he dumped regularly in her lap like so much bruised fruit made it more and more difficult for her to keep the image clean" (49).

Even the sexual aspects of their relationship cause distance to expand between the two:

As they undressed, he wouldn't let her look away from him. Repelled by the room, by his intensity, she nevertheless felt a perverse and heady passion rising in her body. She had often wondered how martyrs felt, the moment before they were devoured

by fire, or nuns, when their hair is being cut off, just before taking the veil. It must be something like this. He took her rather quickly, but it didn't matter. She lay there afterward feeling totally obliterated by his will. She had felt she had, at last, done something irrevocable. (68)

Other instances of sexual intimacies between John and Dane also reflect this disconnection of mind/body within Dane. A separation of mind from body during sexual activity is further evidenced in a later scene where Dane mentally denigrates her own body, envisioning the brutal violation of her body with multiple sexual partners. That is, while physically/sexually submitting her body to her husband, Dane simultaneously creates an alternate narrative in her mind where she rejects his sexual advances in favor of a brutal sexual encounter with others. This scene, while disturbing, not only reflects Dane's mind/body disconnect, but also demonstrates Dane's penchant toward violence. Here, in her fantasy, she allows her body to be cruelly (mis)used, further demonstrating the revulsion she feels toward John (and his body): "His daily dealings with life were so much smaller than the panoramic sweep of his mind; his actions never quite wroth of the clean, heroic beauty of his best ideas" (49). His body is never something desirable or pleasurable to her, but rather it is always either a burden or invasive in some way.

In her current state of unhappy marriage and unwanted motherhood, Dane is "divided" against herself; she doesn't fit into these prescribed female roles, roles largely defined by biology; and, at one point, upon suffering another

headache, Dane even comments to that effect: "I am divided against myself" (153). In other instances Dane wishes simply to become "body," nothing more; she has dreams and visions of becoming "larger" or "smaller" than she physically is. If she could only "shrink" or "inflate" her body, then perhaps she could (re)form her female identity. In one scene, she wishes to "retreat wholly into herself," to disappear (76). Dane wants Robin (her stepson) and John (her husband) to be robbed of the sight of her, to be robbed of her presence, her body: "They could have everything from her but the sight of her" (76). In another instance, Dane wants to use her body as a "divider," a "shield": "...she saw a woman who sat in a chair all day stuffing herself with sweets and pastries until she achieved a disgusting layer of fat which would keep the world away" (77). Here, Godwin uses not only the female body as a means to divide, to distance and separate, but also as a representation of "appetite." This theme of woman as body, as appetite, is one that emerges at the end of this novel as well as in several of Godwin's other novels, including *Glass People*. In "Beyond the Hummingbird," Patricia Yaeger reminds us that while "willful miniaturizations of the female body may seem comical...it is also quite dangerous" (118). Yeager continues:

Southern women's writing is filled with bizarre somatic images that seem unnecessarily cruel or out of control, and yet this cruelty has a function: it tears at the social fabric and tries to leave it in shreds. Giant bodies, tiny bodies, scarred bodies, dying bodies, even idealized bodies are grotesque. They are transgressive and often render an established "norm" unstable. Female bodies are not only

“used as symbolic sites to demarcate undesired social change, but this symbolism has a diurnal power; it offers a fetish of constancy in an inconstant world of crisis and change. (Yaeger 127)

Even in Dane’s fantasies, she uses her female body as an identity marker, one that has the potential to transgress and transform her discontent.

Controlled violence is another aspect of Dane’s character which links her character to the body. This is evidenced in her relationship with Robin. Dane’s first encounters with Robin are rough, violent in nature. Initially, she is reluctant to be his mother and his rejection of her in that forced role causes her to react violently against him: “She had to turn away from him then, she had such a longing to slap some expression into the cool impervious face” (46). Dane’s lack of agency in her own life causes her a deep resentment, a frustration which she then takes out on Robin. This violence, then, often morphs into a muted, passionate experience with Robin, once again showing the body as a means to make the “inner” turmoil “outer”:

She spun him like a zombie and began massaging the cream into the nape of his neck and working it down, in slow sensuous strokes, toward the small of his back, where the little buttocks began their rise at the line of his swimming trunks. When she finished, she held him by his upper arms and swayed him back and forth, the rigid little doll. She put her face against his neck and smelled him. Then, as he wriggled to get away, she planted quick

compulsive kisses over the entire surface of his back. She abstained from a wild desire to sink her teeth into him. (46)

There is a fine line between violence and passion with every bodily encounter Dane has with Robin, for the passion she lacks with John (her lack of physical attraction/reaction to John's body) she perversely finds with Robin (and his body). This passionate response to Robin is again illustrated in the somewhat puzzling, yet similar closing scene of the novel, where Dane fails to resist her desire:

She clamped her mouth upon his and pressed with all of her strength. A wonderful liquid feeling was set off in her womb and began coursing slowly toward her legs. She pushed her lips against his small, milk-white teeth until she tasted her own blood. He struggled like a trapped animal but she held him down with her body, with her hands, with her mouth, drinking the sweet breath until she could get her fill. (211)

This scene, while demonstrating Dane's bodily (almost sexual) reaction to Robin, also shows her desire for control, her desire to have control over another's body (as well as her own body). Her bodily response is one which is both freeing and damning. For Dane, this is a "pure" experience, "personal and private," an "experience which cannot be shared by anyone" (212). Her appetite, her body takes over, and she is reduced to her animalistic desire to (re)act, to dominate. She takes pride in this—it was an instinctual, bodily (re)action wholly her own—

with that one act, she held all the power/control, life/death, for later she admits to John, "I almost killed him...some force came over me, bigger than I am" (211).

In "Nice to Eat You: Acts of Vampires," Thomas C. Foster maintains that vampirism is an act of selfishness; it is an act of "exploitation, a refusal to respect the autonomy of other people" (16). One who has a vampiric personality, has a "consuming spirit" (20), "someone who grows in strength by weakening someone else" (21). The "consuming spirit" is someone who basically concludes that by the vampiric act, he/she is willing to place his/her needs above others (21). This is precisely what Dane does at the end of the novel. She is overtaken by her "appetite"; she needs to "consume" Robin's life force in order to replenish her strength, to gain enough strength to forge her own distinct female identity. That she ultimately "consumes" Robin, her double, also seems significant, in that, she "devours" Robin who has come to represent "the body" part of the mind/body dualism, so that she can attempt to survive and become more whole.

However, though this act may seem a positive act of "selfishness," it is this final primal, bodily reaction which ultimately defines and damns her character, her identity, for while Dane did not give Robin life, that is, she is not his biological mother, in that instant, she had the power to take his life away. This action is a central, defining moment for her, one in which she finds solace and power. Yet, even this victory is short-lived once John's presence is reintroduced. As the novel closes, Dane imagines herself telling John of her violent act toward Robin; she tells John, "It was powerful—and private. I'm sorry. I really can't tell you more than that. It was a sort of experience that can't be shared by anyone"

(212). With this statement, she claims her actions, takes her space. John's projected reaction to this, however, is fully logical and sedate, infuriating Dane; for he once again robs her of her "pure" (bodily) experience by reminding her that she did not have this experience alone, but rather shared it with someone else—Robin. Her bodily (re)action then is reduced to nothing more than a shared violent experience between "mother" and "son." John's simple concluding statement, then, reasserts patriarchal domination, putting Dane once again at the behest of John, reestablishing the polarized, dualistic hierarchy of John/man/reason (mind) over Dane/woman/emotion (body). With this ending, Dane's quest for multi-faceted, "whole" female identity quietly slips away.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: *Glass People* & Woman as (Beautiful) Body

I know of no place in this country other than the South where a girl growing up has an image of womanhood already cut out for her, stitched securely by the practiced hands of tradition, available for her to slip into, ready-made, and henceforward 'pass' as a 'lovely person' ...her image firmly before us. Her image pervades the entire South like an aura. (Godwin, "The Southern Belle" 49)

The publication of Godwin's first novel, *The Perfectionists*, met with a fair amount of literary praise. In her 1970 review of the book, Joyce Carol Oates notes *The Perfectionists* to be a fine "experimental" novel, an "engrossing and mysterious first novel [with a] perfectly structured story" (np). Critics of Godwin's second novel, however, were not as kind. Sara Blackburn comments that the main character, Francesca, is nothing but a "gorgeous object...numb with non-activity and un-thought" (np). Blackburn continues her harsh critique by asking,

“Are we really to root for a blank-minded Francesca to break free, when her author has promised us throughout that she’s totally incapable of doing so?” and concludes that Francesca is “too-exaggerated, too superficial” (np). Karen Gaston in her critical essay, while finding the allegorical structure of the story of interest, also remarks that Francesca is a “drowsy product of over- and self-indulgence” (96). The main complaint about this second novel seems to be that the protagonist, Francesca Fox Bolt, is an unsympathetic, one-dimensional character with whom the audience cannot relate. It is my contention, however, that Godwin creates this “vapid” character as a means to interrogate woman as body by using an all-too familiar character of Southern literature—The Southern Lady.

In her article, “‘Beauty and the Beast’ in Gail Godwin’s *Glass People*,” Karen Gaston compares Godwin’s second novel, *Glass People* (1972), to two children’s fairy tales, “Beauty and the Beast” and “Sleeping Beauty.” Gaston mentions “Sleeping Beauty” as a minor comparison point; throughout the article, Gaston maintains that Godwin’s second novel is an attempt at an allegory of “Beauty and the Beast,” and that Godwin uses this fairy tale as a framework for the novel’s plot. Indeed, some comparisons of the novel’s plot to the fairy tale can be made, such as the main character’s beauty-shaped identity and her relationship to her “beast-like” husband, Cameron; Gaston states that by using the fairytale framework, Godwin contemporizes the tale by “depicting the strain of being loved only for one’s physical appearance and the invisible barriers to growth and self-discovery” (95-96). This point is worth noting, but it is one that

needs further examination. And while there may be some parallels between these two narratives, Godwin's novel is much more complex with underpinnings of the quest for female empowerment through an enriched, independent female identity, one that critiques not only the beauty (and thus body) based identity, but one that also interrogates the traditional icon of The Southern Lady. Godwin, while perhaps using "Beauty and Beast" as a generic framework, certainly complicates this old tale by allowing her readers to revisit an old Southern (stereo)type.

Jane Hill in her analysis of *Glass People* concludes that, like Dane Empson, Francesca Bolt is another undeveloped female protagonist: "Dane Tarrant Empson and Francesca Bolt, the youngest and the least emotionally complex of Godwin's heroines, want to find their best lives just as much as do their more mature and complex descendants, but, as their stories' titles suggest, they are too idealistic and too fragile" (Hill 19). Likewise, Lihong Xie contends that "*Glass People* and *The Perfectionists* both lack the qualities that distinguish Godwin's mature work" (48). Still, much can be gleaned from this second novel in terms of female identity as experienced in/through the female body. This "ideal" is definitely something which needs more investigation. While several critics have picked apart the negative aspects of this novel, I find that despite its detractors, the novel certainly does have its redeeming qualities, including most significantly the way in which Godwin uses the female body as a means to comment on female identity. An examination of the female body as "object" and female beauty as an object, and body/beauty as a consumed commodity shows this novel to be

complex, its message and themes relevant to components of feminist theory. Additionally, if we compare Francesca Fox Bolt to the “traditional” Southern Belle figure, it seems obvious that Godwin’s second novel can be viewed as a critique of the Ideal of Southern Womanhood.

In her treatment of the novel found in *The Evolving Self in the Novels of Gail Godwin*, Xie states that, “Francesca is the object of his [Cameron’s] possession, evaluation, admiration, and criticism” (49). Largely, however, what Cameron specifically bases his analysis on is the “possession, evaluation, admiration, and criticism” of Francesca’s body and/or beauty. Significantly then, the female body, in this novel, becomes a form, a container—a framework even—for interrogating female identity. Just as Godwin uses the female body as a means to “trap” or “contain” Dane in *The Perfectionists*, this theme resurfaces in *Glass People*. Both Dane and Francesca are “trapped,” “contained” in/through their biological femaleness, their identities linked purposefully to conceptions about their bodies. And just as it is revealed throughout *The Perfectionists* that Dane feels trapped and limited by this “pale, wraith-like woman,” this form—her body, merely a biological container that limits her potential—Francesca is also trapped, but more so by 1.) an imaginary, unattainable ideal and 2.) her beauty, and thus, her body.

Francesca Fox Bolt is the young female protagonist in Godwin’s second novel, *Glass People*, described early in the novel as, “very beautiful. People stopped on streets and turned to gaze back at her. She haunted people...this statuesque creature with deep-set, heavy-lidded eyes and the rather swollen,

childish upper lip, the graceful stemlike neck and the dreamy way of walking and moving" (26). Much of Francesca's identity is ascribed to her body, her beauty—to a "perfect" image. The other facet of Francesca's identity is attached to the identity of her husband; Francesca is married to an often overbearing, controlling and older District Attorney Cameron Bolt, often noted by the local newspapers to be "relentless," "inscrutable," or "terrible" in the courtroom (8). Their marriage was one based on mutual needs, in that, Cameron was seeking a beautiful, refined wife to help him bolster his career, and Francesca sought a partner who would have the means and ability to take care of her. They live together in California, far removed from the mountains of the Southeast where Francesca grew up, yet those "values" and "ideals" of her childhood in the South remain a fixture in understanding Francesca's (failed) quest for authentic female identity. Marilyn J. Smith comments in "The Role of the South in the Novels of Gail Godwin" that "In most of Godwin's novels the childhood is a Southern, genteel one [and] is not easily forgotten" (103). Such is the case with Francesca. While she has left the place of her early youth, she took with her the "genteel" values instilled in her by her parents. Further, when she attempts to "break free" from her stifled female identity, she does so first by returning to the South to visit her mother, a woman who used to exude "southern womanhood" (58). On her visit, however, Francesca finds out that her mother Kate has changed dramatically; Kate is no longer The Southern Lady she once was, and Francesca alone is left to uphold the "ideals" of the past. This shift in her mother's identity creates in Francesca a sense of disequilibrium and ambivalence. Because her mother no longer

prescribes to a “set ideal,” Francesca is forced to confront her own “unstable identity,” the ultimate source of her discontentment. If she is not the Southern Lady, then who is she? This is a complicated question for Francesca to address, for previously, she had been completely dependent on that set identity. Godwin writes in “The Southern Belle,” “Many a Southern woman has died, and more will die, without ever having once strained toward what Jung called ‘the task of personality’; without ever having once confronted the true reflection beyond the quicksilver image of what her heritage has prepared her to be” (51). This interrogation by Godwin from a 1975 article offers particular insight when we realize that that is exactly what she intended Francesca to encounter—an authentic female self, one without the set image of the “Southern Lady” before her. Francesca must confront the image.

At the beginning of the novel, we find Francesca in a state of depression. Despite having a four-year education from a liberal arts college, she is without a specific career. Her career is rather that of devoted wife; in fact, one of her noted failings is that she no longer has the drive to “dress up, go out with him again, and help him with his future” (9). Her “career” is aiding Cameron with “his.” Later in the novel, we find out that Cameron is going to run for the office of Attorney General—it is Francesca’s “image” as devoted, loving wife that he believes will help him win the election. Francesca, however, after four years of marriage, does not even have the ambition to “go out” and help Cameron bolster his career (9). This is significant in drawing the parallel to the traditional role of the Southern Lady where part of the classic role of the Southern Lady is that “her traditional

role permits his” (Jones 7). Without children, without hobbies or interests of her own—much of her time, then, is spent alone, sleeping, gazing at herself in the mirror, or indulging herself in her various beauty routines—all activities that seem rather selfish, and the antithesis of the Antebellum image of the Southern Lady. However, in *The Southern Belle in the American Novel*, Kathryn Seidel comments, “The girl who is told, in effect, to become a lovely object can become a narcissist, self-admiring as well as admired for her lovely shell” (xv). This is precisely what happens to Francesca. From the onset of the novel, though, Francesca Fox Bolt, has her identity directly connected to her body, to a particular image, and thus tensions arise; Francesca writes to her mother, “I am unhappy and don’t even know why. I need you to tell me” (14). She is a passive female character who lacks any real identity outside the trappings of her beauty, her body, and the Ideal of Southern Womanhood set before her. She seeks direction from others, but never is she introspective enough to conjure up her own ideas, ideas that would contribute to the carving out of her own identity, one beyond the “image” and “performance.”

Cameron Bolt, the local celebrity District Attorney, does little to help Francesca establish a concrete identity beyond her flesh or the “image” of Southern Womanhood she embodies; in fact, his relationship with Francesca only adds to her objectification and ultimate discontentment: “Cameron did not mind cooking or setting the table, or even washing up, as long as she sat across from him looking perfect” (15). She becomes dependent on Cameron, in essence, a woman-child, helpless. And though he does recognize her

discontentment, commenting, “you are not your old dazzling self” (7)— he makes excuses— “A beautiful woman is her own excuse for being,” (20), and thus he continues to view his wife as solely an object of desire, of beauty, often even denying her autonomy, her independence, and her wish to speak: “To tell the truth, he preferred his wife’s silences. He wished there were more of them. Then her ineffable beauty shone out and she was his mysterious, beautiful woman again” (51).

From the beginning of the novel, then, Francesca is identified as a beautiful “object”: “She saw herself from where she sat, her mist of dark hair blending with the sofa. She had been called beautiful for so long the words meant nothing” (8). Francesca’s female identity is clearly associated with her body, and her body is just as clearly linked to her objectification; she literally “blends in with the sofa,” just another object found in the room. Later Francesca is described: “Her body was an unhealthy bluish pale (even though...the Woman’s Section had called it ‘alabaster’)” (11). Francesca is constantly being set apart by a description of her body, as a “beautiful object”; her much older attorney husband often requests: “Don’t frown so. Preserve your beautiful forehead” (15), and later in the bedroom Francesca is almost cast as a shrine, an object to worship: “...she stood naked before him. This was the part that terrified her, when he knelt in front of her, still fully clothed...let his eyes travel slowly, very slowly upward, inspecting inch by inch of her. As a collector would go over a piece of precious sculpture, examining it for chips or flaws” (17). Francesca’s identity is connected to her beauty, and, in essence, to her body. Her body is an

object to be gazed upon, inspected, appraised. Cameron looks for “chips” and “flaws,” alluding to his desire for her perfection. This “flawless” image, however, exists only in Cameron’s imagination. Cameron, the father-protector figure in this novel, cares about Francesca in the only way he can, by (re)constructing a false image of her, one without “flaws” or “chips,” and Francesca’s (inauthentic) identity is only linked to “performing” that identity through her body. Renata Salecl, in her essay, “I Can’t Love You Unless I Give You Up,” confirms that “for romantic love to emerge, one thus does not need the real person present, what is necessary is the existence of the image” (187). In Francesca’s case, her body is that of “beautiful object,” that of the image of the “perfect” Southern Lady atop her pedestal. The conclusion of the novel also points once more to the “flawless” illusion Cameron must (re)construct in order to “love” Francesca.

Throughout the novel, though, it is revealed that Francesca, much like Cameron, is obsessed with her body/beauty; she sits alone in bed and plucks the hairs out of her legs with tweezers, inflicting physical pain, while participating in a barbaric “beauty” ritual, which she calls her “project,” something from which she gets a “great sense of accomplishment” (19). Even as Seidel points out that the Southern Belle can become “narcissistic” and “self-admiring,” she also contends that this narcissism and self-admiration “emphasizes the tendency. . . of the woman to be treated as an object, to see herself as object and to expect this treatment from others, often in ways that dehumanize the woman in order to obtain the requisite objectness” (xv). I would maintain that this “objectness” can also be interpreted as “otherness.” In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, the authors

argue that, “The ‘killing’ of oneself into an art object—the pruning and preening, the mirror madness, and the concern with odors and again, with hair which is invariably too curly or too lank, with bodies too thin or too thick—all of this testifies to the efforts women have expended not just trying to be angels but trying not to be female monsters” (Gilbert and Gubar 34). Ultimately, it is Francesca’s goal to maintain the “standard of beauty” which drew Cameron to her in the first place, the same set of beauty ideals that she has come to identify with as her prime identity. Moreover, with her “beauty rituals,” she aims to avoid becoming what Gilbert and Gubar claim is the antithesis of the “beauty” or the “angel,”—the “female monster”; she must remain her same “dazzling self” (Godwin 7) or the bulk of her identity will be lost. Francesca’s particular “beauty project” is one that consumes her time and gives her a sense of achievement, something she lacks in her daily life. Still, she remains discontent. Because her identity is based solely in the superficial construct of female identity, an identity enjoined with the Ideal of Southern Womanhood, Francesca has no real sense of self; there is little progression toward female self-hood, no “connection” to those around her. She has become caught up in being an object to gaze upon; and that act, something which once gave her fulfillment, now paralyzes her and makes her ill. Jane Hill comments on Francesca’s superficial character when, later in the novel, Francesca “awakens from a beautiful woman’s worst nightmare—she has no reflection; no one, including herself, can see her, and thus she has no identity—Cameron is miraculously there to ‘save’ her, to see her” (31). Because Francesca has been cast throughout the novel as a “beautiful object,” or an

image of perfection, she is incapable of seeing herself unless it is in a reflection—the reflection of a surface, of words, and/or the reflection of herself in/through the eyes of others. Much like the Antebellum Southern Lady, Francesca’s identity is “effective only as she works in others’ imaginations” (Jones 4).

Mirrors and reflections are symbols present throughout the novel, reminders that Francesca’s identity is linked primarily to the superficial, the visible. This once more links her female identity to her female body. In this novel, woman’s identity remains affixed somehow to her biological difference, her body. Francesca cannot progress, cannot transform, toward self-awareness; she cannot connect to those beyond herself because she lacks authentic female identity. The mirror, in this novel, becomes a frame, enclosing a trapped and distorted image, a reflective surface space where an often censoring, paralyzing gaze stares back. In *Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies*, Helena Michie comments, “The mirror is itself, of course, simultaneously presence and absence, depiction, inversion, and distortion of the body. It is also an image of the body (vanity/surface) and of an attempt to move beyond body (reflection/contemplation)” (8). Gilbert and Gubar comment on such a vain ritual: “Learning to become a beautiful object, the girl learns about—perhaps even loathing of—her own flesh. Peering obsessively into the real and well as metaphorical looking glasses that surround her, she desires literally to ‘reduce’ her own body” (54). This kind of harsh introspection, a somewhat superficial interaction with the self, a small step toward self-awareness, can produce a

feeling of alienation against one's own female body. With Francesca, there is a tension—to either embrace or reject attempts at perfection.

The presence of mirrors and various kinds of reflections that abound in this novel makes Francesca once more an “object” to be viewed, but viewed not only by others, but by herself, “...stopping to gaze blankly at herself in the oval mirror in the livingroom” (14). What is interesting to note, however, is that Francesca is rarely critical of what she sees; in fact, she enjoys her own reflection. It is as if she has no concept that her identity could be more than just the image that is distorted and reflected back to her from the mirror. Comfortable with her body, her beauty, she has never been challenged to understand herself as more than that. Even as a young woman, living at home with her mother and step-father, “Francesca didn't know what she wanted to ‘do.’ She was content as she was. ... She liked the leisurely drift of days, where she would sit at her dressing table, brushing her hair, planning what she would buy in town” (33). Once she is awakened from a terrifying, yet foreshadowing, dream where she had no reflection (i.e. no identity at all), Francesca's identity, her fate, is later sealed, in part, by her own narcissistic tendencies. Her reflection, though, and in essence her claim on her own identity, is exactly what is challenged once she leaves Cameron to visit her mother. This short trip, for Francesca, is a pilgrimage, a spiritual journey, an odyssey of self, where she has the opportunity to face her deepest fear—to lose her reflection and to then truly re-see herself as more than just a “beautiful object.” Though she fears becoming more than an “object,” Francesca ultimately longs to be *more* than “body,” more than an “ideal.”

As Gilbert and Gubar remind us in “The Queen’s Looking Glass,” “To be caught and trapped in a mirror rather than a window, however, is to be driven inward, obsessively studying self-images as if seeking a viable self” (37).

Throughout the novel, Francesca sees herself reflected in a series of surfaces—mirrors, windows, glasses. In addition to these images, however, Francesca is also offered her reflection in a written character sketch by the mysterious M, a writer Francesca finds work with during her short time away from Cameron. M sums up her impressions of Francesca’s character this way: “Extraordinarily beautiful, but never really contemplates the power a beautiful person can wield. Can be hurt, weep, suffers, but suffering passes quickly over like a summer storm. Not given to self-reflection or deep insights to others. Though feels the problems of others to be more interesting than her own. Generous but naïve” (164). As M hands this sketch for Francesca to read, Francesca does not offer commentary on M’s observations. It is as if she may even fail to recognize herself, or if she does recognize herself in this paragraph, she doesn’t necessarily see the negative aspects of M’s assertions about her character. Again, the failure to look at herself critically, to overcome her body, to see herself as *more than beautiful/body*, is ultimately what brings her pilgrimage, and thus her quest for self-hood, to a halt.

We meet M Evans about midway through the novel, after Francesca’s visit with her mother in the Southeast. On her way back to Cameron, in California, Francesca has spent a few days in New York City, deciding that rather than return to California to Cameron, she would instead attempt to live in New York

City and forge her own identity. This occurs only after have a brief affair with a stranger, Mike, whom she meets at the airport (Mike is simply a “replacement” for Cameron, another male gaze that consumes and discards her body/beauty). After Mike abandons Francesca to instead attend to his own life, one separate from Francesca, Francesca is forced to contemplate what she will do next with her life, if indeed she decides not to return to her life and husband in California. After an unsuccessful job interview at an employment agency where she meets the capable and career-minded Nina Brett, Francesca is forced to search for employment opportunities in the help wanted section of the *Village Voice*. Seeing an ad for an amanuensis, Francesca applies for the job—despite the fact that she has little idea what the word actually means or what the job might entail. Her first encounter with M depicts yet another encounter with “the body”:

M or Em Evans had a large, plain face of uncertain age. Her wide, pale-blue eyes focused avidly on Francesca, taking in her face, her hair, her body, with shameless thoroughness. She wore a black muu-muu, beneath which breasts were scarcely discernible. These were Francesca’s only evidence of gender, for M or Em had shaved her head. (Godwin 151)

In this instance, the encounter of “the body” brings attention to difference. Whereas Francesca is noted for her feminine beauty, her female body, M’s female body is rendered nearly genderless with regard to “social norms.” M is a New Yorker, a woman very far removed from the Ideal of Southern Womanhood that Francesca is used to. These two figures, however different though,

desperately seek the same kind of value independence from “the norm” or “tradition” might offer. M’s ultimate goal as a writer, an artist, is to “transcend her body.” This concept is something foreign to Francesca, someone who fully embraces the body. Yet this is a concept Francesca needs to embrace if her character is to develop. M is the antithesis of Francesca; she has shaved her head to dispense with the time-consuming efforts of beauty, in favor of pursuing her art; M specifically states that she shaved her head so that “I would stop looking into the mirror” (153). Francesca could learn from M, for she definitely needs to stop looking in the mirror. In addition to the shaved head, all the mirrors in M’s house are soaped over (158), and all the shiny, reflective surfaces have become dull or dirty.

This encounter with M is significant; it is Francesca’s chance to embrace more than her body and beauty as the only viable parts of her female identity. Though Francesca’s work as an “amanuensis” with M typically consists of housework and shopping instead of that of a “secretary” or “scribe,” she and M have several revealing conversations, chances for Francesca to enlarge her vision of herself and female identity in general. These opportunities for growth, however, come to an abrupt end as Francesca shows up ill to work one day. Francesca’s illness causes M to dismiss her from work for the day; Francesca doesn’t get the opportunity to return, as Cameron soon sweeps in to rescue her (once more). However, with the onset of Francesca’s illness, we see demonstrated “the body’s” betrayal; her illness sets into action a chain of events which leads her back where she started—in California, with Cameron. Hill points

out that, “by accepting a defeated image of herself, she makes herself ripe for Cameron’s reappearance. She believes she is a failure at creating her own identity” (35). Still, Francesca’s relationship with M is one of significance; it is her opportunity to encounter an alternate female image. In fact, Hill in her treatment of this novel, sees the many characters that Francesca encounters as possible catalysts for change: “As her [Francesca’s] identity evolves, she begins to revise her goals, to rebel, and to try on the identities of other characters almost as if she were shopping for clothes” (30).

To further illustrate Godwin’s emphasis on “body” in this novel, one should also return to and examine the central male figure in this novel. Francesca’s husband Cameron, much like Dane’s stifling husband John, continually comments on the “body” as a container for human identity. He has a theory of people as “containers and shapes,” as mere “bodies” and “forms”: “Shapes are the ways in which we know who we are...relationships are containers...marriages are containers...Friendships and families are our containers. They provide a finite form in which we can store our identities” (105). Cameron’s definition of people as containers/shapes lends itself to the idea of the body as a mere shape/container, a location, for (female) identity. Even as Francesca attempts to reject Cameron’s oppressive objectification of her and construct her identity, ultimately, like Dane, she is defeated; she fails to fully forge a female identity because she cannot escape the “containers” that she herself has participated in constructing. This failure is connected to a limited definition of female identity in/through biological terms, i.e. the female body.

Because Dane and Francesca's identities are solely formed around the female body, they cannot "progress"; they cannot achieve a true sense of self-actualization. At the end of *Glass People*, Francesca, after her brief pilgrimage to find her "self," returns with Cameron, pregnant with a child; her body becomes the central figure as she becomes the ultimate "container" (219).

As the novel concludes, Cameron shows up in New York City, ready to rescue her from her sudden "illness" (her body's betrayal). As she recovers, he thumbs through a women's fashion magazine (a gallery of constructed female images), admiring the models and the clothing, picking out a particular dress he wishes to dress Francesca in. He doesn't yet know if Francesca will return with him, but he hopes that she will. In anticipation of her decision, he makes arrangements for Francesca to try on coats and dresses, under the guise of buying her a warmer wardrobe for the cooler weather in New York. The shopping scene is almost one of pure seduction. As Cameron indulges Francesca's penchant for buying clothes, he has a particular garment in mind for her to try on—an exquisite and expensive dress modeled after the Byzantine Madonna (an act perhaps foreshadowing Francesca's pregnancy): "As they went up, Francesca began to feel more secure in herself. Shopping and trying on clothes, was one thing she could do as well as anyone in the world" (201). Trying on various expensive outfits (again, one could interpret clothes as containers), Francesca, caught up not only in her own vanity, but also in a performance of identity, she is pulled back into her comfort zone, that of her having her identity linked to her beauty, her body—an identity reflected in a mirror: "Francesca

loitered in front of the mirror...A lassitude had come over her, a sort of standing sleep within the coat. She felt like she could go on standing here for hours" (203). She has been lulled back into the complacency of accepting her body and her beauty as identity, accepting an "image" of herself crafted by others. This time, however, the "image" is that of another "ideal" of womanhood—the figure of the Madonna. As Jones, Weeks and Perry, Seidel, and Scott remind us, when we are faced with the complex concept of "womanhood," two dichotomous "images" often surface—that of the Madonna or that of "the whore." Here, Cameron casts Francesca as the Madonna, even dressing her in the proper attire. Cameron once more (re)shapes Francesca's image.

Once Cameron and the pregnant Francesca return to California, it at first appears that little has changed. However, it does become quite clear that Cameron remains intent on (re)creating an "ideal" for Francesca to adhere. Whether it is the Ideal of Southern Womanhood or the Madonna figure, it becomes clear that the perfect female image is one that Cameron is intent on leaving intact. Upon her return, a local magazine reporter, requests an interview with Francesca, who has once more relented to her role of being the wife of a candidate for Attorney General. Francesca asks Cameron whether or not she should give the interview; Cameron only replies that he "wouldn't mind seeing [her] picture on the glossy, thick pages." (211). Francesca, however, is more excited about the content of the interview, citing that perhaps with this interview she will learn more about herself. This is the first instance where we've seen Francesca willing to "think" about her identity beyond the constraints of her

beauty. Cameron remains the same—insistent on aligning her identity with an image seen on “glossy, thick pages.” It is also revealed here that Cameron has since moved out of their bedroom—an act that seems to represent Cameron’s lack of ability to “see” his “wife” as anything but that perfected image. Before retiring to the study, Cameron does offer Francesca some almond oil to rub on her growing belly: “He didn’t want a single stretch mark, he said” (214). Again, a “flaw” or “blemish” might mar his ability to see Francesca as the embodiment of female perfection. That Francesca is pregnant from her brief affair with Mike is another unstated point of contention. While Francesca wishes to talk about her infidelity, to voice her concerns, Cameron does not permit it. Here again, Cameron is insistent that the baby is a “miracle” (again casting Francesca as the Madonna figure, another “ideal” image of womanhood). Rather than accept reality, Cameron instead wishes to live with an illusion, an unreal, female icon.

Even so, Francesca is more inquisitive upon her return; she questions the drastic transitions her body is about to make: “Did pregnancy weaken one’s resistance to the old myths and superstitions” (217). That Francesca begins to interrogate “myths” and “superstitions” seems relevant not only to her “bodily” transitions, but also to those transitions associated with her shifting identity. She even acknowledges that “one *became* myth at these times” (217). Her acknowledgment of *becoming myth* seems significant, for it gives her the power to then *demythologize* and/or to create a mythology of her own. She recognizes her need to “grow accustomed to it, get her own feelings straight about it, this thing that changed her body, changed her life” (218). This introspection shows

that even though Francesca has returned to California and to her relationship with Cameron, she is not the same; she has changed in a small way—and she is in the process of changing, of becoming.

One final scene seems to point to Francesca's ultimate transformation while also merging themes of woman/body/appetite:

In the kitchen, she got out the chicken salad and loaf of bread. Cameron had made fresh mayonnaise. She poured herself a large glass of milk. Too early for wine. She could hardly wait to get things arranged on the plate and start eating. Her changing body amazed her! Here she had scarcely finished breakfast and it was ready to go again. Perhaps she would give birth to a giant. ... She took a bite, another bite, greedily washing it down with the good, cold milk. Good calcium for the bones and teeth of a giant. She put away a hefty lunch. (Godwin 219-220)

While the emphasis once more returns to female identity through the body, through appetite, it is not without some small sense of hopefulness. Francesca is defiantly eating, indulging; she reveals that she was “confident in the secret, rather sly knowledge that Cameron would never allow her to get fat” (220). Yet she does it anyway, she eats. In *Scenes of the Apple*, the authors interpret a female “eating” as a “paradigmatic moment of female rebellion against the invisible and negative force of patriarchal law” (Heller and Moran 5). More than that, Francesca wants to nourish her baby, so that she will have the “bones and teeth of a giant”; it seems clear that even if Francesca cannot be more—she

wants her daughter to be more; she wants her to be a giant. As explained in Yeager's *Dirt and Desire*: "The giant is represented through movement, through being in time. Even in the ascription of the still landscape to the giant, it is the activities for the giant, his or her legendary action, that have resulted in the observable trace...the giant represents the order and disorder of historical forces" (86). There is a sense of hopefulness, then, as the novel concludes, that even though Francesca has failed to see herself as more than body, more than an image constructed by others, she still wants her daughter to be more. If woman must be body, then she should be a giant.

Conclusion: Woman as Body

In both of these earliest novels, it becomes evident that Godwin uses the female body as a means to interrogate prescribed female identity, a female identity reliant on patriarchal paradigms. By exploring the implications of long-held traditions of the mind/body dichotomy, the image of Ideal Southern Womanhood, and the element of the grotesque, Godwin both challenges and subverts these concepts in subtle ways. It is true that the figure of the Southern Lady remains a constant female character in later novels, including *Violet Clay*, *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *The Finishing School*, *A Southern Family*, and *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, but she does so in a much more muted capacity; she shows up in the form of background characters—mothers and grandmothers, rather than as the protagonist(s). Godwin seems to purposefully reconfigure the role of Southern Lady in her novels to where she still remains an important part of the plot and the past, a past that will always shape

and inform the future of her daughters in some way, but never again does the figure of Southern Lady take center stage in Godwin's novels as she does in *Glass People*. Even so, the background Southern Ladies—mothers and grandmothers of the protagonists—foster and nurture the main female character(s), so that the daughters and granddaughters may learn from the past. As Carolyn Rhodes concludes in "Gail Godwin and Southern Womanhood," "Woman reared to reenact the traditional values must learn, Gail Godwin insists, to see their fallacies, explore them opening among critical friends and find new ways to be themselves, continually self-creating" (65). This is the fundamental difference in Godwin's later novels; the treasured female icon of the South never has the same kind of hold over the protagonists as she does in Godwin's first novels; instead, she becomes a figure to interrogate and learn from, not necessarily a figure to emulate and embody.

Further, unlike the rest of Godwin's novels, these first two novels approach female identity in a distinct way, with woman's identity attached to the female body. Yet, the female body, in these two novels, rather than being a clearly positive attribute for Dane and Francesca to embrace, their bodies turn out to be a rather stifling component of their female identities. Dissatisfied with their lives, Dane and Francesca lack a kind of "complete" female identity; both exhibit negative associations with female identity; they both are involved in stifling marriages; both women do not have careers. Both women, in essence, lack a whole identity. Is that because their female identity was tied so fully to the "body"? If so, why is this a limiting factor? Godwin's next novel addresses this

and seems to go beyond woman as body and move more toward a female identity linked more so to “the mind,” to creativity. Still, with *Violet Clay*, Godwin’s fourth novel, the portrayal of the female body remains relevant. The female protagonist Violet is a visual artist who has been stuck in a job illustrating “other people’s visions” of the female heroine on the covers of gothic romance novels (5). Violet, however, eventually seeks her own vision and creates her own image; it, too, happens to be an image of the female body, her artistic rendering of the “Suspended Woman”:

Sam was lying nude on the two folded blankets... Her body was supple and muscles trained so that she could easily maintain positions that would have made other models fidgety. But more remarkable was the range of human images her particular body was capable of suggesting. Turn her three-quarters away as though to pick up something and you had the rib cage and torso of a warrior; have her sit facing you, her shoulders in a relaxed position, and you have a fully mature woman who had borne a child. Stretch her out lengthwise and see tender angles counterposed against tough ones. She was like some hybrid woman, a composite of what has always been and what could be. (Godwin 320)

Here the female body becomes a truly positive “marker” of identity; the female form is elevated to muse as it aids Violet in creating her own vision, one dependent on embracing the “hybrid woman” and her female body. *Violet Clay* seems to be a transitional novel, where the female body is no longer ambiguous

or cumbersome, but rather a source of inspiration and creativity. *The Odd Woman*, then, becomes another departure point—one that fully embraces the latitude of the female mind and moves Godwin's writing into another realm of developing female identity.

CHAPTER THREE

WRITING THE MIND

A real vocation is what we are all in search of. Something that is so close to us it fits our psyche like a snug sock...that meshes so thoroughly with our nature... (Godwin, *The Odd Woman* 29)

...literature is a way out of their own minds, and a consequent expansion unlike anything in the world. (51)

Mindful Escape or Interiority of the Mind: Mind as (Female) Identity in *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, and *A Southern Family*

Introduction: Manifestations of the Female Mind in the Novels of Gail Godwin

My analysis of the female mind in the novels of Gail Godwin is first an examination of “how” the mind is portrayed through the author’s later novels, that is, “how” Godwin’s female characters’ representations in later novels are more aligned with the female mind instead of the female body. Secondly, along with the “how,” the question of “why” arises: Why does Godwin relocate female identity with “the mind”? Why is there a shift from the body, to the mind, in how Godwin underscores female identity? For this analysis to take shape, then, I must first define the “mind” or at least explain the term “mind” as I am using it for my analysis.

With this chapter, it is my contention that Godwin’s novels—*The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, and *A Southern Family*—place a strong emphasis on the female mind in terms of how portrayals of the (female) mind (re)shape female identity; this emphasis is especially apparent when comparing

these three novels to Godwin's earlier novels, *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*. It is my belief that there is a distinct shift in Godwin's work, a shift which reflects how/where female identity is located in her protagonists. With her third novel, Godwin's female characters become multidimensional; they are no longer solely female bodies and/or solely representations of the female mind at odds with the female body.

Specifically, then, it is my contention that Godwin utilizes four major themes related to the human mind when constructing the identities of her later female protagonists, each in conjunction with a specific understanding of the human mind; these functions of the mind when applied to Godwin's later novels reveal a particular aesthetic of the female mind that is then associated with Godwin's larger vision of "wholeness" and female identity. For the purpose of this dissertation, then, we must first define "mind" in terms of its collective aspects of intellect *and* consciousness; these aspects are then made manifest through a combination of *cognition, perception, emotion, will, and imagination*. Through my analysis, it will become clear that in Godwin's later novels, *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, and *A Southern Family*, Godwin not only uses manifestations of the female mind as a means to define and carve out a shifting (and expanding) female identity, but also uses manifestations of the female mind to further enlarge her vision of "wholeness" as it pertains to both spirituality and female identity.

Jane Clifford, for example, the female protagonist from Godwin's third novel, *The Odd Woman*, is unlike Godwin's two previous protagonists in several

ways. Jane is introspective, thoughtful, a female who's identity is very much linked to her mind. Jane is a professor of English, a character who constantly seeks identity through words, through the stories of others, through the stories of published authors or the retold family narratives. By comparison to the female protagonists from her earlier novels, the complexity of Jane Clifford's character alone is evidence enough of a major shift in Godwin's writing.

To be sure, Jane Clifford seems to locate her female identity more solidly with her mind, with her intellect, than any of Godwin's previous female characters. Further, there is an interiority, an introspective side of Jane Clifford, that is largely absent from Godwin's earlier female incarnations. Earlier Godwin protagonists, like Dane Empson and Francesca Bolt, lack a sense of interiority. Further, Jane is a representative female of her times; she is part of a feminist (re)awakening as many critics have pointed out: Jane and *The Odd Woman* become an "expression of feminis[m] in the seventies" (Showalter 56). Jane, however, is not alone. Lydia, Cate, and Nell from *A Mother and Two Daughters* also reflect the changing times as each emerges, by the end of the novel, with an identity not only associated with the mind, but linked to the theme of "change," a theme that bolsters Godwin's vision of "wholeness." Altogether, Godwin's novels of the mid-1970s and 1980s seem less apt to associate female identities with female bodies, but rather these female characters begin defining themselves by their careers, many of which are careers linked to "the mind" in some way.

In addition to an emphasis on female identity and "the mind," through her characters' careers and education, Godwin also begins using intertextual literary

references throughout her novels. This, too, seems like a rhetorical strategy geared toward associating her female protagonists' identities with "the mind." The title of *The Odd Woman* is itself an intertextual reference to George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893); moreover, because Jane Clifford is a literature professor, there are countless intertextual literary references to investigate in this novel, references which, in turn, help better illuminate the text. Moreover, we see with *The Odd Woman* Godwin's journey *into* the "female mind" via the (re)construction of dreams, visions, memory, and narrative. One section of Chapter Three entitled "In Search of the Enema Bandit: Mind, Memory, and Intertextual Madness in Godwin's *The Odd Woman*" specifically examines *The Odd Woman*, its emphasis on "the mind" as a means to define female identity, its themes of memory/storytelling/mind, and its intertextual literary references.

With "Chapter Three: Writing the Mind," intersections of female identity and the body will also be examined to show the contrast and shifts from Godwin's earliest novels. Another part of this chapter on the mind will examine *A Mother and Two Daughters* and *A Southern Family* in terms of Godwin's emphasis on the mind in relation to the complex construction of a singular female identity as it emerges from a larger community/family; in addition, the tension(s) between female empowerment and education that exists among the female characters in these two novels will also be examined. Largely the female characters in these three novels are defined by one another in various ways. This section will specifically explore the differences in female identity as they pertain to defining female identity in/through "the mind." Because intertextual literary

references remain a constant in Godwin's works, they will also be identified and explored as support for Godwin's shift in emphasis to "the mind" and female identity.

Ultimately, it is my contention that Godwin uses "the mind" as a means to further define and expand components of female identity. With *The Odd Woman*, *Violet Clay*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *The Finishing School*, and *A Southern Family*, Godwin uses manifestations of "the female mind" to define a shifting female identity. In turn, Godwin targets three main aspects of the mind—areas of the mind which will be defined in-depth below: 1.) Mind-related vocations for her female protagonists, 2.) the use of memory implicit in the act of storytelling as well as the use of multiple embedded/(re)constructed narratives, and 3.) intertextual literary references. Each of these three aspects of the mind then serves as a means to redefine, relocate, and reestablish the female identity in Godwin's later novels. And while the "body" and female identity remain present (and often problematic), especially in *The Odd Woman*, but also in *A Mother and Two Daughters*, the female body as a sole means to define "femaleness" recedes. In turn, the mind becomes much more prevalent, more active, and is often used as an escape (from the confines of the body) toward Godwin's new vision of self-definition through "wholeness."

Defining the Mind

In contemporary American culture, the word "mind" conjures forth ideas about an immaterial, internal site, a space where human thought processes originate and take shape; the mind, in general, becomes defined and inflated as

the site of unconscious, subconscious, or preconscious states, and/or the seat of rational thought. Carol Ochs, however, contends that the mind has more to do with perceptions of reality, that the mind contains the “categories of ... understanding that filter all our perceptions” (49). Linking the body to the mind, then, we understand that the sensory information gathered by our bodily experiences are sorted out and then interpreted by the mind—body/mind, in that way, are not separate, but unified, working together to gather and assimilate information that can then be placed in existing schemas, a complex system for building and expanding knowledge.

In contrast to this idea, however, many western philosophers have maintained that “the mind is a faculty of the soul” (Moreland and Rae 21), merging then mind/soul instead of body/mind. Many of these definitions may be accurate descriptions of the mind; however, with this study, I would like to both keep but also elaborate on the above definitions of the word “mind,” for while the mind may certainly be associated with many of the above descriptors and concepts, for the purpose of this study, we must complicate the usage of the term “mind,” especially as it applies to the study of Southern Appalachian literature and to Godwin’s fiction in particular. With this examination, then, it is recognized that the mind is comprised of combinations among cognition, perception, emotion, will, and imagination as mentioned above; however, certain terms must be further explained as to how they specifically relate to Godwin’s writing.

The Mind of The South: Memory, Mindset, and Mythmaking (Storytelling)

To be sure, the “mind,” is representative of the “interiority” of the human experience; however, the term “mind” requires some elaboration of meaning, especially in relation to its application to Godwin’s fiction. The Old English word, “geymynd,” and Middle English word “minde,” relate that our contemporary American English word “mind” springs more so from the concepts of “memory,” “reminder,” “recollection,” or “remembrance” than to a general understanding of the “mind” as simply the realm of the “interiority” of the human experience. The concepts of “memory,” “reminder,” “recollection,” and “remembrance,” then, can be directly related to the study of the Southern Appalachian literary tradition, where the story and the storyteller, history and myth, the past and the present, recollection and memory, collide into a discussion about the role of the individual versus the role of the individual *within a community*, a community of practice which is largely dependent on a specific legacy, on heritage, on the (re)construction and (re)circulation of stories and myths about the Southern Appalachian region and its people.

As Ray B. West Jr. observes, “Myth is...a form of tribal memory, preserving events of the past as a means of justifying and explaining its views of the present” (13). In Southern Appalachian literature and culture, mythmaking and storytelling are defined as communal acts because of their relation to cultural memory and the preservation of a particular people, culture. Here, the community and the individual converge with roles of the teller and the listener(s). Myths and stories become “symbols of the inner, unconscious drama which only becomes

accessible through projection, through telling” (Sellers 5). Memory and (story) telling then become powerful and intertwined actions, tools of the mind.

Built from a heritage which embraces oral literacy as a means to communicate and convey knowledge, Southern Appalachian culture and its subsequent written literature are filled with tellers and listeners:

Storytelling and traditional speech patterns have been of special interest to folklorists and linguists as well as writers. Observers of the tale-telling tradition now realize that the communication achieved between storyteller and audience goes well beyond entertainment. Storytelling creates a social bond between and among teller and audience members. (Edwards 153)

As Eudora Welty, one of the greatest Southern storytellers, has pointed out, the story is important because it reveals the “vulnerability of human imperfection caught up in human emotion, and so there is growth, there is crisis, there is fulfillment, there is decay” (39). Storytelling connects; it is one of the only ways in which the inner life of the mind can be made “outer.” Regardless of what is learned from storytelling “beyond entertainment,” it is clear that storytelling is powerful and requires both the individual, that is, the teller, and the audience, the community. The interaction between the individual and the community, then, becomes vital not only to storytelling and subsequent mythmaking but also important to Southern Appalachian culture as well.

Louis D. Rubin writes of the importance of the relationship between the community and the individual in *The Mocking Bird in the Gum Tree: A Literary*

Gallimaufry. "...to live where one's identity is embodied in rituals and institutions, involves a prescribed and conspicuous community role, against and within which the nature of one's personal needs and wishes may be delineated and the costs identified and understood" (33). Here, Rubin underscores the conflated role that the individual plays within a community; the role of the individual within a community of practice is necessary to the culture represented by Godwin's work, but such a role is also specifically germane to appreciating the complexities of the act of storytelling and mythmaking, especially those depicted in Godwin's fiction, a fiction that is deeply rooted in place, in Southern Appalachia. In addition, as we will explore in the section of the chapter entitled, "Mind Matters: *A Mother and Two Daughters*," at times, mothers and daughters make up their own "communal space," a sacred space where female identity is often more valued, especially in relation to the act of storytelling, whereas Kathryn Lee Seidel points out in "The Separate Self: Identity and Tradition in the Fiction of Gail Godwin and Ellen Glasgow," "...mothers [become] the main purveyors of information..." (157) as Godwin consistently "...uses mothers and grandmothers as purveyors of family legends," that is as storytellers (160). With the act of storytelling, important connections are made: "...stories are part of a family history that give the protagonist a sense of connection and provide her with parables of ancestors whose similar traits led to similar situations" (161). Again then, female identity, in this way, becomes a process of understanding oneself through difference, just as Seidel concludes: "By allowing the protagonist to view the past from a different perspective, these legends help protagonists understand important aspects of

themselves or their mothers” (160). Storytelling, then, becomes vitally important, especially if we relate the act more fully to the “memory” and “cognition,” acts of the mind.

Because each of these aforementioned elements has to do with continuity—both of the community and of the individual—a particular “mindset” is required, a “mindset” related to humanity in general, but also as a reflection of a particular place and culture as well: “Human identity in time becomes human in a place—a specific, concrete, tangible locus of emotional states” (Rubin, *Mocking Bird* 33). Further, the term “mind” often connects to a “particular way of thinking,” a pattern of thought which influences and determines behavior, that is, a “particular way of doing things”; in this way, then, “mind” becomes related to a particular tradition, to the ideals, customs, and social conscience—the social mores—of a particular culture or a particular region; in Godwin’s case that region is Southern Appalachia. An emphasis on this aspect of the “mind,” “memory,” and “mindset” is highly important to understanding Godwin’s fiction, for her fiction emerges out of a particular “mind,” a particular culture and a particular literary tradition which values mythmaking and storytelling. The stories (re)told by the grandmothers, mothers, and daughters of Godwin’s fiction serve the purpose of relaying the “mindset” of a particular people from a particular place.

Godwin’s creative nonfiction piece “Uncle Orphy,” from Joyce Dyer’s collection, *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers*, underscores Godwin’s love of a particular region; the piece also depicts as well the role of the individual within a community and/or family; in this instance, the

figure that binds together “memory” and “myth” to community, family, storytelling, and place is Godwin’s real-life great Uncle, Orpha Rogers; fictional incarnations of “Uncle Orphy” show up in the form of Uncle Osgood in *A Mother and Two Daughters*, Uncle Iz in *The Odd Woman*, and Uncle Ambrose in *Violet Clay*. Though the fusion of the “real” Uncle Orphy to his fictional counterparts of Uncle Iz, Uncle Osgood, and Uncle Ambrose is just one instance of the conflated themes of the role of the individual within community and the act of storytelling that revolves around place, there are countless other such instances woven throughout Godwin’s fiction. Just as the “real” Uncle Orpha, is an important member of Godwin’s “real” family and community, his fictional counterparts remain relevant to Godwin’s fiction in general, for Uncle Orpha, in his many incarnations, is a link to the past; he is a storyteller, a mythmaker, but he also becomes story and myth; he becomes representative of something more, a representation of Southern Appalachia. In fact, the inclusion of “Uncle Orpha” within her fiction underscores the importance of the aforementioned themes of “mythmaking,” “storytelling,” and a connection to the past in relation to the Southern Appalachian literary tradition. Uncle Orpha becomes myth, he becomes story, because of the way Godwin (re)creates him in the stories she tells/writes.

Mythmaking and storytelling remain extremely relevant to Godwin’s fiction, especially as they are related to the “mind.” Central to the plots of *The Odd Woman*, *Violet Clay*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *The Finishing School*, *A Southern Family*, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, *The Good Husband*, and *Evensong* is the heavy emphasis on the interwoven community and family

stories, stories remembered and retold by the novels' primary and secondary female characters; within each of these novels, there is always a deliberate and constructed familial, communal, or cultural mythology that helps to (re)stabilize—or sometimes destabilize—Godwin's larger narratives. The embedded (familial, communal, cultural) narratives in each of Godwin's novels are, in turn, used to advance or complicate the larger plots. Further, in each of these novels, *the act* of storytelling contributes to mythmaking, and both of these actions—storytelling and mythmaking—often generate necessary healing—for the individual and, at times, the larger community or culture. Interestingly enough, we do find that the act of storytelling often involves the cooperation of the body and the mind; this cooperation of body and mind in the storytelling process, then, advances Godwin's overarching theme of “wholeness,” a theme which embraces the mingling of body and mind (and soul).

Trinh T. Minh-ha points out in *Woman Native Other* the relevance of the individual to the community as they are each involved in the act of storytelling:

The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being. The story of a people. Of us, people. Story, history, literature (or religion, philosophy, natural science, ethics)—all is one. (119)

With Godwin's novels, the individual protagonist's identity is linked strongly with her ability to both listen to and (re)tell the family and community stories and myths.

Storytelling and mythmaking have two functions according to Robert Graves; they “answer awkward questions that children ask...and....justify the existing social system and...account for rites and customs” (Graves qtd. Sellers 2). The emphasis on enforcing a “social system,” “rites,” and “customs,” again links mythmaking and storytelling to the “mindset” of a particular culture, and thus to a function of the mind in general. Further, according to Carl Jung, myth always functions as a component of the mind in terms of its relations to constructed mythology, for Jung views mythology as part of a collective psyche and/or collective unconscious, common to all, comprised of shared archetypes (Sellers 4). Consequently, myths and stories act as an “organizing function” (5) for a culture or community, again linking storytelling and mythmaking with cognition and the mind. Susan Sellers, author of *Myth and Fairytale in Contemporary Women’s Fiction*, reiterates that mythmaking and storytelling are a “communal process” (7) that involves “human socialization” (11). Stories connect the past to the present to the future (Minh-ha 122).

Mythmaking and storytelling, therefore, are powerful acts; within a family, community, or culture they connect life to story and story to life. According to Sellers, then, myths and stories are always a powerful “generating force” (1). This “generating force” can also be a “regenerating force” bound to the circulation and transmission of stories which are told and retold within families and communities. Minh-ha, in “Grandma’s Stories,” clarifies the connection between storytelling and power/authority: “What is transmitted from generation to generation is not only the stories, but the very power of transmission” (134), the

power to tell, to give voice. And, as Anne Goodwyn Jones points out, “To have a voice is to have some control over one’s environment” (37). Having a “voice,” that is, having “control over one’s environment” is connected to feminist tenets, thus, at least tangentially linking storytelling, mythmaking, and Godwin’s fiction to feminist theory—some aspects of which will be explored below.

As for the “power” and “authority” connected to storytelling, Minh-ha much like Sellers maintains that the generation, regeneration, and transmission of stories act as a balm or a cure, a cure for the individual, the community, and/or the culture: “The story as cure and as a protection is at once musical, historical, poetical, ethical, educational, magical, and religious” (140). Minh-ha continues: “Curing means re-generating, for understanding is creating. The principle of healing rests in the reconciliation, hence the necessity for the family and/or the community to cooperate, partake in, and witness the recovery, de-possession, regeneration...” (140). A communal story, a family story, is never simply a story; it is always related to the act of telling, which is, in turn, implicit in acts of power and healing through the process of transmission. As Sellers points out, “myth is so continually repeated that it gradually creates its own resonate force,” (2) a force that is at once personal and communal.

Marina Warner, paraphrased in Susan Sellers’ *Myth and Fairy Tale in Contemporary Women’s Fiction*, states that: “Even the most immediate and intense personal experience...passes through the common net of images and tales that comprise our understanding of the world. Myths offer ways of making sense of our experience and give crucial insights into the ideologies that underlie

our understandings” (Warner qtd. Sellers 7). The personal once told becomes communal property, and then it is embedded in the larger culture: “A story is not just a story. Once the forces have been aroused and set into motion, they can’t simply be stopped at someone’s request. Once told, the story is bound to circulate; humanized, it may have a temporary end, but its effects linger on and its end is never truly an end” (Minh-ha 33). In terms of their relationship to the “mind,” memory and mythology often overlap, creating inner narratives that live on throughout the adult life. Sellers believes that mythology can “impact adult life with all the resonance and force of childhood memories—whether the emotions stirred by the tales are the ones of terror, grandiose dreams of achievement, or puerile satisfaction in just being dispersed” (12). Myths and stories are “infinitely translatable” (Sellers 6); told and retold, they can, in turn, warn, heal, give voice, and offer power. For these reasons, mythmaking and storytelling should not be taken lightly, for as Minh-ha points out, a story is never just a story, and once told is always “bound to circulate” (134).

It is interesting to note that the stories (re)told throughout Godwin’s novels are decidedly related to the feminine/female. Stories are passed down from mother to daughter, from grandmother to granddaughter, creating a network of female voices, voices repeating and transmitting stories that might not otherwise be told. In *The Odd Woman* for instance, Jane only hears stories from her mother and grandmother, and, in turn, Jane only retells the stories told to her by her female ancestors, creating, in turn, a distinctly female culture. Sellers also comments on the connection between storytelling and women’s culture, noting

oftentimes that telling stories, narrating tales (particularly fairy tales), is a shared feminine act (7). Storytelling can be a feminist act as well when linked to the concept of “giving voice.” In turn, then, storytelling can also be a transgressive act when used to challenge the dominant hegemony. Godwin uses embedded narratives in each of these ways—to reflect a distinctly women’s culture and a female voice, but also to challenge and sometimes transverse the dominant paradigm.

Trinh T. Minh-ha in *Woman Native Other* also traces storytelling, mythmaking, and memory to feminist acts, especially those which involve revision of “grand narratives”; she poignantly writes:

I owe that to you, her and her, who owe it to her, and her and her. I memorize, recognize, and name my sources, not to validate my voice through the voice of an authority (for we, women, have little authority in the History of Literature, and wise women never draw from their authority)... In this chain and continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring. Pleasure in the copy, pleasure in the reproduction. No repetition can ever be identical, but my story carries with it their stories, their history, and our story repeats itself endlessly despite our persistence in denying it. (122)

Feminist critics like Minh-ha place a high value on storytelling and mythmaking because without such subversive means, many “stories,” “truths,” “voices” would be silenced by the dominant hegemony and/or lost amidst other more dominant voices. So it is with Godwin’s female characters. As Kathryn Lee Seidel reiterates: “By allowing the protagonist to view the past from a different perspective, these legends help protagonists understand important aspects of themselves or their mothers” (160). Godwin’s protagonists understand themselves better through legend—through the family, communal, and cultural myths and stories (re) circulated by mothers and grandmothers.

Godwin’s female characters tell and retell the family/community stories; it is the female characters who become “the storytellers” and thus the “living memory of her people” (Minh-ha 125). That Jane Clifford retells (and also investigates) her grandmother Edith’s story about Aunt Cleva remains vitally important to not only the plot of *The Odd Woman*, but also to Jane’s development as a character; by retelling her grandmother’s story, her Aunt Cleva’s story, her “voice” becomes complicit in creating a counter-narrative. Jane uses her mind, memory, and the act of storytelling created through memory, to give “voice” and “authority” to the other female characters in the novel, characters whose narratives, lives, might otherwise be forgotten. By interrogating her family’s myths, Jane works “to loosen its negative strangleholds” so that she can “sew new variations into its weave, and jettison those myths that cannot be satisfactorily altered” (Sellers 7). Jane’s interaction with the family mythology—even to challenge or alter it—is part of a feminist act. Subversive (re)writings

complicate set mythology; they complicate Truth and challenge authority, while still maintaining the importance of the storytelling act. Telling helps (previously) silenced voices remain “alive,” just as Minh-ha concludes in “Grandma’s Stores”: “My story, no doubt, is me, but it is also, no doubt, older than me. Younger than me, older than the humanized. Unmeasurable, uncontainable, so immense that it exceeds all attempts at humanizing” (123). Stories remain “alive” and relevant long after their characters and many tellers have expired as demonstrated most aptly in Godwin’s *A Mother and Two Daughters* and *A Southern Family*.

In Godwin’s novels the “continuum” emphasized is then not only tied to a particular literary tradition, that of Southern Appalachian literature which emphasizes community and family mythology, but also this “continuum” stresses that the act of storytelling is part of a female culture linked to memory and thus the female mind. In *The Odd Woman*, for instance, Jane retells the stories of her mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, female friends, female colleagues, as well as the stories of female authors and female characters from 19th century literature. This is important for a number of reasons: 1.) it is an act of feminist (re)visioning 2.) it gives “voice” and “authority” to lost/silenced female characters and authors 3.) it is an act of regeneration, of healing. Each of these acts links memory and storytelling to the (female) mind, thus demonstrating “how” Godwin’s later novels emphasize the female mind rather than the female body in order to better construct female characters who embrace Godwin’s concept of “wholeness.” With storytelling and memory, Godwin’s female characters are linked to more

than just the individual, but also to community, to family, to other women whose stories must be (re)told.

The Female Mind at Work: Career, Academia, and the Draw of the Intertextual

In addition to storytelling and “mindset,” the “mind” also has direct associations with formal education, intellect, creativity, and cognition as mentioned earlier; therefore, Godwin’s later novels also reflect the female mind in terms of how her characters use their education, intellect, and creativity—all functions of the mind—as a means to establish a changing female identity. As Godwin’s writing progresses and her female characters develop more agency through the development of their minds, Godwin’s female characters become women with careers; they are intellectuals and academics; they are artists whose minds are largely associated with creativity, critical thinking, and intelligence. This shift, however, of an emphasis on the “intellectual” or an emphasis on “the mind” as a means to carve out (female) identity, posits Godwin slightly at odds with her Southern Appalachian literary tradition.

Since the 1917 publication of H.L. Mencken’s “Sahara of the Bozart,” a scathing critique of Southern Literature and culture, the South, its culture, and its literature have been under much scrutiny. Mencken’s critique basically maligns the South for its lack of artistic endeavors: “...for all its size and all its wealth and all the ‘progress’ it babbles of, it is almost as sterile, artistically, intellectually, culturally, as the Sahara Desert” (Mencken 157). This critique, many Southern Literature scholars credit as the document responsible for bringing attention to the emerging literary geniuses of the South, for the 1920’s Southern

Renaissance (or “Renaissance”) is often interpreted as a response following Mencken’s harsh critique. Further, the alliance of the Fugitive Agrarians and their subsequent publication, *I’ll Take My Stand* (1930), also established a division between the “intellectual” and the “traditional Southerner,” the Fugitive Agrarians being the “anti-intellectual intellectuals.” Tara Powell points out in “The Beleaguered Intellectual in Southern Fiction,” that the division of “traditional” versus “intellectual” mostly comes down to a division between “man-doing” versus “man-thinking,” that is, the traditional agrarian culture of the South valued “man-doing,” man working, actively involved in production, over “man-thinking.” Intellectuals, that is, “man-thinking,” become opposite of “man-doing,” seemingly alienated from the Southern Appalachian tradition. Powell makes this connection: “In some ways, this was the simple corollary of the Old South’s being a largely agrarian society, in which wealth, respect, and even spiritual life, were tied far more to the land and to the collective work of bodies than to an individual’s mental life producing ideas that could not be seen, touched, woven, or tasted” (1). This division between “man-thinking” and “man-doing,” exists culturally and historically, and Powell makes an important distinction when she points directly to a division between body and mind. The division between body and mind, then, is a source of fodder for Southern Appalachian writers in two ways: 1.) Intellectualism and the intellectual can be interpreted as “against” the traditional agrarian culture of the South and thus acts as a framework for a stabilized cultural identity and 2.) Pitting “intellectualism” against traditionalism, “man-

thinking” against “man-doing,” plays into the mind/body or body/soul dichotomies that emerge as themes in traditional Southern Appalachian literature.

Traditional literature of the South and Appalachia, then, has rarely depicted the intellectual or the academic in a favorable light because “man-thinking” is simply not valued as highly as “man-doing” within the agrarian tradition. William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, and Flannery O’Connor are three among many Southern authors who have often interrogated the role of the intellectual within traditional Southern culture. In Appalachian literature as well, “folk wisdom” is often lauded above “book learning.” Historically speaking, then, there has been a divide between the “intellectual life” and “everyday life” of the Southern Appalachian. An additional reason for the distrust of the intellectual might be due to the demystifying component intellectualism seems to offer everyday life, for Southern Appalachian literature is often characterized by its embrace of “the mysterious.” Intellectualism challenges the mysterious on some level; it attempts to rationalize and explain away the mysteries of life, including those mysteries associated with religion, with Christianity in particular—traditions also linked to Southern Appalachian culture and literature. In this way, we see the conflict of “soul” versus “mind” also come into play.

As Robert B. Heilman points out in “The Southern Temper,” in Southern culture and literature “...a mystery [is] to be accepted not solved” (10). Accepting the mysteries associated with the soul, working within everyday life, allows what Heilman calls a “sense of totality” to enter Southern Literature and culture. This phrase, “sense of totality,” then, can be unpacked and related to Godwin’s

philosophy of “wholeness” and to the concept of “spirituality.” Heilman relates “totality” to a “sense of time, of the extensive need and possibility, of the world and the spirit” and as a reflection of “inclusiveness” which relies on the past (10,11). With his definition of “totality,” Heilman also comments on the necessity of the belief in “human potentiality” against “the naturalist closure of other avenues of wisdom” (12). Heilman’s final association of “totality” to an “open” exploration of “other avenues of wisdom” once more relates to the general misgivings regarding intellectualism often associated with Southern Appalachian literature and culture.

Understanding Southern Appalachia, its literature, and its culture became centrally important after Mencken’s article. Later texts like W.J. Cash’s *The Mind of the South* (1940) offer a sometimes romanticized version of the South’s cultural (and literary) contributions to society at large, idealized versions which serve to reinforce the agrarian stance, pitting the intellectual against the traditional and “man-doing” against “man-thinking,” (re)creating an age-old division between not only body and mind, but also body and soul. The legacy continues in contemporary texts like James C. Cobb’s *Redefining Southern Culture: Mind and Identity in the Modern South* (1999), Michael Kreyling’s *Inventing Southern Literature* (1998), and Michael O’Brien’s *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (1993). There has been since the inception of “Southern” culture and literature, a palpable division between “intellect” and “tradition.” As O’Brien explains, “To write was respectable. Only to write was less so” (22). Therefore, the very auspices of creativity, the existence of the creative

being, is suspicious within Southern culture. For Godwin, then, to create female characters who are both creative beings and/or intellectuals, she is almost reacting against the literary tradition from which her work springs.

In this way, then, Godwin does not follow the path of her Southern (and Appalachian) literary forbearers. The female protagonists in Godwin's fiction find solace, find meaning, in their intellectual lives; in fact, it is Godwin's emphasis on the female mind that gives her later female characters so much more depth. Godwin, with her fiction, is consciously challenging her literary forbearers in terms of the positive way she depicts the academic and/or the (creative) intellectual. With Godwin's fiction, the academic, intellectual, and/or creative-minded female is to be admired, and ultimately, the female mind becomes a means to attain agency and carve out a stable female identity. Why does Godwin portray the intellectual in such a positive light? Perhaps it is to challenge hegemonic and patriarchal paradigms of the past, or perhaps it is to legitimize her own work as an "intellectual" endeavor.

Along with establishing female characters with mind-centered careers, Godwin also uses intertextual (literary) references throughout her later fiction perhaps as a means to challenge the role of the intellectual and/or the role of the academic. My use of the term "intertextuality" originates in relation to Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality as associated with the study of language and semiotics, that is, "read[ing] the literary text as an intersection of other texts" or realizing that the "inside of a text is indebted to its outside" (Kristeva 446). Intertextuality, in essence, then, is the (re)shaping of texts' meanings by other

texts. Or, as Kristeva reminds, “Every text builds itself as a mosaic of quotations, every text is absorption and transformation of another text” (Kristeva qtd. Plottel 15). Intertextuality in this way relates to the rhizomatic nature of language, where language and meaning are built upon repetition, where cognition is not simply linear, but also horizontal and schematic.

John Frow in *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* lists ten different assertions and underlying assumptions regarding intertextuality. Below I will paraphrase four of those assertions as they pertain to my reading of Godwin’s fiction: 1.) The concept of intertextuality requires that we understand the concept of the text not as a self-contained structure but as differential and historical, 2.) texts are traces and tracings of otherness, shaped by repetition, 3.) the form of representation of an intertextuality ranges from explicit to implicit, and 4.) the identification of an intertext is an act of interpretation.

Intertextuality, however, can also refer to an author’s specific “sampling” or borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader’s referencing of one text in reading another. In this way, intertextuality synthesizes a polyphony of internal and external textual influences, thus allowing history, culture, cosmology, psychology, literature, etc. to interact and converge with the text in order to create layers of meaning. As Thomas C. Foster describes: Intertextuality is a “dialogue between old and new texts” (34). Foster claims that the, “intertextual dialogue deepens and enriches the reading experience, bringing multiple layers of meaning to the text, some of which readers may not even consciously notice. The more we become aware of the possibility that our text is speaking to other

texts, the more similarities and correspondences we begin to notice, and the more alive the text becomes” (34-35).

Godwin’s use of intertextual references is particularly related to the field of English studies, namely the study of literature, but may also include intertextual references to Jungian psychology as well. Godwin’s uses of literary references inform the text; they bring to the text a “layering effect,” something that also reflects Godwin’s own interaction(s) with various texts. We see evidenced in *The Odd Woman*, for instance, Godwin’s earlier academic interests in British and/or Victorian Literature. From the very beginning of her writing career Godwin has laced her fiction with literary references, references that may be easily glazed over and/or researched to add “texture” or a layering effect to her fiction. Certainly, one may read, process, and understand *The Odd Woman* without ever investigating George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*. However, by exploring the many textual connections, that is, the “intertextual” references, the reading experience will expand, and become enriched.

Why, then, does Godwin actively use “intertextuality” in her fiction? Because the intellectual, academic, or creative mind plays such a vital role in her later fiction, intertextuality may be another tactic employed by Godwin to “elevate” her fiction and/or to appeal to a more academic audience. Perhaps such literary references serve as an homage to her own literary influences. Or perhaps, implicit and explicit intertextual references are Godwin’s comment on the (in)authenticity of the writer’s voice, an acknowledgement that what she is writing has been written before in some way, where the voice of the author is called into

question. Whatever the reason, intertextual references are woven throughout Godwin's fiction. Regardless, intertextuality does complicate Godwin's fiction, adding layers of meaning that challenge the reader.

Mind as Escape (from the Body)—The Dis-ease of the Mind:
Dreams, Fantasies & Chronic Insomnia

Sleep, sleeplessness, dreams, and fantasies also become prevalent recurring themes in Godwin's fiction, especially in Godwin's later novels, *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, and *A Southern Family*. Jane, Kitty, and Edith are each plagued with chronic bouts of insomnia in *The Odd Woman*, and Lydia from *A Mother and Two Daughters* is often caught catching a nap in the afternoon; sleeping is one of her luxuries, just as sleeping was an indulgence for Francesca in *Glass People*. Interestingly enough, each of these—sleep, sleeplessness, dreams, and fantasies—is connected to the mind, for they are states of the unconscious. While Francesca and Lydia's penchant for sleep might be easily attributed to their lack of interaction with the world around them, their lack of desire to engage in the development of their own conscious identities, Jane, Kitty, and Edith's chronic bouts of insomnia might be more interesting to unpack and investigate, as they relate to the ongoing dichotomy between mind and body. Even so, while Francesca seems content to sleep, Lydia breaks free from the grasp of sleep so that she might better engage in the life around her. Still, patterns of sleep and sleeplessness and the recurrence of fantasies and dreams, emerge as themes in Godwin's later work.

Insomnia is often characterized by three different categories: as one who has "trouble getting to sleep," "wakes up often during the night," or "who wakes

up long before [one] desire[s] to do so” (Rosenteur 272). Typically, then, someone might comment that lack of sleep might be associated with one being unable to “rest the mind,” thus commenting again on the (dis) connection between body and mind. *Morpheus and Me: The Complete Book of Sleep* significantly notes that, “Ulcers and insomnia, in the upper echelons, are considered scars of honor...war wounds proudly won in man’s paradoxical battle against his own mind and body” (Rosenteur 268). Here we have another instance where the body can evidence a disharmony with the mind, thus causing disunity of the self or a lack of wholeness and harmony. Like the headaches that devastate Dane in *The Perfectionists*, literally and metaphorically splitting body from mind, Jane, Kitty, and Edith each suffer from insomnia, another ailment of the body which resides largely in the mind being at dis-ease.

Rosenteur goes on to describe the complicatedness of insomnia: it is “everywhere and nowhere: an impalpable, impossible to pin down and dose nightmare from which the sufferer knows he won’t awaken since he has never been asleep” (268). Some experts, in fact, maintain that, “chronic insomnia may be the result of difficulty relaxing both body and mind [and that the] insomniac suffers from a combination of external circumstances and inner nervous tensions which have arisen in the course of the individual’s development, often from infancy onwards” (31). Here again, the body (the external) reflects the mind (the internal), for “Insomnia is not a disease or a condition in itself, but is always to be considered an expression, or a symptom of an underlying disorder” (33-34). That

is, something troubling the mind may influence the body's ability to rest: "...a definite symptom of conflict somewhere on the mental scene" (37).

On the other hand, once sleeping, Godwin's characters often have vivid dreams, dreams which significantly show us again the "internal" workings of a female character's mind. Dreams function as means for the reader to engage with the inner-workings of a female character; with dreams we are allowed to enter the female characters' minds. In addition, dreams and fantasies allow the symbolic to enter Godwin's prose, for "dreams seem to use a language which is different from our usual conscious method of expression" (52).

Jane Clifford as well as many of Godwin's other female characters are introspective, solitary figures whom we often fail to see actively interact with others. Yet, their minds are always at work. Godwin always uses the dreams and fantasies of her female characters to depict their inner life. These dreams and fantasies often involve the female body in terms of sexuality and sexual acts. With the sexual dreams and fantasies of these characters, we see merge once more the body and the mind. Here again, then, Godwin uses "the mind" via sleeping and dreams to identify core aspects of her developing female characters. Also with dreams and fantasies, Godwin's characters are allowed, permitted to be "alone," wrapped in solitude, yet still actively engaged in life around them. Annis Pratt views Godwin's use of dreams and fantasies as a means to enable the individual. Encased in dreams and fantasies—also acting as embedded narratives—are the individual's (inner, often hidden) desires: "The tension between society and the individual embodied within these narrative

structures creates an implosion of consciousness, opening the way for a radical shift in vision” (Pratt 113). This “radical shift in vision,” then, is what I interpret as Godwin’s shift from body-identified female protagonists to mind-identified female protagonists.

Conclusion: Writing the (Female) Mind

The remainder of this chapter will specifically analyze the mind-identified female protagonists in Godwin’s *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, and *A Southern Family*. With my analysis, I assert that Godwin uses the “mind” in a number of specific ways, ways which encompass not only the mind’s contemporary meaning as a site/space where our thought processes take place (including the thoughtful acts of creativity and analysis), but also in terms of how the mind relates to the memory (including the particular and collective memory of family/community/culture through the acts of mythmaking and storytelling) as explained above. In addition to the discussion above, the “mind” in Godwin’s novels is often explored through the subconscious/unconscious life (through Godwin’s use of dreams, sleep and sleeplessness, and fantasies in her novels).

In Search of the Enema Bandit: Mind, Memory, and Intertextual Madness in Godwin’s *The Odd Woman*

While *The Perfectionists* (1970) and *Glass People* (1972) begin Godwin’s writing career as a novelist concerned with the *formation* of female identity, Gail Godwin’s third novel, *The Odd Woman* (1974), celebrates a drastic change in the location as well as the evolution of female identity; female identity moves from the body-identified female protagonists of her earliest novels to the mind-centered female protagonists of her later novels. Godwin’s use of the career-

minded protagonist, embedded narratives involving family mythology, intertextual literary references as well as a heavy emphasis on the unconscious mind in the form of dreams, fantasies, and sleep, stresses the role of the female mind in the re-formation of female identity.

Though very few literary critics have analyzed *The Odd Woman* since its first publication in 1974, those who have seem to draw similar conclusions. Southern Appalachian author Doris Betts calls Godwin's third novel "complicated" and "shaped more like an onion than a map; it may help to peel off three major themes before trying to reconstruct its plot" (239). Virginia Smith cites *The Odd Woman* as "self-reflexive fiction," relating simply that Godwin's novels "often echo, revise, and parody other texts" (82), while critic Susan Lorsch labels the novel as "self-conscious fiction" (21). Each critic, though, with her statements alludes to the mind-centered dimensions of *The Odd Woman*. Smith, in fact, goes so far as to claim that "*The Odd Woman* is wholly intertextual as well as self-reflexive. Its form emerges from tales within tales, and it becomes a novel about fiction as well as about its own plot" (82). Parts of Smith's analysis seem accurate in my estimation; however, to claim Godwin's novel to be "wholly intertextual," or a "parody" of other texts, I think, is to oversimplify and denigrate its complex format. Godwin does not rely solely on other literary texts; Jane Clifford, the female protagonist, does have a plot of her own. Moreover, the use of embedded text, that is, the intertextual references used throughout the plot, adds a level of complexity to many of her novels, not just *The Odd Woman*; this intertextuality, in turn, serves as a literary mechanism that links Godwin's female

protagonists with their inner life, their minds, thus often complicating the plots, but also adding depth to the female characters. What I do agree with in Smith's analysis is her assertion that Godwin uses embedded texts to challenge, to subvert the power of, a literary tradition dominated by men: The novel, according to Smith, then, is "a search for a story of her own, for a hitherto unwritten plot that would free her from the paralyzing narratives--both male--and female--Victorian texts that romanticize female victimization and passivity--which she reads, teaches, and lives" (82-82). Again, I question Smith's use of the terminology "paralyzing plots"; such a phrase has negative connotations and ignores the positive "healing" effects that a shared narrative may have. (Re)visionary plots often serve to heal the protagonists, to reconcile the past with the present, often leading to a broader sense of reconciliation or healing within the family or community. Further, because of Jane Clifford's preoccupation with the plots of 19th century novels, I would assert that Godwin's female characters in *The Odd Woman* subvert more than a literary tradition of "female victimization" and "passivity"; Godwin's plots, especially her female characters, interrogate the role of the entire "romantic tradition" and how that tradition has over the years informed female identity. Even so, it remains that Godwin's use of the female mind is what separates *The Odd Woman* from her earlier works, *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*.

Jane Clifford, the protagonist of *The Odd Woman*, is a professor of English at a Midwestern university in the 1970s; she is quite different from Godwin's earlier female protagonists, Dane Empson from *The Perfectionists* and

Francesca Fox Bolt from *Glass People*. Unlike her predecessors, Dane and Francesca, Jane is a career woman, and her career is related to her mind, to her intellect. Moreover, *The Odd Woman* is a major departure for Godwin; the novel reflects a more mature writing style and voice, and in fact, the character of Jane most encapsulates and reflects the extensive shift in Godwin's writing. Jane's female identity is radically different from Godwin's earlier female protagonists, for her identity is solidly attached to her "mind."

In the "introduction" to the newest British reprint of *The Odd Woman*, Nicci Gerrard describes the plot and Jane's character, as a kind of "...scholarly drama [which] takes place beneath the calm surface, in the theatre of Jane's mind, where she chases emotions and thoughts, harbours fantasies, makes up stories, and tries to discover the secret of happiness" (viii). With Gerrard's synopsis, major themes of *The Odd Woman* emerge, those of the "scholarly drama" and the emphasis that the action of the novel takes shape "in the theatre of Jane's mind." The female mind, then, becomes central to both Jane's character (where she locates her identity) and the novel's plot.

Foremost, Jane Clifford is an intellectual, an academic, who seeks answers and understanding (mainly) from the experiences of others, those experiences captured and recorded in books, by words: "...Jane did not share [Donne's] certainty of the afterlife; she wanted to understand this life, however. What she wanted was a metaphor of her own. ... Her profession was words and she believed in them deeply" (3, 4). While Dane Empson from *The Perfectionists* desires "a large room, all her own" (Godwin, *The Perfectionists* 56), her character

echoing the plea of Virginia Woolf, Jane Clifford desires something even more personal, something more precious; Jane desires to write, to speak, to create with words her own metaphor, a challenge rooted deeply in 1970s feminism, a challenge linked to the major feminist concerns such as “voice,” “authority,” and (re)visionary female narratives.

From the first pages of the novel, then, we discover that Jane is most concerned with how best to understand the life she is living, the present (though Jane often uses a lens of the past to interrogate the present), yet rather than being concerned with the future, particularly the destination of her soul and the (uncertainty of an) afterlife, Jane is mostly concerned with her present. Her lack of concern for the soul, for the afterlife, is something which also distinguishes Jane from later characters, such as Margaret Gower from *Father Melancholy's Daughter* and *Evensong*. What further separates Jane Clifford from Godwin's earlier characters is Jane's penchant for interiority, that is, Jane's emphasis on the inner-workings of the mind. Jane is introspective. In fact, much of the novel takes place through remembered conversations (memory), the retelling of family stories/myths (embedded narratives), and the recounting of various canonical literary plots (intertextual literary references)—all of these elements again linking Jane's character more so to her mind than to her body. This emphasis on Jane's mind, however, should not detract from Jane's bodily incarnations throughout the novel. Throughout the novel, Jane's body is referenced in terms of her sexuality (and sexual experiences) and in relation to her chronic insomnia. It is interesting to note, however, that Jane's experiences with her body are often linked directly

to her mind. She is plagued by insomnia, a state of the body's dis-ease, often defined as a condition where the "mind cannot rest." Further Jane's sexuality and sexual experiences are most emphasized through the fantasies of her mind. Jane is rarely at ease with her own body, with her sexuality, during the actual sexual encounters. Instead, Jane's sexual fantasies serve to heighten her pleasure after or before the sexual act itself. That Jane's bodily experiences are always filtered, enhanced, or related to the workings of her mind, again emphasizes Jane's penchant for interiority.

In a 1975 review of *The Odd Woman*, Lore Dickstein calls the novel "cerebral" and "reflective" and cites Godwin as an author who has "self-consciousness" and "who knows her characters well" (4). Dickstein also comments that Jane's "inner life is rich in fantasy" and continues, "The women in Jane's world...speak to her primarily as voices in her own mind" (4). This review, which includes several more references to "the mind," again solidifies *The Odd Woman* as a departure point for Godwin, a departure point where Godwin is now moving away from earlier depictions of women associated with their bodies alone. In addition, unlike her two previous female protagonists, we encounter with *The Odd Woman*, Godwin's exploration of the female as single, as independent, as different; Jane is a female character viewed mostly as either alone or separate/different from traditional, familiar, communal, societal roles inhabited by women (i.e. those of the wife/mother). Annis Pratt alludes to one meaning of the novel's title by explaining that Jane is an "'odd woman' because she is not half of a couple and fulfills no set function within a nuclear family"

(113). Jane's "oddness" or "singleness" are highlighted throughout the novel and thus remain important themes to explore. Pratt sees "solitude" and "singleness" as positive attributes and a clear signifier that Jane's character and Godwin the writer are both evolving. Pratt concludes, "In literature dealing with single women...authors seem to be clearing out a new space that is in actuality an old, or archetypal, landscape of the psyche, a place that, essentially apatriarchal, contains once-forgotten possibilities of personal development" (127). The "landscape of the psyche" can be easily applied to the plot of *The Odd Woman*. Jane's life is enriched because of the way she utilizes her mind to (re)form her female identity.

Jane, however, despite her "oddness" or "singleness" is still a daughter, and in this novel, we see emerge for the first time, in a well-crafted way, Godwin's depiction of the mother-daughter dyad. Lihong Xie sums up *The Odd Woman's* differences from earlier Godwin novels this way: "Where she [Godwin] was unable to envision evolving patterns of female development earlier, Godwin now explores such potent themes of female growth as the mother-daughter relationship, female networks, place, and memory" (63). Xie concludes that *The Odd Woman* is a novel which seeks "new ways of narrating female lives" (63). And while Xie's statements may be accurate, there is missing from her summation an acknowledgment of the increased relevance of the "female mind" to Godwin's expansive and transformative definitions of female identity. As Pratt alludes, Jane's "singleness" does contribute to her interiority, thus allowing an interaction with herself more than any other character in the novel; this may be

relevant in terms of her character's self-actualization. The "odd woman" in traditional society challenges patriarchy, and often the "odd woman" is a character who will transgress traditional roles inhabited by women. As Pratt points out in *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction*: "The tension between society and the individual embodied in these narrative structures creates an implosion of consciousness, opening the way for a radical shift in vision" (113). A "shift in vision" is exactly what happens with Godwin's third novel, and Jane's "oddness" is central to her development as an authentic and (re)visionary female figure. Interestingly enough, in other novels, many of Godwin's female characters either seek or teach their students about "the visionary" (in/through literature). Jane Clifford is indeed one of those.

The (Female) Mind at Work: Higher Ed, the Career-Academic, & the Intertextual

As the novel opens, Jane is just completing a course on "visionary literature" involving the works of Dante, Donne, and Blake. When one of Jane's students challenges her about the visionary aspects of the artists she's "chosen" for her students to study, Jane is seemingly content (or maintains the pretense that she is content) to repeat to her students the "theories" that she's learned and researched in graduate school. Jane believes in words, believes in their power (4), however, she is not always willing to share *her own* "vision," with/through *her own* voice by using the power of *her own* words. In a moment of exasperation, during an uncomfortable confrontation with a male student, Jane, when pressed, cries: "Oh, God, Howard! The experiences and words of others *can* help you. Even if they have been dead hundreds of years. That's what education is.

Learning from the words and experiences of others, other human beings who wanted answers just as badly as you do now” (Godwin, *The Odd Woman* 18). With this scene we see at once that Jane carries conviction, passion even; she has an affinity for words, for narratives of the past, even narratives and words that at times often serve more to entrap her (and others) than to free her. Here, Jane’s devotion to “the word,” her desire to understand through the vision of others, is a point of contention. Howard, her “bad” student, offers her a challenge to speak of the “personal,” but Jane declines; instead she repeats the words of Dante, Coleridge, and even Matthew Arnold, the “old guard” of the literary canon, to defend her “learned” position. For as much as Jane seemingly seeks a “metaphor of her own,” she too often relies on the stories, words, and “metaphors” of others to define and understand her own life.

Susan Lorsch, in her article, “Gail Godwin’s *The Odd Woman*: Literature and the Retreat from Life,” offers this analysis: “*The Odd Woman* centers on the relation between literature and life, especially on the effect that literature—and the lies it often tells—has on those who believe it” (21). Lorsch’s almost harsh critique, while necessarily alluding to some of the negative effects of literature, does little to explain what positive effects literature and the words of others do have on Jane’s eventual transformation. Lorsch continues by stating that literature “conditions [Jane’s] very mode of seeing. She views her own life through the refracting filter of literature...interweaves her life with books; she experiences her life through literature” (21). Here, my ideas diverge with Lorsch’s assessment of Jane’s character. Where Lorsch sees Jane as trapped by re-

cycled literary plots, I see these plots rather as unending possibilities for Jane to explore, avenues which Jane may have never had access to if she had not been exposed to these possibilities through books, through education, in essence, through the words of others.

For Jane, reading, writing, and knowledge have always been solutions, ways of opening up her life to greater possibilities. Coming from a humble background, from a working-class family, secluded in the Southeastern hills of Appalachia, Jane has, since a young child, viewed words as her “way out.” Even as a five-year-old, Jane, living with her grandmother Edith and widowed mother Kitty, imagined that her life would begin once she started school: “When is my life going to start she had thought...she was sure it would start when she began going to school and learned how to read and write” (Godwin, *Odd Woman* 265-66). Jane had lived the first of her years, watching her grandmother and mother negotiate a household of women and achieve many goals in the process. Kitty had a career as a part-time literature professor, a writer of women’s romance novels, and a newspaper reporter; Edith managed the home, often caring for Jane, while “indoctrinating” her with family stories while Kitty was away at work. Between Kitty’s work with words, as a teacher, a writer, and a reporter, and Edith’s (re)telling of family stories, Jane begins to see the value of words; and she begins to associate her identity with their power. This family of women, however, is interrupted once Kitty remarries a local contractor, an ex-GI—and one of her adult students—Ray Sparks. Jane’s relationship with Ray is, from the very beginning, tenuous at best. Jane views Ray as someone who had robbed

her of her mother's time and attention, someone who had invaded her home, her sanctuary of women, and so, as a result, Jane lives most of her childhood apart from Ray—and Kitty—at her grandmother Edith's house.

Jane's strained relationship with Ray, her gruff stepfather, "that creature who took away [her] mother" (109), continues to deteriorate as she gets older. The relationship deteriorates even more so as she enters college and starts to develop opinions and a "mind of her own." Ray, of a working-class Appalachian background, does not value Jane's newly discovered ideas about equality. In one violent altercation with her stepfather, Ray physically attacks Jane, causing her to lose part of her hearing in her right ear from his assault. Jane's escape, then, becomes clear; in order to free herself from Ray, who in this novel most represents the patterns and negative influences of patriarchy, she must forge her own way, and she does so with her education and subsequent career as a professor:

She had connived to win her degrees (and her economic independence, her release from being beholden to Ray Sparks, the Ray Sparkses of the world) partially through the charms of her sex, the way other women used these same charms to win husbands. So now they had their husbands, and she had her degrees, her economic independence. (Godwin 143)

From the time Kitty marries Ray, Jane begins her "long Campaign to Escape Ray, via the fellowships and scholarships which would lead to financial independence" (142). She uses "intellectual flattery," "memorization," and "many-

drafted, idealistic high school themes...most of them aimed at the preferences or prejudices of influential teachers" (142-43). Jane's mind, her intelligence, molds her identity, and in the process gives her a means of escape; learning and literature become Jane's impetus and thus her "way out."

Education and literature, for Jane, imbue "possibility," not limitation(s) as Lorsch asserts, and because Jane, then associates education, and by proxy literature, with her freedom and independence, Jane has almost an indebtedness to learning and literature, an indebtedness she carries into her adult life—at times to her own detriment, thus her apparent alliance with the "old guard" of the literary canon (21). So while her education alienates her on some level from her stepfather and, in essence, from her culture, it has also provided many opportunities for Jane. Therefore, when Howard, who functions in some ways as an echo of Ray, challenges her allegiance to the "words of others," Jane reacts as if Howard is encroaching on her independence and her very identity. As Jane has experienced, her education, her alliance with learning and literature, are feminist acts. At the same time, however, as many critics have noted, Jane has almost become "paralyzed" by the literary plots that she studies, unable to move beyond them or deviate from them in many ways: "...Jane, at thirty-two, continued to lie in a double bed alone. She ransacked novels for answers to life..." (24). In this way, then, what began as a feminist act, slowly becomes a space where Jane's development and self-actualization stall. Literature and learning, however, do not completely impede her desire to live "real" life as some

critics maintain; they instead open up possibilities and eventually allow her character to transform.

Elaine Showalter in *Faculty Towers* reiterates the effects of the inner turmoil at work in Jane, but with her commentary alludes more so to the metamorphosis that is slowly taking shape in Jane:

Jane is conflicted not only emotionally but intellectually. She thinks she believes in the sanctity of the canon...she thinks that she's a psychological realist and a moralist, like...the Victorians. But at the same time she is disturbed by the contradictions in her own personality, beginning to question the unitary "self" and to think through the issues of identity and wholeness that were being raised in poststructuralism in the 1970s. (58)

It is clear that Jane realizes the many ways in which history, society, and even literary plots have entrapped women over the centuries; at one point, Jane makes a list of the many 19th century literary "ladies," female characters, who met with their own demise, one way or another (often marriage or death), due to their "wrong" choices—a concept that is later emboldened by her grandmother's "real-life" story of Aunt Cleva, just another woman who made a "wrong" decision and paid for it with her life.

As a child, Jane overhears her mother and grandmother discussing one of Kitty's developing romance novels and the "acceptable" plot, one involving "proper" occupations a romance novel heroine might have. Later Jane asks Kitty, "Why don't you write a story about a woman who teaches school at the college

and writes love stories on the weekend and has a little girl like me?” Her mother answers, “It wouldn’t sell, that’s why.” Jane counters, “Oh, I think it would be very interesting to read.” Finally, Kitty concludes, “It would be interesting to people like you and me...but I can assure you, *Love Short Stories* wouldn’t buy it. My girls have to have respectable, slightly glamorous jobs, but nothing too important. There must be nothing too permanent or heavy in their lives, because they have to throw it all out the window when a man comes along” (27). Unfortunately, Kitty’s own “real-life” becomes just like the fiction she writes, and Jane witnesses her mother’s transformation soon after she marries Ray. Kitty gives up her jobs, her writing (i.e. words), her independence, her dreams, and, in the end, parts of her identity and freedom: “Ray allowed Kitty her extravagances in return for her freedom. He built her a swimming pool and gave her French perfumes and a cleaning lady, but he did not like her to go off that mountain without him” (117). Therefore, despite what some critics have claimed, Jane does understand the “real-life” repercussions associated with the limited choices women have had to make, in life as well as literature; she understands her own mother’s sacrifice: “Motherhood had taken Kitty too soon, before she was ready” (92).

Ultimately, though, Jane’s epiphany comes after a conversation with her grandmother:

Then she had an insight—the beginning of one, rather—about stories. Stories were all right, as long as you read them as what they were: single visions, one person’s way of interpreting something. You could learn from stories, be warned by stories. But

stories, by their very nature, were Procrustean. Even the longest of them had to end somewhere. If a living human being tried to squeeze himself into a particular story, he might find vital parts of himself lopped off. Even worse, he might find himself unable to get out again. (44)

Jane realizes the boundaries that story can impose on “real life.” Her casual reference to stories as “procrustean,” itself an intertextuality, indicates the level of her awareness. In Greek mythology, Procrustes, a giant, would stretch or shorten his captives to make them fit his iron bed. His bed, secretly adjustable, was always too short or too long for his victims; therefore, he was able to adjust the bed to achieve his desired result—the shortening or lengthening of his victims for his own amusement. His bed, then, in this comparison, becomes an imposed, arbitrary standard, much like the “standards,” “rules” or even “morals” many stories might encourage one to follow so as to avoid a particular “punishment.” Stories *can* entrap, can force a sense of conformity. Stories, however, can also be used to heal as Trinh T. Minh-ha asserts in *Woman Native Other*. Even so, because Jane knows the power and effects of words, of stories—their potential to harm or to heal—she is caught up in endless possibilities, not limitations. Jane has choices—it is the many choices, then, more so than the “limits” of stories, that often “paralyze” Jane, causing her fear and anxiety.

Jane is always somewhat fearful, reluctant to embrace the choices, the possibilities, of her life. She is troubled by the idea of the “unclear, undefined, unresolved self,” (21) a female self that would remain separate, independent,

free from family narratives, societal expectations, and other such “paralyzing plots.” What complicates Jane’s life on some level is the way in which she often chooses to “retreat” into others’ narratives whenever “the shape of her own life bled more than usual at the edges” (22). For Jane, family stories, literary plots, can be a sanctuary, again, a way of escaping her fears, a means to avoid what bothers her most in life: The idea of unending possibility, the unwritten plot, that is, not knowing the end to the story, in essence, a lack of clarity and control: “The right word or the wrong word could change a person’s life, the course of the world. If you called things by their name, you had more control over your life...she liked to be in control” (4). While her mind is always at work, engaged in the stories of her relatives and various literary plots, she often fails to use her mind to imagine herself as part of her own story; in fact, she fails to imagine herself a future at all; she is always caught in the present. At one point, Jane tries to picture her future, her vision of 9-months abroad with her married lover of two years, Gabriel, who is seeking a Guggenheim fellowship in Britain: “Jane tried to imagine herself in England, with Gabriel. He would have a job, a purpose. She would have—Gabriel. On loan, for nine-months. How long would it take before she started hating herself?” (27). Jane fears making a choice here that would enable her to lose purpose and end up “hating herself.” Also interesting here is that Jane equates “a purpose” with having a vocation—an academic vocation at that, again allying her identity with her career as a professor. To go with Gabriel would be to abandon her career, her goals, her dreams—repeating, in essence, the “paralyzed plot” assumed by her mother Kitty when she married Ray. Jane,

however, later in the novel realizes her potential; she faces her fears and remains alive in the “possibility” of various endings: “As far as she could see, she had not written herself any premature endings” (41). The ongoing internalized battle for Jane is always facing her fear of losing the absolute; the plots of novels and family stories enable Jane to retreat when she begins to understand that her choices are endless, and it is not until Jane realizes that she can (re)write her own ending that she becomes free.

In another scene, Howard, the “bad” student, again challenges Jane: “What I want is to—like—clean out my mind of preconceptions. I want to empty my mind of all the—stuff that’s been laid on me. I want to just exist, if you know what I mean” (20). Howard’s brief monologue might well be representative of the challenges that lie before Jane if she intends to face her fears, her uncertainties, and create her own metaphor. Howard “the bad student” challenges Jane, challenges her ideals; her prize student, Sheldon, on the other hand, is part of the status quo and definitely more aligned with how Jane sees herself early in the novel. The tension between these two students—Howard and Sheldon—represents the war in Jane’s own mind.

Intertextuality, Storytelling, and the “Snowflake Effect”

Godwin uses many intertextual references to enrich and complicate *The Odd Woman*; these intertextual references, in turn, not only illuminate *The Odd Woman*, but also serve to align Jane’s character with the inner workings of her mind once more. References to literary texts such as “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” by John Keats, *Barren Ground* and “The Difference” by Ellen Glasgow,

“Dream Children” by Charles Lamb, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, *The Fatal Wedding* by Theodore Kremer, and George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*, to name a few, permeate Godwin’s third novel. One critic comments: “The life realistically portrayed in *The Odd Woman* is done with details especially familiar to literary women: less educated women need to muster more imagination to identify with the heroines of gothics” (Brownstein 178). Other general references to Pre-Raphaelite art by Dante Gabriel Rossetti or specific references to “The Garden of Earthly Delights” by Heironymous Bosch lace *The Odd Woman*’s pages. Along with published textual references are references to fictive texts like *Femme Sole*, a feminist newspaper run by Jane’s college friend Gerda or *The Country Husband*, a novel written by one of Jane’s colleagues; there’s even significant mention of a local news story regarding the infamous Enema Bandit, a villain who has been victimizing women for two years; and then there is Jane’s own artistic rendering, inspired in part by “The Garden of Earthly Delights” and *The Country Husband*, her own penned response to these works fueled by her anger and indignation (Jane entitles her pen and ink triptych, “Penis Park”). Then there are the references to “literary” and “timeless” couples, couples that figure into the “Romantic” or “Victorian” tradition. Jane dwells on these various “romantic”—“real” and “imagined”—relationships, such as Jane and Rochester, George Eliot and George Lewes, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Burden Morris, and compares them to her own fizzling romance with Professor Gabriel Weeks. In “Gail Godwin’s Paralyzing Plots and the Woman Professor,” Virginia Smith maintains that Godwin’s *The Odd Woman* is to be “read as both an allegory and

a parody,” especially in terms of how women have been portrayed in these various aforementioned texts (82). According to Smith, then, Godwin’s intertextual references are a means of “subverting the power such a tradition holds over her characters, her readers, and her culture” (82). Such may be the case as it seems that Godwin has very consciously chosen her many intertextual references so that they reflect an emphasis on the female mind.

Intertextualities explode in *The Odd Woman*, creating a complex web, a system of (inter)textual references that when researched reveal a compounded interweaving of textual layers. Interestingly enough, Godwin, in an interview, comments that she wrote *The Odd Woman* in the “snowflake way” rather than as a linear progression of plot: “I let myself follow topics that entice[d] me” (Godwin qtd. Neufield np). In this interview with Rob Neufield of the *Ashville Citizen-Times*, Godwin describes writing in the “snowflake way”: “A snowflake is a kind of a curtailed or organized tangent. It’s got a center and tangents that go out, but it’s a finite thing. If it works, it makes the whole design tighter” (Godwin qtd. Neufield np). Such is the case with *The Odd Woman*; at the core of the story is Jane’s quest for identity; tangential to the plot are various intertextual “tangents” that serve to enhance an already complex plot, thus showing the inner workings, the connections of Jane’s mind, but also requiring the reader to “work” his/her mind as well, tracing the links from one intertextual link to the next.

The foremost and most obvious intertextual reference is that of George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*, published in 1893. Gissing’s rather pessimistic novel

details the lives of five single or “odd” women in Victorian London, female characters that Jane sums up this way:

Monica Madden...compromise-rebellion against one’s compromise-death,” “Virginia Madden...Escape through drink—partial rehabilitation to a ‘useful member of society,’” “Alice Madden...starting all over again in a child. Retrenchment,” “Mary Barfoot...finding ‘fullfillment’ through others,” and Rhoda Nunn...sublimations of personal desires and furies into a “cause.”
(Godwin 295-96)

Because Godwin’s *Odd Woman* can be read as a virtual gallery of “types of woman,” it is easy to assign each of Gissing’s five 19th century female characters with a “modern double.” Monica Madden becomes Jane’s great aunt Cleva, the woman who, in 1905, dies tragically after running away with a “villain” from the traveling melodrama, *The Fatal Wedding*; Alice transforms into Edith, Jane’s beloved grandmother who raises not only Jane, but also Cleva’s orphaned child Frances; Mary Barfoot is clearly Kitty, Jane’s mother, who has thrown herself into her work at a Catholic girls’ school and devotes all her spare time to the church; Rhoda Nunn is obviously Jane’s college friend Gerda who devotes herself to the “feminist cause” by producing the feminist journal, *Femme Sole* (another reference to the “single” or “odd” woman). That, then, leaves only Virginia Madden, the “addict” who opens a school in an attempt to redeem herself, who might just be Jane herself—if we trade Virginia’s addiction to alcohol for Jane’s addiction to literature.

What complicates these easy pairings is the larger plot of *The Odd Woman*, that is, Jane's quest to find herself, to escape her fears, and to write a "metaphor of her own" (3), her quest to break free from the addiction of "traditional literary plots," "stock female characters" and other easily defined "female types." Why would Godwin, if she intended to subvert the patriarchal patterns of westernized literature, use many of the same "female types" employed a century earlier by George Gissing? As several critics have suggested, perhaps Godwin is "revising" the various plots that have entrapped female characters over the centuries, or perhaps, she is commenting that these outdated plots and traditional roles still exist in the 20th century. Godwin's use of Gissing's *Odd Women*, though, seems to allude to Godwin's own literary and cultural interests and experiences; Godwin is a graduate of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, with a degree in journalism, and additional degrees, an MA and Ph.D. in English, from the University of Iowa. As Anne Cheney examines in "Gail Godwin and Her Novels," Godwin's own educational and personal experiences often seep into her work. Further, in "The Uses of Autobiography" Godwin admits, "All my protagonists—slapstick, allegorical, disguised by gender or species, occupation or social class, or hardly disguised at all—are part of myself" (22). In yet another article, "Becoming the Characters in Your Novel," Godwin reiterates, "When we as writers create characters, we are in the process of stretching our own identities" (12). Here, then, by Godwin's own admission, "she," her experiences, bits of her own her life, intertwine with the fiction she writes, making Godwin herself often an intertextuality of sorts. Within this novel,

there are countless instances from Godwin's life that inform the plot; thus, the intertextualities used throughout the novel might be partly informed by Godwin's education, her literary interests, and her life experiences—autobiographical intertextualities.

There are three particular embedded narratives/intertextual references that overlap in this novel and act in a particular way, that is, to free Jane from the confines of narratives written and told by others. First, there is Jane's (re)visionary triptych of Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*; secondly, there is the familial story of Great Aunt Cleve paired with *The Fatal Wedding*; and thirdly, there is the nightly news report on the Enema Bandit paired with Jane's own narrative(s) involving this local "villain." Each of the intertextualities extends from an act of violence in some and each also relates to sexuality in some way, but each frees a certain part of Jane so that she might move forward and embrace her shifting female identity, an identity linked solidly with her mind.

In The Garden

Jane's married lover Gabriel Weeks is an Art History professor at a neighboring university; his primary field of study happens to be the 19th century Pre-Raphaelites, those "visionaries" who broke free from the "bondage of academia that shackled the art of their generation" and, instead, embraced the "passion and imagination of youth, which blazed most brightly in their veneration of women," images of women almost painted "obsessively" and "represent[ing] over time an ideal beauty" (*Pre-Raphaelite Vision* np). With this description, it would be simple enough to connect Gabriel's 19th century studies with Jane's

and, in turn, critique the ways in which the Pre-Raphaelites' art often "objectified" and "contained" women, making their images of the female "body" alone just as Virginia Smith points out in her article: "...these are passive images of womanhood painted through the imaginative vision of men who transform the ordinary into the sublime. They are embodiments of women trapped in the male gaze, just as Jane is trapped in Gabriel's ethereal vision of their relationship" (85). This is an important focal point of analysis of *The Odd Woman*. Yet, there is another intertextual visual reference that also seems important to investigate as it relates to Jane's ultimate metamorphosis—Heironymous Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

A copy of Heironymous Bosch's triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, hangs behind the desk at Gabriel's university office. Even though she has never visited, Jane knows of the painting's existence there only because she has made Gabriel describe every detail of his office over the course of their two-year, long distance affair. In fact, most of Gabriel's life is only "made real" because of Gabriel's words, that is, from his verbal (re)telling or the many letters he's sent to Jane over the years. It is the written word that first connects the two, for Gabriel writes and responds to Jane's initial letter. Because of their physical distance, they are connected mostly through words. For this reason, along with their shared academic profession, Jane considers her relationship with Gabriel "intellectual," a commingling of academic minds; however, more often than not, their relationship reflects an occasional commingling of bodies instead, or what her friend Gerda refers to as "fourteen furtive fucks" (70) more than anything

more substantial. Jane never forces herself to challenge Gabriel; she doesn't ask the questions she wants to ask and often bypasses controversial topics so as to avoid confrontation (and "reality"): "She had had almost two years to ask Gabriel some straight questions and she had not asked" (269). There is a sense of fear related to Jane's reluctance to ask Gabriel questions. She doesn't want to know if Gabriel would choose his wife of 25 years over Jane and their two-year, long distance relationship.

Gabriel Weeks is an interesting figure in the novel; he only appears "in person" during the last chapters of the novel. Before that, Jane remembers and shares re-visions of their relationship to her mother and her friend Gerda. Gabriel's character, his absence from Jane's daily life, for the most part, enables Jane to have an academic life and her independence—for she lives separate from him and they only meet occasionally—and ultimately, he is mostly an outlet for her sexuality. Even so, Gabriel's presence and absence in Jane's life are significant, for she envisions him often; he is part of her psyche, her internal world that she constructs: "At this minute he was having office hours... Some student was sitting to the left of his desk perhaps looking at *The Garden of Earthly Delights*..." (68). The casual reference to Heironymous Bosch and his triptych almost seems out of place in this novel, that is, compared with the many other 19th century intertextualities mentioned throughout the text; yet Godwin's inclusion of *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is relevant in many ways, several of which link Bosch's triptych closely to the quest of "the mind."

During his time, Heironymous Bosch was known as the “people’s painter” and was “immensely popular” (Daniel 5). Today, however, “he is essentially a painter’s painter or an intellectual’s painter,” (5) drawing again the connection between Bosch’s recognition as an “intellectual’s painter” and his association with the mind. Born in the Netherlands circa 1450, Bosch is considered by most contemporary art critics and art historians as a “cerebral artist”; he is credited as being a visionary and celebrated for his “penetrating psychological approach” (Daniels 14). Noted to be a pessimist, themes of “unrest, conflict, and change” permeate Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights* (Daniel 8). Bosch was born into a time of great social change and uncertainty, where disease--plague, typhus, leprosy--ran just as rampant as the corruption of The Church, a time when the rise in the merchant and working classes were beginning to weaken the stranglehold of feudalism and the grasp of the nobility, when the city-state was beginning to give way to the nation-state, disrupting the very core of his culture and society. Bosch’s paintings are most noted for their nightmarish, surrealist qualities, depictions of the gruesome or grotesque aspects of humankind, especially in terms of human beings’ interactions with each other. As most critics point out, however, Bosch’s paintings are a reflection of not only his inner turmoil and quest of resolution, but a reflection of changing, uncertain times. Howard Daniel comments, “The solid body of his artistic output is permeated by this sense of change” (8). Daniel continues: “Consciousness of great social change and its powerful reflection in his work separates him from his contemporaries” (8). Like Godwin, Bosch’s exploration of and concern about major social change

show up in his work; this preoccupation sets these two artists apart from many of their respective contemporaries: "Much of his significance stems directly from his recognition not only of change but of the necessity for it" (Daniel 10). Bosch, like Godwin the writer and Jane the character, explores what it means to be an artist caught in the midst of change, of social turmoil. Similar to Godwin's own autobiographical references within her novels, her intertextualities of "self," we find that Bosch also often included himself in his many paintings; one critic comments that "Bosch as a younger man painted himself into several of his large works" (Daniels 7), and in fact, it is Bosch's "face looking out from under the table, a lost soul in hell" in the *Garden of Earthly Delights* (7); he has also painted himself into his canvas as part of the "Tree Man" figure.

Bosch's triptych is crowded with figures representative of cultural and historical narratives, much like Jane's own mind is crowded with stories and figures of the past, figures both from her literary studies and family background. Also like Jane, Bosch was preoccupied with the internal workings of the human mind. One critic notes, "There has never been a painter before or since who has so thoroughly and deeply explored the fear and guilt caverns of man's inner life" (14).

Typically a triptych is created to be an altarpiece, though Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* was more likely crafted for the enjoyment of a wealthy patron family. Triptychs are usually larger pieces of art; *The Garden of Earthly Delights* stands over seven feet. The sheer complexity of the form of the triptych itself relates to the complicatedness of the mind and its significance to Jane's

transformation and *The Odd Woman*. The triptych really has four main parts; it has three internal panels as well as a painting on the outside that is revealed only when the triptych is closed. Therefore, at any time, one may have multiple views, involving vastly different scenes. What may be most interesting, however, is the way in which the triptych “opens out,” that is, only when the triptych’s exterior is opened up can the interior panels be revealed—the inner has to be made outer for the whole story to be told. In this way, then, the triptych can be related to the relationship between the body and mind or where storytelling intersects with the mind, when the teller makes external what is internal. In turn, however, the triptych is best viewed, altogether, as a whole, and this then relates more fully with Godwin’s theory of “wholeness.”

In addition, Bosch’s triptych is itself a metafiction, intertextual in nature, much like Godwin’s work; it has layers of meaning associated with its many intertextualities, many of which are incomprehensible—or at least highly debatable—for contemporary art critics/historians. Even so, the triptych is laced with one of the grand narratives of Christianity, the creation story, the story of Adam and Eve, the story where woman is first made “victim” because of her “sin,” her choice, that is, her desire for knowledge, for independence; all of these relate directly to *The Odd Woman* and to Jane’s “re-vision” of Bosch’s triptych entitled *Penis Park*. Whereas Bosch’s triptych depicts several “traditional” Christian narratives, particularly the tales of creation, the “folly” of humans, and the consequences of that folly, eternal damnation, of interest to the comparisons to Jane’s creation is her exclusion of the “traditional” and embrace of a counter-

narrative or re-visionary narrative where women play the primary roles while patriarchy and the sins of men go under great scrutiny.

With Bosch's painting we see clearly the presence of a patriarchal narrative where God the Father watches over the creation he has just made in the first panel or where God the Son grasps the arm of Eve who will eventually "betray" creation and bring into the world "sin" and "death." As Peter S. Beagle maintains, most critics interpret this scene where, "The Fall is implicit in Eve: sin and death enter the world through her, and Bosch is well within the church doctrine in the prefiguring the flourishing of iniquity from the instant of her creation" (41). Here, then, we see displayed, the first times (in western Christian tradition) where a woman's (wrong) choice brings death and destruction on all of humanity. Such a legacy, then, becomes implicit in the 19th century literary texts that Jane studies and thinks about. With the Creation narrative, the story begins; enter the great dichotomy of "shoulds" and "should nots" for women of all generations. Though Bosch has embedded his own set of intertextual references, many of them relating to the writings of Milton and Dante, what remains most evident with this painting is the story of Eve, that is, what happens when a disastrous choice is made, one that seemingly impacts all of humankind, or at least all of womankind (and the narratives they tell and write).

Jane's own triptych, *Penis Park*, however is, in a sense, a counter-narrative of that age-old story. After reading snippets of her colleague's novel, *The Country Husband*, which Jane finds distasteful and labels mostly as a pornographic male fantasy, Jane, suffering from insomnia, decides that she

wants to “draw a fantasy of her own” (153). Imbibed with wine and indignation, Jane begins to feel “visionary” (154). This scene is one of the only instances in *The Odd Woman* where Jane appears liberated, free enough, to create her own (counter) narrative, to reveal her own fantasies, and to tell her own story. With her artistic endeavor, inspired by Bosch’s triptych, Jane creates a world where the roles of men are interrogated, where female victimization is absent; instead, there is a sense of female empowerment, female authority. Jane’s triptych, in essence, creates a sexual fantasy dependent on the demands and experiences of women alone, where women can experience freedom with their bodies, embracing their sexuality, but also a space where men’s (sexual) offenses are illuminated and effectively “punished,” where their “sinful ways,” their “choices” and/or “acts of folly,” are highlighted, where men suffer the consequences of their crimes--their “felonies” and “misdemeanors” (Godwin, *The Odd Woman* 155). A closer look at Jane’s artwork reveals more.

Panel One, “Puberty’s Innocent Pleasures,” depicts the innocence of budding female sexuality, where the female heroine is encouraged to explore her female body, experiment with her sexuality, embracing her appetites, her sexual nature, without fear or censor. The female body here is positively depicted as a site for pleasure, for embracing hungers and desires. Jane’s panel, much like Bosch’s first panel of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, reveals a kind of naïveté, reflective of the innocence associated with Eden, with paradise. Jane’s second panel, “Plethoras and Plentitudes,” much like Bosch’s second panel, reveals the more mature heroine partaking in many sexual acts, acts associated solely with

the female body, such as motherhood. There is a kind of grotesque chaos to this panel, where the heroine has simultaneous multiple lovers and endless children spilling from her womb. Such grotesque chaos is reminiscent of Bosch's second panel where human beings partake in various "pleasures of the earth," including those associated with sexuality. Hans Belting, in his analysis of Bosch's middle panel, comments about the overwhelming presence of nudity, the countless male and female naked bodies, stating that the scene creates a kind of "erotic derangement that turns us all into voyeurs" (7), making us all somewhat complicit in the curious scene set before us. This analysis, of course, can also be applied to Jane's rendition of the second panel. Jane's third panel, "Piques and Penalties," is perhaps the most disturbing, much like Bosch's third panel often entitled "Hell." Here, though, in Jane's construction, we find the heroine depleted by her earlier sexual escapades: "The heroine—sagging and furious, a wild depraved look in her eye, no longer young, breasts hollowed from too much suckling, belly scarred and loose, legs bowed from the excesses of two and three men at the same time" (155). What's interesting, however, is that the woman, the heroine, is not a victim despite her grotesque figure; she is (now) fully in control. The offending men have been entrapped in tiny cages. She stops to "make obscene gestures at the naked men trapped in small cages" (155). Further, on top of each cage, there is a plaque which names each man's misdemeanor: "Jilter," "Adulterer," "Deserter," "Double-standard bearer" (155). Then, the heroine continues on to the rifle range, where the "felons," "Pimp," "Rapist," "Child Molester," are kept and lined up sideways so that the heroine can take "careful

aim” and shoot off the “offending organ” (155). If the heroine is successful with her first shot, she is rewarded with her choice of “Jaded Romps,” sexual activity “pleasing to a woman who had experienced many times, every species of the ordinary lustful pleasure” (155). Here, it is interesting to note four important aspects of Jane’s creation: first, the way in which the female body is depicted as grotesque, but enabled, and second, that only men are “punished” for their various sexual crimes; third, the heroine has all authority; she is in charge of doling out the punishment for the crimes, and fourth, ultimately the heroine’s sexuality is not robbed from her, but rather, she is rewarded for her actions with her choice of sexual pleasure. Jane has created with this triptych a scene reflective of female empowerment, a triptych which not only revises Bosch’s work, but also interrogates one of Westernized society’s most prevailing narratives, the story of Eve and the subsequent “fall” of human kind. With Jane’s vision, woman is not punished for her choices; man is.

After her late-night artistic endeavor, Jane is ravenous; she’s “starved”: “She picked up the cold steak with her fingers and began tearing at it with her teeth, getting grease on her cheeks, on her fingertips. It was very messy, greasy. She laughed and picked up the wine in her greasy hand and drank it straight from the bottle” (155-56). Jane’s creation leaves her hungry, with an appetite, and it is this hunger that drives part of her transformation later in the novel. Jane used her creativity, her mind, to create a world where women hold power, where their “sins” and “choices” are not punished, but where they become the enforcers

of a different kind of law, a space where women's sexuality is not stripped from them, but becomes a reward for maintaining "the new law."

Understanding Great Aunt Cleva: (Re)telling (Old) Stories

At the beginning of *The Odd Woman*, we find out that Jane's beloved grandmother Edith has passed away. Jane, who has just finished her teaching for the semester, must not only deal with the stresses of grading final papers and assigning final grades, but she must also prepare to leave her home in Iowa to attend her grandmother's funeral in North Carolina, confronting along the way additional stresses in the form of uncomfortable family relationships and attempting to salvage a dwindling romance with her married lover Gabriel Weeks. Jane's love, her allegiance to her grandmother, is one that was established early in Jane's life. As a child and teenager, Jane lived with her grandmother and so was ensconced with her grandmother's love and care, but at the same time subjected to her grandmother's worldview, a worldview often emboldened by family tales. One of those family tales involves Edith's sister, Cleva, who in 1905 ran off with a cast member of a traveling performance of the melodrama, *The Fatal Wedding*. Cleva left Edith only a note, stating, "Have gone to New York with an actor in the play. Don't try and trace me. It's for the best. Your loving sister Cleva" (22). Cleva and Edith, sisters, were also college roommates and dependent upon one another for both support and grades: "When Cleva ran off, she took Math and Latin and English with her" (23). Soon after Cleva left, Edith dropped out of college and married Hans Barnstorff. (Melo)dramatic enough, and somewhat reminiscent of the plot of *The Fatal Wedding*, Cleva soon sends word

to Edith of her plight, a note scribbled in pencil on the back of a torn theatre program: "Sister I am in grave trouble please can somebody come the villain has left me" (23). And then it is revealed: "Cleva returned tens months later, in a coffin. Her death remained a mystery. Hans had gone to New York on the night train and returned with the coffin and the infant girl" (23). Though a tragedy of a woman's life ended too soon, Edith tells Jane (and Kitty) this story for a specific purpose: It serves as a warning to the girls: there is a "price to be paid for certain kinds of folly" (23). Edith would then follow Cleva's story with her own tale of romance, another (melo)dramatic tale of a girl who, when confronted with the "disease" of life, opts to escape it by marrying a "good man" who will protect her from it; Edith literally faints into Hans' arms as he sweeps her away to "safety" (23). Throughout the novel, Jane often ponders the "choices" women have, choices wrapped up in a neat little dichotomy of good and evil: "You had your choice: a disastrous ending with a Villain; a satisfactory ending with a Good Man" (23).

Cleva's story fascinates Jane throughout the novel. In fact, after her grandmother's death, Jane searches through Edith's things looking for that scrap of a theatre program with Cleva's handwritten note, Cleva's words, and Edith's only clue as to what happened to her sister. Edith, though she remains unsure of what exactly happened to Cleva, manages to reconstruct a rather specific narrative, a retelling of the event which will serve to reinforce her worldview, a worldview tied to her culture and times. Jane, though, despite her own fascination with the family story—she will often retell her grandmother's version

of the story to her own friends—manages to challenge the constructed myth by the conclusion of *The Odd Woman*.

During her disastrous New York rendezvous with Gabriel (New York the same setting where Cleve's life ended), Jane uses the story of Aunt Cleve, or at least the investigation of the story of Aunt Cleve, to embolden the choice she is about to make, that is, her choice to leave Gabriel after two years of a (mostly) unsatisfactory affair. Gabriel, an art history professor at another university, begins his tenuous relationship with Jane through letters. Jane writes to Gabriel after seeing him present a paper at the MLA convention. The two of them corresponded for sometime before deciding to move their relationship to a more physical realm. Letter-writing itself harkens to an earlier time, and Jane, a lover of 19th century culture and times, embraces the chance to commune with Gabriel—despite the fact that he has been married for 25 years and has no plans of leaving his wife Ann.

At first content with their arrangement, Jane embraces the chance to involve herself in what she thinks is a commingling of minds, an intellectual romance, where she is valued for more than just her body, but also her mind. The fact remains, however, that when together—and they've only seen each other in person 14 times over two years—Gabriel and Jane do little but have sex, and unsatisfactory sex at that. Jane never feels free enough to ask questions, and in fact, when they're together, Gabriel and Jane rarely engage in meaningful conversation at all: "She had had almost two years to ask Gabriel some straight questions and she had not asked. She had not wanted to break the smoothness

of the dance step, pit her jarring voice against the elegant music. So wasn't she, then, an accessory...?" (269-70). The day after a very uncomfortable evening out with Gabriel, in which Jane spends more time in her own mind than engaged in actual conversation with Gabriel, Jane seems to be moving toward a decision. The following day, Gabriel spends his day researching at the museum, then the night with friends, all the while promising to meet Jane later and later in the evening. Upon the last phone message from Gabriel, Jane loses patience and decides to stop waiting; she makes a choice. She leaves the hotel, first to go on a shopping excursion, an excursion which proves only to make her more unhappy and uncomfortable, where the dresses don't fit, but she buys one anyway out of a sense of obligation. Jane then decides to go to a place where she will feel most at home, the public library, "where dowdiness was the norm just as chic was the norm in the store that had almost done her in" (322).

That Jane retreats to the library—to books, to words—only further aligns her character with the inner workings of her mind. This act again alludes to the fact that the crux of Jane's female identity is most related to her mind, her intellect. Once there, she decides to investigate *The Fatal Wedding*, and, in the process happens upon the program listing the name of the man who played "the villain," in 1905, the same man, Edith and others assumed to be Cleve's undoing. Finding "the villain's" name, Hugo von Vorst, Jane proceeds to see if he is still alive and residing in New York. The research on *The Fatal Wedding* and Hugo von Vorst invigorate Jane; it is as if she has found her purpose again. Finding

von Vorst in the phone directory, she calls the phone number listed and is quite shocked to hear von Vorst, the villain himself, on the other end of the line.

What makes this encounter so compelling is that Jane has identified this man as “villain” her entire life because of the story Edith has constructed. In actuality, once Jane meets this man, he is a charming and intelligent ninety-year-old man who lives among beautiful houseplants and his cat Ethel. After speaking with von Vorst, it is as if Jane has another epiphany, or as Virginia Smith points out in her article: “For Jane, Cleve’s narrative now appears unresolved, open-ended...” (87). This open-endedness relates to Jane’s fear of losing control, her fear of not knowing how the story ends. With Jane’s meeting with von Vorst, Jane is almost forced to acknowledge the “...ambiguity of all the texts...” (87), an important realization for Jane to make so that she might be free to tell her own stories, create her own metaphor, satisfied with a new understanding.

Jane is quite taken with von Vorst and questions again the roles that stories play in women’s lives. Even so, Jane, after her encounter with von Vorst, leaves with new knowledge, with additional details to the story which she can, if she chooses, tell. She can alter, that is, revise, the narrative (re)constructed by her grandmother Edith if she so chooses. This new sense of empowerment seems to be complicit in Jane’s ultimate transformation by the end of the novel. After her visit with von Vorst, Jane returns to the hotel, where she is met with a note from Gabriel announcing that he will be later than he expected. Jane, however, has finally decided not to wait. She begins writing her own note to Gabriel, discarding several drafts before she finally writes, “Dear Gabriel...I

decided to leave” (363). Another scribbled note, another time, but here, unlike Cleve who waited for someone to come get her, Jane decides to leave; she is mobile, empowered enough to break free from an unfulfilling relationship, and unfulfilling cosmology even; she takes actions, boards a plane, and doesn’t look back, a conclusion Smith calls, “circular, open-ended, and hopeful” (88).

Jane later imagines herself telling this story, her own story, to her friend Sonia: “When we perform acts that change our lives, there is a certain quality like a dream. ... I wrote him a note and then I slowly began to undream him” (365). The intersections of Cleve’s story and Jane’s story, in this way, overlap to inform each other. Jane with her research—an action of her mind—finds strength, clarity, and empowerment; she walks away knowing she has voice and authority over her own life; she has choices beyond “the villain” or the “good man.”

Taking Back The Night or “Becoming” (and) The Enema Bandit

Jane’s preoccupation with the literature and culture of the 19th century controls, or at least informs, much of her inner, and, in turn, her outer, life. She often seeks “knowledge” and “wisdom” from the past, gathering such information often through the lens of literature. Early women writers become an inspiration for Jane, yet she often fails to fully understand that she does not live in the 19th century—and, that therefore, she does not hold 19th century ideals, despite her desires to maintain a “neat” dichotomous cosmology where “good” is good and “bad” is bad. Jane is not confined by a “women’s sphere” or a “cult of domesticity” or the restraints of the ideal woman embodied in the images of the “Southern Belle” or the “Southern Lady.” As Alison Piepmeier describes in *Out in*

Public, women's 19th century roles, even the roles of the most popular women writers of the day were far different from the configurations of women within contemporary society. By the 1970s in American culture those categories of prescribed womanhood had bled into a new creation, giving life to a "new woman" with a new set of ideals encased in feminism; in turn, however, this "new woman" and the feminism of the 1970s caused, for some, a feeling of loss associated with angst and anxiety of losing a particular set of ideals, but for others a sense of joy and a feeling of freedom reigned. With this newfound freedom, there remained, however, a residue of fear and anxiety, and it is that fear and anxiety that is often used to control and manipulate women. Jane is an educated, independent, single woman, living alone, far from her family, pursuing her own academic career; yet, despite these facts, Jane still lives in fear, particularly a fear of the night, of the unknown, of losing control (of her body); this is a fear inspired by the cultural narrative of violence against (single) women, a narrative played out in movies or witnessed on nightly news broadcasts where women are perpetual victims of violent crimes; it is a cultural narrative reinforced by the messages of social apparatuses such as mass media.

Like many of the other family, literary, and cultural narratives present within the novel, narratives that have heavily influenced Jane's life, the narrative of "The Enema Bandit" seems especially related to control, fear, and Jane's unfolding female identity. The embedded intertextual narrative of "The Enema Bandit" is one that begins and ends the novel, therefore drawing attention to itself and the way in which it encircles and envelops the larger narrative of *The Odd*

Woman. However, Jane's initial fictive confrontation with the Enema Bandit differs greatly from her final confrontation with this criminal figure. While Jane's first reaction is always fear, it is interesting to note the differences in how she moves outside and beyond her initial anxieties and fear by the time of her second imagined encounter with the Enema Bandit.

Jane, sleepless, a chronic insomniac, sits in bed, attempting to reread *The Odd Women* by George Gissing; but she is distracted from her reading, immersed rather in thought, contemplating her future, remembering her grandmother's stories, when all of a sudden: "There is a noise outside her bedroom window. It sounded like something, or somebody, slumping against the side of the house. ...Her bedroom was at street level, less than fifteen feet from the sidewalk. She froze, holding the unopened book" (28). The incident that takes shape here is a common narrative, familiar to most women, a narrative of female fear embedded in and enabled by various (patriarchal) cultures throughout the world.

Jane has heard of the Enema Bandit; she is familiar with his crimes: He wears a "woman's" stocking pulled over his face, wields a pistol, and carries an enema bag with which to assault his female victims. Authorities have been unable to catch this criminal for two years—the same amount of time Jane has been teaching at the university, the same number of years she's been involved in her relationship with Gabriel. Jane's Midwestern city boasts of a low crime rate, despite the fact that the Enema Bandit has been victimizing women for two years without being apprehended. Also revealed in this section is the bandit's personal

code of ethics: He never breaks into a woman's apartment; he only enters residences where the doors are left unlocked, thus making the female victim complicit in the crime in some way. Jane even comments at one point: "It would be her own fault, her own lack of self-respect should the Enema Bandit now be peering at her through that chink [in the blind], thinking, that woman alone in bed..." (29). This embedded narrative is yet another reference to the should/should not behavior of women, that ideology which often serves to entrap women, making them complicit in their own victimization. With this belief, Jane should be sleeping soundly with her door bolted, curtains tightly shut, rather than being awake, sleepless, engaged in another night of insomnia, reading a proto-feminist novel, thinking about her family and her relationship with her married lover.

In the *Handbook of the Psychology of Women and Gender*, Rhoda Kesler Unger comments that "the fear of violence, in particular the fear of rape, affects many more, if not most, women. ...A few researchers have even suggested that learning to cope with the threat of violent victimization is a normative developmental task for females in the United States" (8). Kesler Unger elaborates on the kind of fear associated with violence against women:

Criminologists recognize that one social consequence of crime that affects many people beyond those who have been directly victimized is fear of crime. The consequences of the fear of crime are real, measurable, and potentially severe. Because women fear

crime more than men, these consequences are disproportionately borne by women. (Kesler Unger 84)

Such findings fueled determined feminists in the 1970s to partake in various rallies, demonstrations, and marches held after dark to “reclaim” or “take back the night” from those who would use “the night,” the cover of darkness, to victimize women. As one feminist poignantly recalls, “The feminist rallying cry ‘Take Back the Night’ has always struck me as a fine piece of movement poetry. We don’t have the night, but we want it, we want it” (qtd. Scott 533). Even so, the remnants of fear of violence remain in effect, often perpetuating female silence or controlling and immobilizing women in turn.

Arturo Aldama reiterates this information and echoes Jane’s initial reaction in *Violence and the Body: Race, Gender, and the State*: “When bodies feel sudden fear, the adrenaline curve in the nervous system spikes in the first few milliseconds, provoking a fight-or-flight response with varying intensities in the physiology of individual subjects” (1). Jane’s reaction is typical; then, she “froze,” (Godwin, *Odd Woman* 28) “lay[s] rigid, all problems but this forgotten,” (29) “she waited, unable to move, unable to even look out of the sides of her aching eyes” (30). Then, Jane imagines: “...she could hear it, the quick shattering glass, the hand reaching in to turn the lock, the soft footsteps, the stealthy approach through the kitchen until he would be visible in the doorway of her bedroom...” (29). Jane’s fear, in this instance, controls her—the (re)actions of her body and the thoughts of her mind. She is unable to move, unable to (re)act.

As many feminist theorists, such as Andrea Dworkin and Susan Brownmiller, have pointed out, fear of rape, or fear of violence, serves to intimidate and control all women in some way (Kesler Unger 11). Jane remembers the news broadcast by the state attorney general that she had heard the day before: "We have several suspects but cannot reveal more at this time. We have reason to believe that he is in the area at the present, and urge all single women not to go out alone after dark, and to lock all doors and windows..." (Godwin, *The Odd Woman* 28). This individual fear of one "woman" then translates to an attempt at social control of all "single women" in the area: "...we...urge all single women not to go out alone after dark" (29). Jane's mind races: "Had she refastened the back screen after taking out the garbage? Of course, the inside door was locked, but he might break the glass pane..." (28). Aldama clarifies: "Unlike the spontaneity of an individual lashing out, pushing off or running away fast, or the collective adrenaline surges of crowds in protests ... the sustained proliferation and normalization of fear in the 'nervous system' of the body politic has different effects. The propagation and internalization of fear in the social body attempts to keep people docile, numb, silent, and afraid to challenge the status quo..." (1). This fear, then, becomes paralyzing and largely disempowering to (all) single women. As Martha McCaughey maintains in *Real Knockouts: The Physical Feminism of Women's Self-defense*:

The embodied ethos of rape culture is also perpetuated through the practice of sexual violence. That violence, the experience as well as the fear of it, produces in women specific feminine dispositions.

The fear of violence restricts women's mobility and encourages them to be with male "protectors." It prompts women to engage in a variety of cautious and modest behaviors to avoid crossing the line between virtuous woman and whore (for whom little sympathy is given when victimized)... (43)

McCaughey concludes:

The acts of rape and battery teach women that they have no boundaries with men, that their bodies are objects for someone else's use, that they dare not impose themselves or their desires onto the world. We learn that this is the privilege of men, not women. When a woman is actually the target of male violence, her bodily comportment and self-identity may become all the more restricted. (43)

It is interesting to note that Jane's first "encounter" with (her fear of) the Enema Bandit leaves her body paralyzed, disempowered, unable to move, to act; instead, she eventually reasons with the bandit in her mind, constructing a fictive narrative of her own where she implores the criminal to take her bankcard, reasoning that the bandit can take \$1000 out of her account and she won't tell anyone as long as he doesn't harm her, doesn't violate her body (Godwin, *Odd Woman* 30). Jane's fear overtakes her, paralyzes her body, but not her mind. She maintains her cognitive skills and, eventually, as a means to combat the fear that grips her body, she proceeds to construct a scene where she engages the bandit in playful, witty dialogue, "using her best nineteenth century English," of

course, to “make him feel ashamed” (29); her mind, then, is her only way out, her only way outside of her fear. The imagined encounter then morphs into a sexual fantasy, where Jane and the bandit share a “dalliance” (30). This entire scene reveals several important aspects that pertain to the ultimate transformation of Jane’s character. First, there is the conscious, exerted control of her mind over her body, her efforts to reason with the Enema Bandit. Second, Jane’s approach to reasoning with the bandit, her attempts shame him by using 19th century words, seems relevant. And finally, the confluence of 19th century “shame” and 20th century expressions of “sexuality” converge in this scene, reflecting the ever-present conflict Jane experiences throughout the novel, that is, her desire to align herself with 19th century literature/culture without the 19th century moral constrictions associated with being female or her desire for a constant rather than a fluid female self. Jane constantly battles against hybridizing her identity; she fears merging her obsession with 19th century literature and culture with her own 20th century life. Jane resists this “blurring” of categories, often citing her discomfort, her dis-ease, with a shifting, “becoming” self, a reality in which there is no “sure end” (45). This nonlinear reality/identity also stirs anxiety within Jane, linking her experiences with the Bandit to her experiences with her own shifting female identity. As Gayle Greene similarly asserts in *Changing the Story*, Jane seeks “nineteenth-century resolutions, only to encounter twentieth-century irresolutions” (91-92). Jane’s psychological fear of “becoming” often paralyzes her just as much as her physical fear of the Enema Bandit (or other criminal types).

The conclusion of *The Odd Woman* has a similar scene in which Jane is forced once again to confront her fears in the form of the narrative of the Enema Bandit. Much has happened since the first imagined scene with the villain; Jane has attended her beloved grandmother's funeral in the Southeast; while there, she confronted her family and had meaningful conversations with her mother; she has doled out her semester grades, gone on to New York City to be with her lover Gabriel; and she has since left her lover, ending their two-year relationship, and now is back in the Midwest alone in her bed, asleep, dreaming when suddenly: "her heart began to beat frantically" (422). She is awakened by a startling sound and must once again confront the narrative associated with fear of (male) violence: "...she was frozen, a woman alone in frozen terror" (422). Jane begins remembering the many times before that she's been awakened by an unfamiliar sound, the many times she's imagined a criminal breaking into her home and the imagined confrontations that would ensue: "Always she reasoned in her mind with the escaped inmates, the murderers, the drug addicts, and petty thieves who somehow managed to overcome her locks and bolts and break into her night worries" (422). After relaying a series of "reasonable" arguments she has managed to offer her "imagined" criminals over the years, she concludes that she knows "in 'real life' criminals were usually beyond words" (423). This scene, unlike her first imagined encounter with the Enema Bandit, is far more profound and even more so linked to the workings of her mind and to the ultimate transformation of Jane's female identity. Here again we find that she "reasons" with the criminal—as she has done in the past—but this time, it is not with the

words or pretenses of others; the conversation doesn't involve nineteenth-century English or the 19th-century guilt and shame she might pile onto the criminal to convince him to leave her without harming her. This final scene is far more personal, more related to Jane's psyche, especially in terms of her love for words and her belief in their transformative power. Here she acknowledges "real life" where "words" probably wouldn't matter to the criminal mind, yet she uses them anyway, to reshape and redefine her fear, her own reality, reasoning that perhaps "he was not beyond words" (423). Earlier in the novel, we find Jane readjusting to the notion that her own ending has not been written, that she, herself, is alive and "not yet beyond words"; this epiphany is reflected in her final session of reasoning with the "Enema Bandit." With this concluding scene, then, as Jane begins to use her words to reason with the Enema Bandit, but in essence, as she slowly begins to commiserate with the criminal, she begins her own process of healing, her own acceptance of "becoming" her own "best self," a theme echoed throughout all of Godwin's work: "In a way I really feel for you. I understand you... Take my advice get out of here..." (423). From here, Jane begins her ultimate transformation of self where she embraces her fears—of violence, of losing control, but also her fears of "becoming."

The Enema Bandit is an "oddity" much like the way Jane views herself. As she commiserates with him in her mind, she encourages him to put on her clothes, to identify himself as Jane Clifford (423). This is precisely the point where critic Virginia Smith sees Jane fuse her body, her identity, with the Enema Bandit, where Jane "transcends the divisions—between male and female, victim

and victimizer, art and life" (89), where Jane merges the worlds of "oddity" and "normalcy" (89) and shifts into "an androgynous bandit-professor who turns things—identities, professions, fiction, victimization—inside out" (89). And while this is one point of Jane's transformation in the novel, this final scene seems to be more than just another fantasy allowing Jane to become "other" or an androgynous victim/victimizer. Instead, the emphasis on this final scene might be better placed in terms of its relation to Jane's love of words, where she finally acknowledges both the power and futility of words. In this final scene, Jane does not become the Enema Bandit; she simply "becomes," and this allows her transformation of self, her healing. She does not reason with the criminal as she does in the first scene with him. Jane's words are not meant to inspire the Enema Bandit to change, but are meant to inspire Jane herself to embrace the transformation that's been taking shape over the course of the novel.

In the first imagined encounter with the Enema Bandit there exists tension, conflict. Jane reasons with the Enema Bandit, but in her best 19th century English. That scene concludes with Jane having a mystifying sexual fantasy about the bandit. These two acts seem antithetical but are very representative of the way Jane views herself, "born too late" (21), and the conflict that encapsulates Jane's quest for female self throughout the novel: "...the ever-present problem of her unclear, undefined, unresolved self," coupled with her desire for "wholeness" (21). In the final encounter, Jane does not become the Enema Bandit as one critic suggests, but rather she embraces what she's learned and offers her fictive bandit the advice he may need to find his best life,

while bolstering her own continued desire for self at the same time. Jane switches to second person, using the pronoun “you” to be more inclusive—her advice, then, opens out; it is not only advice to the bandit, but also to herself: “...walk fast to the bus station and take the first bus out and don’t get off till you’ve reached the place where the snow melts away and you think you can turn your oddities inside out like a sock and find your own best life by making them work for you instead of being driven by them. That’s the best advice I have to offer” (423). Jane with this statement pays homage to her “home” in the Southeast, “where the snow melts away,” a space where she can use her “oddities” to her advantage, turning them “inside out like a sock,” and where she can put to rest her obsession with 19th century life, turning her love of words, stories, literature, positive rather than negative, making “them work” to her benefit “instead of being driven by them,” the narratives and intertextualities of the past, achieving at last what she desires most, her “own best life” (203, 423), defined by herself.

Mind Matters: A Mother and Two Daughters

Your son is your son till he gets him a wife; your
daughter is your daughter for the rest of your
life. (Old Adage)

Anne Tyler, in her book review of Gail Godwin’s *A Mother and Two Daughters*, comments that the novel “says much about modern society, but it speaks even more affectionately and more resonantly about the tiny, cataclysmic events that make up domestic life” (249). In another book review from that same year, 1982, Josephine Hendin states that there is a “tension between individual

vision and the constricting power of circumstance” presented throughout the novel (np). Hendin continues, “*A Mother and Two Daughters* extends...faith in the individual toward a vision of community” (np). Jane Hill, however, views *A Mother and Two Daughters* as a novel that deals extensively with female characters who challenge the traditional roles of women; she states that “all three women are working toward transformations of self that include recognition of and respect for their past and their past selves” (66), an act of inclusion rather than exclusion, emphasizing community and family as well as the role of the individual. Lihong Xie similarly maintains that the novel involves “vibrant heroines who are immersed in memory, interested in history and identity, and capable of constructing a mature, coherent, and evolving identity through an internal process of self-definition” (132). Xie continues by asserting that there is a renewed sense in the “concept of self as plural, continuous, and in-process” (133). Like the novels that precede it, *A Mother and Two Daughters* reflects Godwin's ongoing concern with women in the process of self-definition; the main difference with this novel, however, is that the individual female protagonists recognize, at least in part, that they are shaped and reshaped, that is, that they are constantly being (re)defined, by those (other women) around them.

Godwin's fifth novel, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, definitely comments on the role of the individual within a larger community, but also on the role of the individual within the family unit, or even within a small female network of a mother and two daughters. As Nina Aurbach reminds us, however, “the first community we know...takes the shape of Mother,” whose “power is seen as all-

suffusing" (25). With this assertion, then, the difference between community and family is at least minute, if not completely unimportant. Here family and community become conflated terms, linked because of the way in which human beings build relationships; both require fostering a sense of "relatedness," a concept which Godwin explores quite extensively in this novel, even quoting, an intertextual act, Ralph Waldo Emerson in the epilogue to reiterate her point: "We are not strong by our power to penetrate, but by our relatedness. The world is enlarged for us, not by new objects, but by finding more affinities and potencies in those we have" (Godwin, *A Mother and Two Daughters* 497). Within this often criticized epilogue, a rather utopian ending ironically entitled "1984," we see this concept of "relatedness" demonstrated, not only by the way in which family and friends of the Stricklands gather together to celebrate a wedding, but also in the passage where Nell waxes philosophical about the ways in which all those present at Cate's party are there because of her initial relationship with Leonard, her husband (535). Even so, the concept is explored throughout the novel in terms of how the individual thrives or merely survives within the (often stifling) constraints of family/community, a theme often explored in Southern Literature. Still, we have to ask as we examine this novel: Where do these three female protagonists find their source(s) of self-renewal and self-definition? Individually or within their tiny community of a mother and two daughters? Additionally, how does Godwin's use of the female mind continue to (re)define these three powerful female characters? In addition to the act of storytelling and the presence of career-minded and intellectual female protagonists, Godwin uses

once again literary intertextualities, like the quote from Emerson or an exploration of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, to further investigate her vision about the role of the individual (woman) within the larger family and community, an additional layer of complexity.

This novel is quite different from Godwin's earlier novels, in that there is a focus on three female protagonists rather than one. Nell, Cate, and Lydia are the three main female characters, each one reflective in some way of a shifting female identity, an identity caught up by her shifting role in changing society (community). No matter what, it seems that their changes must always take place within the confines of "relatedness." In part, Cate and Lydia are who they are because they are sisters, and Nell is who she is because she is their mother. This "relatedness," then, creates, in a sense, a tiny community where the individual is either constantly challenged for her choices or limited by her choices due to the confines of her role within the family, a concept Godwin explores more in depth in *A Southern Family*. The novel opens with the death of the Strickland patriarch, Leonard. Leonard, a well respected member of the Mountain City, North Carolina community, leaves behind his wife Nell, a mature woman of sixty-two, his eldest daughter, Cate Strickland Galitsky, who is a thirty-nine year old, twice divorced, college professor, and his youngest daughter, Lydia Strickland Mansfield, who is a thirty-six year old mother of two boys, Leo and Dickie, and currently separated from her husband, Max. As the novel begins, then, we first glimpse the ways in which each of these female characters interacts with one another in the light of a family tragedy, a space where all should be supportive of

one another due to their great loss. This grief-laden event, however, only serves to showcase the set roles of each female protagonist and how they each react and “relate” to one another.

Because of its length, plot, and setting, Kerstin Westerlund categorizes *A Mother and Two Daughters* as a “substantial novel of manners” and maintains in *Escaping, the Castle of Patriarchy: Patterns of Development in the Novels of Gail Godwin* that, “With *A Mother and Two Daughters* a new phase of development is envisioned: one that contains a vision and the seeds for profound transformation” (109). Westerlund [Shands] also views *A Mother and Two Daughters* as a *zeitgeist*, a novel of the times, a novel “seen against the background of contemporary American society—through triple points of view,” a “kaleidoscopic depiction of the complex and often unarticulated emotional needs within a family,” with the “dynamics between the female characters...occupy[ing] center stage” (110). Westerlund [Shands] goes on to articulate the many ways in which *A Mother and Two Daughters* interrogates the “set roles” of traditional “Southern Womanhood,” again linking Godwin’s novel not only to her earlier work, but also to other Southern women writers working within the tradition.

The strong sense of community, of family, then, connects *A Mother and Two Daughters* more intently to the Southern literary tradition, thus linking this Godwin novel more solidly than her others with the Southern literary tradition at large.

Additionally, because of Godwin’s emphasis on “relatedness,” also presented within this novel, are the complexities associated with the “burden” of family, of community, themes also linked to traditional Southern literature. Louis

D. Rubin Jr. examines such themes in “The Genius of Place” where he states: “...there is the sense of the individual as being assigned a social role within a palpable and defined social organism” (31). Rubin continues, “Human identity in time becomes human involvement in place—a specific, concrete, tangible locus of emotional states” (33). There is a constant “conflict between personal fulfillment and the continuity of identity that a family situation can afford...” (33). Here with Rubin’s assessment, then, we find several intrinsic elements of Southern fiction—individual identity, family, community, and how those roles are each carved out through place/space to then inform individual identity—all thematic elements at play in *A Mother and Two Daughters* as each female protagonist strives to uncover or recover parts of her female identity. Godwin places her mother and two daughters within the context Rubin describes above. She pairs them all with other women, including each other, who represent possibilities for their own self-definition. In some cases, these “others” are idealized female selves who provide positive models toward which each female character can strive. In other instances, as Carolyn Pelzer points out, “they are omens of the underside of self, of self-assertion gone wrong” (155).

Susan S. Kissel also comments on the way in which Godwin utilizes the social structures of family and community to shape the individual female protagonists in this novel: “*A Mother and Two Daughters* focuses on the relationship of individual women to each other and to their society. Godwin asks, how can daughters reject family entrapment yet still maintain a positive relationship with family members; how can they show care for others without

sacrificing themselves, at the same time..." (123). Other feminist critics have avidly addressed such issues, particularly those associated with the individual identity of the daughter growing up in the "shadow" of her mother, where "mother" was not embraced as individual, but as "other." Elizabeth Fox-Genovese comments on this mother/daughter tension in her foreword from *Southern Mothers: Fact and Fictions in Southern Women's Writing*: "During much of the twentieth century, as young women have seen their opportunities expand and customary sexual conventions relax and then collapse, daughters have increasingly tended to see rebellion against their mother as the necessary gateway to autonomy, to the freedom to become a person in one's own way" (xv). Fox-Genovese continues to explain the "primitive rivalry" between mothers and daughters: "...the younger struggles to supplant the older. But there are abiding bonds among members of each sex, and mothers and daughters share intimate knowledge of the pains and joys of womanhood, of what it means to live in a female body..." (xv). This desire for a separation from the past, from the role of the mother, then, morphs itself into a common theme in early women's writing, that of the "orphan figure." Fox-Genovese sees the "orphan figure" as significant because the "orphan figure": "...was a strategy designed to emphasize the young woman's preponderant role in her own maturation or self-fashioning..." (xvii). Interestingly enough, Fox-Genovese notes that "...each of us is a daughter and potentially a mother, [these roles] lead us through a compelling exploration of what it means to be woman" (xviii)—all themes that continually resurface in Godwin's novels. Fox-Genovese's observations, of course, complicate and

underscore a reading of *A Mother and Two Daughters* where we see quite clearly both daughters, Cate and Lydia, eventually rejecting their mother Nell's "traditional" role of devoted wife and mother.

As Joan Schulz points out in "Orphaning as Resistance," an essay found in Carol Manning's *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature*, "A substantial—and at first glance surprising—number of women in novels and short stories by Southern women authors "orphan" themselves.... In doing so, they signal themselves as resisting, refusing, or rejecting the kind of family identity, family roles, and family ties with the past or the present, considered so vital to the Southern way of life..." (92). In some ways, then, with this novel Godwin acknowledges the tension between mothers and daughters as they each strive to better define themselves. In other ways, however, Godwin's major focus tends to be more toward embracing "relatedness," the antithesis of the act of "orphaning" to which Schulz alludes. Perhaps, then, the conflicting, yet coexisting, themes of "relatedness" and "orphaning" presented throughout the novel exist as a deliberate tension, one employed by Godwin to show the struggles of the emerging and individual female identity within a rather stifling community/family. Godwin in *A Mother and Two Daughters* explains and defines the complexities of the mother/daughter relationship as it resides in the cohesive structure of family/community, for the novel consistently interrogates what it means for the individual to be caught up in a network of family/community. Can one truly become an individual within such a setting? Or will she always have a dichotomous choice of "either/or"? In "Becoming the Characters in Your Novel,"

Godwin herself comments on the connections between the female characters and the ways in which she had to craft the novel so that it would be representative of their family connection, yet also reflective of their difference: Godwin's task was to "...show the subjective reality of each character, complete with her history, her style of behavior and speech and thought, the important people in her life, and—most crucial perhaps—the mysterious way in which she had shaped and been shaped by the other two heroines" (12). This shaping and reshaping, then, is most reflected in how Godwin once again explores female identity in relation to the female mind.

Nell, Cate, & Lydia

Nell, the Strickland family matriarch, is reminiscent of many of the other mothers we've seen in Godwin's work. She is part of the "old guard," part of tradition, a tradition that is largely associated with 19th century ideals about womanhood, ideals that reinforce the (stereo)typical views of gender. It is Nell who is most aligned with the figure of the Southern Belle or Southern Lady, although she is also an "orphan" of sorts, an "outsider" to the community of Mountain City, North Carolina, a woman who has struggled to define herself as an individual amid other more "stable" and traditional women of Mountain City's bourgeoisie; this is despite the fact that after 40 years Nell has become more like them than unlike them; even so, she continues to be reserved. Nell

excluded the innermost kernel of herself, that unsocialized observer who had masqueraded adequately since puberty as a "Southern Lady." She did not feel thoroughly Southern, though she had never

lived farther north than Delaware. But, unlike her older daughter, Cate, Nell had always felt obliged to suppress what her own elegant father would've called her "ungainly aspects." Nell could never quite forgive Cate for not making more of an effort to blend gracefully into the landscape and keep her unruly instincts to herself. (Godwin, *Mother and Two Daughters* 8)

Here we see quite clearly the generational tensions between mother and daughter as well as the tensions between the themes of "orphaning" and "relatedness." Whereas Nell's generation would (mostly) adhere to the gender roles they had inherited from their mothers, Cate's generation does not feel quite so inclined. The differences in personalities, then, between Cate and Nell, become a point of contention throughout the novel, with each female figure often defining herself by the other. Betty Freidan, in the now classic feminist text, *The Feminine Mystique*, addresses this contentious phenomenon that arose between mothers and daughters in the 1970s, the phenomenon itself reflective of the "orphaning" and "relatedness" themes examined throughout *A Mother and Two Daughters*: "...almost all our mothers, were housewives, though many had started or yearned for or regretted giving up careers. Whatever they told us, we, having eyes and ears and mind and heart, knew that their lives were somehow empty. We did not want to be like them, and yet what other model did we have?" (74-75). Freidan's assessment in this quote can be aptly applied to Cate and Nell's relationship. Cate becomes what Nell could not, an independent woman, who carves out her female identity almost in reaction against her mother's model

of “traditional womanhood.” Adrienne Rich also relates that, “the daughter views her mother both as Herself and as the Other from whom she must split [in order] to define her own sense of self. Because the mother usually represents and inculcates patriarchal values, the daughter senses that to imitate her is to lose independence” (236). Thus, Cate forges a female identity that is antithetical to the traditional gender roles associated with Nell’s generation; Cate forms an identity that is largely associated with the mind and her profession.

Cate is a literature professor, a woman who spends her time analyzing texts and teaching others. Throughout the novel, it is revealed that Cate’s greatest fear is her loss of independence, “the loss of [her] will to resist” the “compromise. Cowardice. The sucking pull of the Status Quo” (65). Interestingly enough, Cate is the female character who has most solidly defined her identity by her (female) mind rather than with her (female) body. Yet, throughout the novel, it is Cate’s female body that is constantly being “assaulted”; it is almost as if Cate’s mind is at war with her body, a tension we have seen in earlier Godwin novels, such as *The Perfectionists*, *Glass People*, and *The Odd Woman*. In this novel, we witness the mind/body dichotomy first as Cate breaks a tooth while sharing a piece of peanut brittle with her nephew Dickie. Moreover, Cate’s unplanned pregnancy and subsequent abortion also seem to be a reflection of her body’s battle with her mind, a reflection of her “will to resist the...Status Quo.” In Part Three of the novel, Cate’s body is again “attacked” as she suffers from Bell’s Palsy, a disfiguring disorder involving a facial nerve (453). The continuous “assault” on Cate’s body almost transforms her into a grotesque figure, the

grotesque, a theme that frequently recurs in Southern literature. Cate's response to the many physical "attacks," however, is to simply, almost coldly, analyze and acknowledge the "metaphysical" division between body/mind: "There was nothing like an awareness of something gone even slightly wrong with the body to diminish the urge to rehash or philosophize" (453). At one point, she even postulates: "Even her own body, it seemed, had joined the popular crusade to make her lose faith in herself" (65). Cate's "faith in herself," however, is simply Cate's faith in her "mind," her faith in her intellectual ability, her faith in her independence as a single woman. Ultimately, however, Cate's identity is one that fails to reflect "wholeness"; it is an identity that rejects the theme of "relatedness" Godwin seeks to explore with this novel. Cate consistently rejects other parts of herself—namely her body and her soul—in favor of the pursuits of her mind. That being said, then, we must acknowledge that while Godwin's shift from an emphasis on female identity through female body in her earlier novels to that of female mind in later novels seems to have been a favorable one, the shift remains incomplete if it abandons the positive attributes associated with the female body. Cate is still incomplete, still searching for a "wholeness," searching for something beyond her mother's identity, but beyond her own mind-centered identity as well. Cate's female identity has become stagnant; somewhere along the way in her efforts to react against her mother's identity, that is, to "orphan" herself, she has ceased to embrace "wholeness" ceased to acknowledge that she is not perfected even as she consistently rejects "change" in her life, "change" in her identity. It is perhaps, then, Cate's rejection of change and her

failure to acknowledge her need for transformation that most contributes to the way in which her (female) body verges on the grotesque throughout the novel.

Lydia's character actually seems a bit more complex than Cate's. Her development as a woman has been much more in tune with her mother's, for she has up until age thirty-six pretty much patterned her life after her mother's: She married and had children at a young age. She has no real identity outside of being wife/mother. Lydia, though, senses she must change and accepts that, and it is perhaps Lydia's transformation that happens so completely throughout the novel. Much like Francesca Fox Bolt from Godwin's *Glass People*, Lydia is often seen sleeping her life away: "During her married life Lydia had been a great sleeper" (115), and until Dickie's friend asks if his mother is ill, Lydia has seen nothing wrong with her luxurious afternoon naps. Dickie's friend's observation, however, provokes her, for it brought with it a "new unwelcome image of herself as 'a woman who slept a lot'—not to mention 'an invalid'" (115-116). After this incident, Lydia begins to seek a life that "would make one want to stay awake" (116). Lydia's separation from Max, her husband, is part of her transformation; Max's caring nature enables her comfortable life, something which, in part, then serves to paralyze her, or at least put her to sleep. As Suzanne Jones points out in "Dismantling Stereotypes: Feminist Connections, Womanist Corrections," Lydia is not fulfilled in her role as mother/wife, and "as a result she behaves much like Kate Pontellier, napping her way through life as an avoidance strategy" (81). Lydia's transformation, then, includes going back to college, leaving her husband, finding a career, and having an affair, one that fulfills her sexually,

something that had been missing in her life—all acts which hone different aspects of her personality—body, mind, and soul—and presses her character more toward Godwin's theory of "wholeness." Lydia's transformation, however, is not without its share of problems; her guilt alone—for abandoning her mother's ingrained idea(s) about womanhood to instead embrace more of her "wayward" sister's life—is enough to cause quite a stir among the Strickland women. Nell is saddened by Lydia's choices, while Cate is almost threatened by her sister's changes. Carolyn Pelzer points out again the influence of the "community," the family, on the transformation of the individual in *A Mother and Two Daughters*: They each form relationships, "friendships with other women who embody the lives and stories they seek as models, and their friendships with or connections to these other women are crucial to their efforts to create selves" (155) What Lydia discover, however, is more than this: Lydia discovers that there is freedom in the constant "revision" of one's life. Just as Ursula DeVane warns Justin Stokes in Godwin's *The Finishing School*: "As long as you yearn, you can't congeal: there is a forward motion to yearning" (Godwin, *The Finishing School* 256), so too Lydia learns in *A Mother in Two Daughters*: There is power in the change, power in the desire to transform, something Cate, despite herself, has failed to recognize.

The almost "utopian" epilogue of *A Mother and Two Daughters* does little to add to the novel's plot; it does, however, serve as a means to reinforce the themes of "community" and "relatedness" as well as the theme of "change." Here, the Strickland family and friends gather to celebrate the marriage of Leo,

Lydia's oldest son, and Camille, Renee's daughter. The celebration takes place at the cabin in the hills of Mountain City, the property that Cate has inherited from her father's Uncle Osgood. Each of the characters is briefly acknowledged as we are updated about the various changes in their lives. The final scene, then, is one of reconciliation and renewal, reflections of change, but also "wholeness," and themes then linked once again to the positive transformation of female identity, an identity largely associated with the merging of body, mind, and soul.

The Quick(s) and the Dead: The Mind(s) of *A Southern Family*

Godwin's *A Southern Family* (1987), much like her earlier novel, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, is one of her "major key" novels, novels which Godwin defines as "social novels," or "novels about a person's place in society and the community" (Neufeld np). Therefore, *A Southern Family* is a highly complex novel which examines, in turn, the complicated structures of the family, the community, and society, especially in terms of their collective effects on the individual. It is also a novel, underscoring issues involving the role of the individual within the social structures of family, community, and society; it is also a novel which attempts to explore and examine the intricate elements of the Southern social class system—another massive undertaking for which Godwin has received some harsh commentary. By either account, then, *A Southern Family* is as Kirsten Westerlund [Shands] states, a "more expansive and inclusive text" than earlier Godwin novels (139).

Since its publication, *A Southern Family* has had its share of mixed criticism; one critic complains, "The weakness of the novel lies in the sheer

quantity of the material used to say very little” (Taylor qtd. Cheney 230).

However, in her review of the novel, Beverly Lowry comments that *A Southern Family* “may be [Godwin’s] most satisfying book...the best she’s written (np), and Jonathan Yardley comments that it is a novel about middle-class women “trying to reconcile traditional expectations with the new territory opened for exploration by feminism” (3). Other critics, such as Anne Cheney in her article, “Gail Godwin and Her Novels,” carefully counters that while *A Southern Family* may be one of Godwin’s most popular novels, it may not be one of her best, and John Alexander Allen in his article, “Researching Her Salvation; The Fiction of Gail Godwin,” fails to see the many positive aspects of Godwin’s *A Southern Family* by simply citing that the novel has “long passages...[which] are relatively dull and barren; and its shifts in perspective often make it hard to follow” (1). Despite the fluctuation between lofty praise and harsh criticism, however, Godwin’s seventh novel, *A Southern Family*, remains what it is, a massive narrative undertaking, a five-hundred-and-forty page novel revolving mostly around one Southern family, the Quicks, and one main event, the tragic death of Theodore Quick.

Despite some of its above-noted shortcomings, *A Southern Family*, by most accounts, is far more complex than many of Godwin’s earlier novels, shifting throughout the novel among different voices and points of view, thus allowing readers to glimpse the different ways in which the same tragic occurrence individually affects the different family members and friends of the deceased Theodore Quick, showing at once the relationship of the individual to the community. Moreover, in addition to being a novel where the spiritual

dimension of the characters comes more into play than in previous novels, something Ronald Emerick points out in his article, "Theo and the Road to Sainthood," this novel is also one which emphasizes again the realm of the mind in terms of Godwin's meticulous attention to the different consciousnesses portrayed by her use of various points of view, the use of intertextualities, as well as the recurring themes of dream-visions, storytelling, remembering, and memory. Of particular interest in this novel is the role of "re-memory" embedded within the act(s) of mythmaking, memory, and storytelling. For even as Theodore's death remains a mystery throughout the novel, it also becomes part of the family's—and the larger community's—*mythos*; Theodore's death becomes the embodiment of story; in essence, over time, Theo becomes story, his identity caught up solely in the act of retelling.

Despite its decidedly spiritual aspects, the novel is a reflection of the new twist or shift in Godwin's writing; with this novel, the mind again becomes a primary focus. As Beverly Lowry alludes to in her *New York Times Book Review*, much of the novel's action takes shape solely within the characters' minds; within the "theaters" of the different characters' minds, we find slightly different versions and different understandings of the same events, emphasized by a complex interweaving of shifting perspectives and points of view. To be sure, the "theater of the mind" is something emphasized in *The Odd Woman* as well; the difference in this novel, in comparison to Godwin's earlier novel, *The Odd Woman*, however, is that the action of the narrative takes place not solely within one mind, that is, from one point of view, but instead, the action and the narrative take

shape from various points of view, allowing for differing perspectives to coexist and challenge one another at the same time, emphasizing that there is no singular “narrative truth” to the various events of the plot, nor to the specific tragic event of Theo’s death. At the same time, however, the multiple perspectives and points of view also allow several characters to contemplate not only the tragic event of Theo’s death, but also to think about the real ways in which one life (or death) impacts others; this, in turn, allows the characters to make astute observations about their own posited roles within the family and within the community, a common theme of Southern literature that Godwin has examined before in her novels, especially in *A Mother and Two Daughters*. In essence, *A Southern Family* forces the internal external; she thrusts her characters inward, so that they might push themselves outward. With this novel, Godwin seems to ask again what responsibilities we as human beings hold to one another as members of the same family, same community, same society.

Central to the novel’s unfolding plot, then, is not only Theo’s death, but also Theo’s life. In addition, this novel is also Godwin’s own personal attempt to examine the interconnectedness of the self, and the role of the individual, to the webbing of family and the larger community. For this plot device to work well, Godwin must also examine the ways in which stories and storytelling function within the family and the community. She does so deftly, often (self) criticizing the role of the novelist, that is, the role of the storyteller, who simply “lets [her characters] suffer a little, just enough to improve their characters, but...always rescues them from the abyss at the last minute and reward[s] them with love or

money or the perfect job—or sometimes all three” (Godwin 49). It is Theo who points out this tension between the grittiness of “real life” versus the “unrealistic realism” of created characters and well-plotted novels, to his stepsister, Clare, who is a published author of fiction, an author similar to Godwin herself.

Storytelling, an act associated with the mind, then, becomes central to the novel’s plot, and semi-reflective of a personal odyssey for Godwin the author and storyteller.

The inspiration for this novel and its unsolvable and mysterious elements was the violent death of Godwin’s own step-brother, Tommy Cole, who died in a similar kind of tragedy in 1983, the same year in which *A Southern Family* is set. Noted to be one of the most autobiographical novels written by Godwin, *A Southern Family* is a comment on Godwin’s own foray into the mysterious death of her real-life step-brother and its “unsolvable” nature; in one interview she relates simply that she wanted to “explore, but not explain” her stepbrother’s death. She comments: “I wanted to stick to the insoluble part” (Graeber np). Recurring themes of mystery and “the unsolvable” permeate this novel and emphasize its complexity, and it is the act of storytelling that is often used as a tool to explore the “insoluble.”

Integral to the plot’s development are the ways in which Godwin “shows” the Quick family’s interaction both before and after Theo’s death. The patriarch of the family is Ralph Quick, the self-made man, a builder who has pulled himself up by the bootstraps from his humble Appalachian roots. Ralph married widow and writer Lily Buchel Campion (Quick) after the death of her husband, Miles

Campion. From the beginning, their marriage does not sit well with Clare, Lily's nine-year-old daughter. Their marriage continues to haunt the adult Clare Campion, the successful novelist who plays the role of the insider/outsider, oscillating between her role as sister/daughter, an insider, and outside-observer/stepdaughter, the one who moved away (escaped) when she was a teenager. Clare's character is a sympathetic one, one who desperately attempts to not only understand Theo's death, but also to critically examine the ways in which the family structure and the larger community itself may have been complicit in Theo's tragic death. Ralph and Lily have two sons, Rafe, the younger son, and Theo, the older son, who seemingly, at the onset of the novel, commits suicide after he murders his girlfriend, Jeanette, committing both violent acts in front of Jeanette's three-year-old son Gordon. Theo, at the time of the murder/suicide, is separated from his wife, the cynical Snow Mullins (Quick), a girl from an underprivileged Appalachian upbringing; Snow and Theo have a son together named Jason. The Quicks are a fairly affluent Southern family, or at least it would appear so from an outsider's perspective; though, it is revealed throughout the novel that the Quicks' finances have seen better days. The tension between social classes, however, is palpable throughout the novel, especially when examining the relationship between the Quicks, who live separate from and above the community, atop a hill in Mountain City, North Carolina, and the Mullins, who live in near poverty deep in the "holler" of Granny Squirrel. The tensions between the social classes within and without the extended community, however, become almost second place to the tensions

within the Quick family. The larger community consists of Snow's family, the Mullins clan; Clare's lover Felix Rohr, a professor, and his daughter Lizzie; as well as Clare's girlhood friend Julia Richardson Lowndes, a history professor, and her father, Neville Richardson; Ralph's best friend, the elderly Alicia Gallant, sister of the deceased Dr. Gallant--the Gallants in this novel representing the "old guard" of the Southern aristocracy and another level of the Southern class system.¹

Intertextuality, Dreams & The Mind

Intertextuality functions in *A Southern Family* much as it does in *The Odd Woman*. Literary texts are mentioned throughout the novel as a means to reinforce what we already know about the female characters—that they are intelligent women who find meaning in and through their intellectual lives, including interaction with a variety of texts. Just like Jane Clifford in *The Odd Woman*, we have female characters in *A Southern Family* who read, and who find reading—an activity of the mind—a rewarding experience, an experience that largely enriches their lives and develops their characters. The female characters again have careers that are also linked to the mind—college professors, high school teachers, and writers. In this novel, then, we find female characters who not only read, but also female characters who also write, that is, female characters who create, whose identities are securely tied not only to their

¹ For a full discussion of the primary and secondary characters and their real-life counterparts, see Anne Cheney's article, "Gail Godwin and Her Novels" from *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*.

intellect but to their creativity, characters reminiscent of Violet from *Violet Clay* and Justin Stokes from *The Finishing School*.

Both Clare and her mother Lily are writers. Lily, however, has given up the craft of writing (and, in essence, also her vocation) long ago, after her marriage to Ralph and the subsequent births of her two sons, Theo and Rafe. In this instance, then, Lily's character mirrors different biographical elements of Godwin's own life, for Godwin's mother, who once wrote romances and taught literature at a local college to support their "man-less" family, eventually gave up her own writing once she married Godwin's stepfather, Frank Cole. Moreover, Clare, a character much like Godwin herself, is also a writer, a writer who lives in upstate New York with her companion Felix Rohr, echoing again biographical fragments of Godwin's own life. Clare, like Godwin, creates with words. She is the storyteller, the keeper of myths, myths which belong not only to her family, but to the community and the culture as well. Thus, we find within *A Southern Family* references to both Lily and Clare's writing careers; Clare has written a novel, *The Headmaster's Daughters*, and this novel is mentioned throughout *A Southern Family*, and at times its description sounds hauntingly familiar to *A Southern Family* and its characters: "Their sadness had become their religion and their art: it provided, as music to a dance, the tempo and structure of their lives" (74). In addition, Lily's abandoned writing career also highlights Lily's dissatisfaction with her own female identity. Lily's references to texts and abandoned texts act, in a way, as intertextualities, texts within texts, that serve to add depth to both of these characters, female characters who largely find

meaning not only through the acts of verbal storytelling, but also their writing, through the creative process, and through their intellectually-driven vocations.

In addition, there are also several important texts mentioned throughout the novel, texts which serve to illuminate and complicate the novel's meaning. Clare's best friend, Julia, who is a college professor and a historian, is also an important figure in this novel, for she functions not only as a supporting female character, one whose identity is linked to her career, and her career to her mind, but also a character whose intellectual life is relevant to Godwin's emphasis of "the mind" to female identity. With Godwin's admission that this novel was to be, on one level, a foray into the intricate elements of the Southern class system, into Southern life, it is not a coincidence that Julia's history class happens to be studying W.J. Cash's classic commentary on Southern identity and culture, *The Mind of the South*, or that Julia is often pictured reading Morrison's biography about W.J. Cash. W.J. Cash and his work act as both an "intertext," and as a broad comment on Southern intellect, Southern literature, and Southern culture in general; all of these, of course, can be linked to the role of "the mind" in Godwin's fiction. Julia, the teacher, admires Cash's work and life; however, Cash is himself a tragic figure. At once, he is someone Julia admires because he had been "brilliant, one of the few Southerners able to live at home and see it, historically and objectively, for what it was, and still love it" (344). At the same time, however, Cash's death, much like Theo's death, is shrouded in mystery, a mystery which only heightens the tragic sadness associated with their individual deaths. In fact, Godwin creates an important scene in which Clare and Julia

discuss not only the significance of Cash's life and definitive work, *The Mind of the South*, but also a scene which draws parallels between Cash's life and suicide to Theo's life and suicide (344-373). Cash, a highly significant figure in Southern culture and the study of Southern literature, is depicted here as a tragic figure, much like Theo, someone who was largely misunderstood by his own family, but one who was embraced by "others," but outsiders, that is the "intellectual literati." The scene captures the ways in which one individual can impact and change a family, a community and a culture, again emphasizing the conflict of the internal and the external, the tension surrounding the role of the individual in a community and/or culture.

Another intertextuality woven into the fabric of *A Southern Family* is Morton Kelsey's *Dreams: A Way to Listen to God*. Morton's text is one treasured by Lily, a text that often comforts her in times of need, especially after the death of her son Theo. The text is seen casually lying on Lily's bedside table and noted as one of Lily's standby books, from her "library for getting through life" (463). Interestingly enough, Kelsey's text is one that joins the realm of the mind to the spiritual realm, in that, the text deals extensively with how one might harness his/her subconscious through careful analysis of dreams. Dreams for Kelsey, however, are spiritual in nature, a way for human beings to be reached by God. Kelsey notes that, "throughout the history of Christianity, the dream had been a channel often used by God to talk to His people" (9), a sentiment later expressed by Sister Patrick, the nun who befriends young Clare and later Lily. In addition, Kelsey is a proponent of "wholeness," a theme that permeates much of Godwin's

later work. For Kelsey, dreams aid in uncovering the depths of the “total human life,” and “they reveal the forgotten depths of the human being and even give intimations of a spiritual world that surrounds the human being as totally as the physical one” (1). Thus, we see here by Godwin’s inclusion of such an intertext yet another way in which Godwin’s writing seems to be evolving in slight ways, basically exploring the ways in which her female protagonists might better incorporate spirituality as a means to enrich their daily lives. Kelsey’s *Dreams: A Way to Listen to God* becomes integral to the plot, not only as a way for Lily to embrace her spiritual side, but also when its findings are applied, it is a way to interpret the concluding chapter of *A Southern Family*, one which largely embraces dreams as a means of understanding, merging the spiritual, the physical, and the mental dimensions of (female) identity.

Throughout the novel, several characters are depicted as having dreams and/or visions that would illuminate either something about their inner life or the lives of those around them. This happens rather mysteriously and often in Clare and Felix’s rented summer home on “The Island.” Their summer home, affectionately named “No Saints,” is a place the Quick family often join Felix and Clare for a summer retreat, a time to get away and enjoy life outside of Mountain City. The home, however, is said to host a spare bedroom that offers its guests the opportunity to dream dreams and have visions and moments of depth and clarity. Felix is the first to experience such a phenomenon; it happens during the first night, their first summer spent at “No Saints.” Here Felix embraces a fantastical dream where he is “lifted” by the ocean, where the “thoughts of Felix

Rohr fell away and were replaced by the life and thought of...whom? Of nobody, really" (405). Felix later reflects that his dream experience was "a little like sharing the feelings of God. For the first time I had the idea that if God really exists, he isn't just a blind brute force but something that enjoys making new things to love, even if some of them don't turn out well, or get destroyed in the process" (406). Felix's dream-experience here is one that is inclusive, encompassing, a "godlike vision embracing everything from unborn souls to creatures of the sea" (407). Throughout the novel, Felix is a character who seems to be most accepting of others, even his daughter who has chosen to go against her father's wishes and embrace traditional Judaism.

On a separate night, Clare, intrigued by the room's seemingly mysterious power, sleeps in the room, and she too experiences a dream/vision, one where she envisions herself as a crewmember of a spaceship. As she explores the ship, she is admonished not to fall in love with the captain. As she wanders the spaceship, she finally sees the captain, and despite the warnings, instantly falls in love. The captain, however, turns out to be herself. It seems interesting that while Felix's dream seems to be a move more "outward" toward others, Clare's dream takes her inward, toward herself. This inward step, that Clare sees initially as "selfish," is necessary, however; for with it, we realize that Clare is one of the first of Godwin's female protagonists who seems to be content, at ease, and confident in the realization that she is steadily working toward her "best self." Jane Hill comments that it is the sheer complexity of *A Southern Family's* plot and its multi-faceted points of view that reflects such a change:

No longer is the main story to be told that of a sensitive, independent young woman seeking her best life. ... The crucial difference is that the swirl of events and characters that surrounds her is too complex, too insistent, too demanding, to allow her the luxury of concentrating quite so intently on the personal as the Godwin woman has been able to do previously. (103)

Hill's observation seems relevant, for she clearly discerns the shift in Godwin's "vision." At the same time, however, Hill fails to elaborate or investigate the means by which this shift has occurred. With the two dreams in the "No Saints" chapter following each other, it is easy to see the shift from "self" to "others," from "inward" to "outward," and this is important in a couple of different ways. First, it alludes to Godwin's subtle move toward the spiritual. Secondly, we see Godwin's female characters not only becoming more "whole," but more accepting of their faults as they embrace "wholeness" as an ongoing process. That is, her later female protagonists are able to love themselves as they are, in the state of becoming—something very relevant in Godwin's next three novels *The Good Husband*, *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, and *Evensong*. The structure of the dreams in *A Southern Family*, then, become the vehicle, the means by which Godwin's characters can express their transformation(s), a space where they can embrace their "becoming," an act very foreign to Godwin's earlier female protagonists.

Dreams surface again at the end of the novel in a chapter that has often been puzzling to its critics. The chapter, "Anniversary," begins in the point of view

of Sister Patrick, a somewhat minor character who has been mentioned only briefly throughout the novel. Sister Patrick has been a friend to the Quick family and a teacher of Clare, and more often than not, she is a source of inspiration and friendship to Clare while simultaneously a source of irritation to Lily because of Lily's own insecurities regarding her relationship with her daughter Clare. The concluding chapter, however, begins with Sister Patrick's dream. It just so happens that Sister Patrick dreams of an unnamed young man on the morning of the first anniversary of Theo's death. In her dream, her deceased father comes to tell Sister Patrick that her beloved horse Shadow has returned. Her father warns her to hurry along to the barn before the horse "mortally wounds that young man" (507). Sister Patrick is ecstatic about the return of her horse and runs toward the barn to see her old friend again. Along the way she hears and recognizes Shadow's familiar "waggish whinny" (509). As she approaches the scene, however, Sister Patrick hears a "thud and a cry, and in a spotlight in front of the stables, a handsome young man lay crumpled and dead on the ground" (509). She realizes she has come too late, that not only is the young man dead, but that Shadow will have to be put down as well. Sister Patrick is "put out with the young fellow for going and getting killed" (509). The young man lying crumpled dead on the ground suddenly arises, and brushing himself off asks the Sister if he could go back to the school with her and wash his hands. She knows, then, that if she accompanies the young man back to the school, she will never see Shadow alive again—a major sacrifice for Sister Patrick. Sister Patrick awakens from her dream, confused, but thinking about the choices she has made in her life. As the

day progresses, it is revealed that Sister Patrick fully realizes the significance of her dream and its associations to the anniversary of Theo's death, yet she is reluctant to confront Lily about the dream. Even so, Sister Patrick reasons with herself, acknowledging that throughout Christian history dreams have been used as a medium for the spiritual, and that perhaps her dream may be a comfort to Lily. Acting on this conviction, Sister Patrick phones Lily and the two decide to meet for lunch. They will drive to a church set atop a picturesque mountaintop in Maggie Valley. As the day progresses, Sister Patrick prays continually for guidance in broaching the subject of Theo's death and her dream. Later that day Sister Patrick, seizing an awkward silence, relates her dream of Theo to Lily, and at first, Lily is almost jealous that Theo would "appear" to Sister Patrick rather than to his own mother. But, as Sister Patrick continues to describe to Lily her dream, Lily's attitude transforms and she is able to accept the dream as a gift of closure and reconciliation. It is Sister Patrick who offers the dream, but Lily who interprets it as a dream of hope for Theo's eventual sanctification, hope that one day Theo's hands will be "clean enough" to shake hands with God. Dreams, in this way then, act in a similar fashion, providing the plot with a resolution that is related to the merging and reconciliation of body, mind, and soul as they pertain to a "whole" identity. The novel concludes with a benediction and a blessing of sorts, a prayer and blessing for protection from evil and everlasting life; this novel's conclusion, then, is once again reflective of Godwin's shift toward the spiritual.

In this instance, dreams and the interpretation of dreams are linked to intertextuality—all cognitive functions of the mind, and ways in which Godwin once more aligns her fiction and her female characters to the female mind. In addition, here we also see the ways in which the functions of the mind merge with the needs of the soul and the quest for spiritual wholeness. The most intriguing intertexts in *A Southern Family* are embedded texts that more fully address (female) identity and its relation to the spiritual realm. One of Lily's other perennial favorites for coping with life is *The Night and Nothing* by Gale D. Webbe. We first see *The Night and Nothing* casually lying on Lily's nightstand, Lily again almost always acting as a conduit character for Godwin's new spiritual vision. *The Night and Nothing* is a spiritual guide that addresses the ways in which believers can better cope with the trials and travails of life. Webbe advises that humans "must see our travails not as punishments but as birthpangs attending the emergence of a 'new creature' who is evolving to the limit spiritually as well as merely biologically" (12). Webbe clarifies, "A person should fully expect to enter the shadows repeatedly, emerging each time on a higher level, as God continues to lead him on the spiritual journey" (11). It would seem that Webbe's emphasis on the "evolution" of humans toward a "new creature" might fit with Godwin's own vision of "wholeness," and on the act of "becoming" that we see reflected in much of her work. Godwin's personal ties, then, to Webbe, an Episcopal minister, also seem quite relevant. In her article, "Farewell to a Mentor," Godwin addresses her ties to and affection for Father Gale Webbe. Father Webbe, the minister at St. Mary's in Asheville, North Carolina, became a

mentor to the young Godwin in 1947, when Godwin was 10 years old. She comments that,

To my male-deprived imagination, Father Webbe was like a being from another star. Father of two children himself—his daughter my age—he knew how to listen and talk to us and he always gave the sort of answers that honed our discretion from the complexities of the world we were going to live in, not some idealized, simplified version of it. (Godwin, “Farewell” 15)

After leaving Asheville and traveling abroad, Godwin lost contact with Webbe, and it wasn’t until she found herself browsing the shelves of a bookstore in Piccadilly Square in 1964 that the two were “reintroduced.” There Godwin found a copy of *The Night and Nothing*: “...my eye was arrested by a slim dark volume with a title that described the current state of my heart—and a familiar name below...” (16). Godwin remembers, “I bought it, took it home to my darkness, and read it straight through the night, and then I wrote him a letter” (16). Their regular correspondence took up then, and continued for more than thirty years. It is no coincidence, then, that Godwin places Webbe’s spiritual guide, *The Night and Nothing*, on Lily’s nightstand. And, it is no coincidence that we see the influences and incarnations of Webbe in Godwin’s later novels, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* and *Evensong*, linking once again biographical elements of Godwin’s life to her fiction. *The Night and Nothing* as an intertextuality continues to reflect the shift in Godwin’s writing; she is slowly moving more toward the spiritual and its emphasis on “wholeness.”

Memory & “Re-memory” Through Mythmaking, & Storytelling

Though generally the term “re-memory” has been reserved for and applied to literature created by the African and African American traditions, and most popularly associated with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, for example, parts of the term can also be accurately applied to Godwin’s *A Southern Family*, especially in terms of its relation to the functions of constructing a narrative—that is, to remembering, to mythmaking, and to storytelling that effectively results in healing or reconciliation. In relation to the tradition of African and African American literatures, Carol Boyce Davies broadly defines “re-memory” as: “...the remembering or the bringing back together of the disparate members of the family in painful recall,” involving “crossing the boundaries of space, time, history, place, language, corporeality, and restricted consciousness in order to make reconnections and mark or name gaps and absences” (Davies qtd. Washington 17). In *A Southern Family*, the sudden, tragic, and mysterious death of Theo leads the collective Quick family on a quest for healing and reconciliation. Many instances throughout the novel point to the family’s “mythmaking” and “storytelling” as a means to piece together what has happened, to “painfully recall,” to remember, and sometimes to (re)tell about their individual experiences and relationships with the deceased Theo in order to “make reconnections and mark or name the gaps and absences (17). Godwin’s use of the shifting point of view allows readers a glimpse into the minds of the various family members where we often see them engaging in “re-memory,” thinking about, reliving

moments, or telling their stories about Theo, in order to better understand their loss—individual loss and collective loss.

The dysfunctional Quick family is hardly representative of the loving family one might expect to find in Mountain City, North Carolina; instead, the Quicks represent that common theme found in Southern literature, straddling the line between the blessing and burden of family, a theme often associated with traditional Southern literature. In this novel, the Quicks become more closely aligned with the families found in William Faulkner or Flannery O'Connor: "Layer upon layer of debilitating resentments and intrigues that over the years had sapped the family members of their individual strengths, and yet bathed them, as a unit, in a certain sinister charm" (15). Even so, it is the Quicks' troubled relationships that fascinate us as we read the novel, piecing together and picking apart the role each family member plays within the family drama.

Throughout the novel, the (re)construction of stories connects these divergent family members as they each attempt to solve the mystery of Theo's death, often by "memorializing" him through the different versions of the stories they tell. That Godwin offers us multiple viewpoints on the same event shows both the complexity of the loss and the aimless way humans attempt to find a singular "truth," as if that will somehow numb the pain of the loss itself. Julia's character in the chapter entitled "Old Friendships" comments on the ways in which individuality often complicates our understanding of others: "How long it took to learn that others saw the world from the center of themselves just as thoroughly as you saw it from yours..." (16). This statement stands out from the

text, for it foreshadows the multifaceted ways in which each character from *A Southern Family* attempts to understand his or her individual loss. Also reflected throughout the plot is the way in which each character attempts to tell stories and reconstruct a “truth” that best suits and underscores his/her own worldview.

Clare as the keeper and writer of stories wishes to embrace Theo’s “last” request and write a novel about the things that just cannot be wrapped up, a complex plot in which there is not a happy ending, only ambiguity and uncertainty; Clare’s writing almost becomes therapeutic for her, a way of healing and making sense of the tragedy. If she can just retell Theo’s story, adhere to Theo’s request, then somehow everything will be resolved. This aspect is especially shown in Lily’s chapter, “Dear Theo,” where she writes a lengthy letter to the deceased Theo, one which focuses on a couple of unresolved instances of Theo’s early life, paying particular attention to events of the one day when Theo “fell from the sky” in his attempts to climb a ladder and scare his stepsister, Clare, who had been diligently working in her room. Frustrated by her lack of knowledge about that event, Clare writes,

...I just put it out of my mind. You hadn’t been hurt, and I don’t remember either of us ever mentioning it to anybody else. I never thought about it again until now, when, just as I keep replaying your death that I never saw, trying to fill in the blanks (the way it actually happened, the motive, what you were really up to), it was you falling, over and over again, past my window, through the air of the summer day, haunted that I’ll never know—because I didn’t bother

to find out—whether your fall was accidental or intentional, or the exact circumstances of how you hit the ground. (Godwin, *Southern Family* 395)

Clare's letter to Theo encapsulates the sorrow, the pain that she feels over the loss while it also reflects the family's collective pain—their loss of never fully knowing who Theo was while he was alive, their recognition that they can never fully recover “what really happened,” who Theo really was. The only way in which they can ever “re-construct” Theo is to (re)tell versions of stories or through the act of “re-memory.”

Lily's penchant for “mythologizing,” for romanticizing the family stories, is mentioned throughout *A Southern Family*. Snow, in her chapter, refers to Lily as the “Queen Mother” with her “book of family fairytales” (219). Others note Lily's proclivity for “telling stories” as well. Rafe even comments about his mother that: “She tells a good story, though she tends to romanticize things” (276). Lily, though, is probably one of the least “romanticized” characters in the novel, or at least, she's one of the only characters that we see change as “reality” takes its toll. Many of the characters, including Julia and Clare, often comment on the ways in which Lily has changed over the years; Julia comments about the changes:

I didn't think of her as the typical Southern woman, at all, when I was growing up...She was the most vibrant, sensual woman I knew. She said daring and unconventional things; she mocked the status quo. She was writing a novel that she said was going to blow

the lid off this town, only she never finished it. I still dream of reading that novel. Now, whenever I meet her, I feel I'm talking to someone under a spell. It's as if she'd been trapped and transformed into the kind of woman she used to scorn. (Godwin, *Southern Family* 328)

For as much as other characters tend to label Lily a “romantic,” or as part of an ideal, the readers catch glimpses of the inner workings of Lily Quick, glimpses of the space where Lily can think and reason freely, a space where she can reveal her “true” feelings and ideas about her life and its changes. One of these instances is shown in a scene where Lily's car runs out of gas at the bottom of “Quick Hill”; Lily has been battling with herself, thinking about her own life choices as well as the tragedy of Theo's death, when she decides that it might be best for her to climb the hill by herself, to take responsibility for her own actions of not filling the car's tank with gas, something she'd been guilty of many times before. In a scene which parallels her life choices as a younger woman, Lily finally decides to step out of her car in her bare feet, onto the gravelly road:

Suddenly it became her most promising task to walk barefoot on rough shale to the top of Quick's Hill in the dark, letting desolation and hopelessness embrace her like a lover, feeling the ache in her heart swell and swell like a sponge as it absorbed death and betrayal and cowardice and willful, damaging ignorance—her own as well as other people's. If she could make it to the top of the hill carrying her entire and acknowledged load of sorrows and

mistakes, as well as all the evils and experience had taught her human beings were capable of visiting on one another, it seemed to her she might be granted a kind of spiritual second wind...she would die to herself without actually dying. (Godwin, *Southern Family* 212)

Lily's action is not only representative of a Christ-like or sacrificial act, but also reflective of an act befitting a struggling Southern Lady or a woman desperate enough to face and accept her fears. She is ready for the challenge; she secretly longs for it, and just as she longs for the renewal of her spirit, she also longs for her independence and the feeling of self-sufficiency that's been missing from her life since her marriage to Ralph. Just as she makes the decision to step out, however, Ralph and Jason arrive at the bottom of the hill and "her darkness was invaded"; once again she is "saved, seemingly "rescued" by others, yet once again trapped, limited by her (un)comfortable role of Southern Lady. Like the typical Southern Belle or Southern Lady we have seen in Godwin's earlier fictions, Lily puts on a good front, a sparkly show for others to enjoy, while internally she wages a battle against her own self: she accepts her penance of living silently "with the less than ideal facts of yourself" (201). Lily desires only to enlarge her female identity, yet she continually makes choices that preclude that. Lily too remembers Theo throughout the novel, but it is the different versions, the different stories told by and about Lily, which emerge throughout the narrative and prove most interesting. In the chapter entitled "Betrayal," Lily re-members Theo as well as other painful instances from her life, instances which have

continually (re)shaped her into the woman she is currently; the present-day Lily is one who denies her body and her mind, and most embraces her spiritual side as a means to better define who she is. The “romantic” versions of the stories that Lily tells are most representative of herself; her embrace of the spiritual alone, however, is not enough, and certainly rejects Godwin’s theory of “wholeness.” On the outside she is the classic “lady,” the woman who puts on a superficial self to appease others and in some ways “punish” herself; she visits the sick and infirm, she prays at church, she continues to live with a husband who has cheated on her, a husband who loves another woman. Moreover, it is Lily that creates the most fanciful version of Theo’s death; she crafts a version of Theo’s death that would pardon him from the “messiness” of the murder/suicide; she constructs the “outsider theory” that almost exonerates Theo of murder and suicide and, in turn, mythologizes him as victim; this “romanticism” is a coping mechanism for Lily, a way to escape.

At the end of the novel, there is a parallel scene involving Sister Patrick telling Lily about her dream of Theo climbing a steep hill to wash his hands. Sister Patrick tells Lily her dream, but it is Lily that interprets the dream, quite simply and again romantically:

It was Theo’s way of sending a message that he’s all right, don’t you see? The details of how he was...struck down, exactly what happened that day, well, they aren’t important, they’re just past history. That’s why the details aren’t important: they’re already over, we don’t need to know because it won’t change anything. ...in the

realm that matters, the realm where the indestructible personality lives on, the realm of mere history can't touch, Theo lives. He lives, and right now he's in the process of climbing that very steep hill to sanctity. (Godwin, *Southern Family* 536)

Lily's romanticized stories, her uncomplicated view of Theo's death, and her interpretation of Sister Patrick's dream are ingrained in her personality; her versions of the stories are her way to cope with the sad and empty parts of her own life and identity; stories become a vehicle by which Lily can feel relevant, and her stories, while more ideal than the others', and seldom a reflection of the "truth," remain important to her individual healing, just as much as Clare's futile attempts to find a singular truth become hers. As Trinh T. Minh-ha points out, "The story is a cure and a protection"; it has regenerative powers, principles of which rest in reconciliation provided by the (re)telling (140).

Others like Theo's younger brother Rafe find it even more difficult to deal with the loss. Rafe, too, however, engages in "re-memory" and the retelling of stories, often painfully recalling the ways in which his relationship with Theo could have been different. In the chapter entitled "Nightmares," we catch a glimpse into the psyche and subconscious of Rafe Quick. This chapter once again connects to the theme of dream-visions, a theme that runs throughout the novel; simultaneously, the chapter also examines the ways in which the theme of "re-memory" functions throughout the novel. Rafe is perhaps the most psychically connected to Theo. This is shown through the many dream sequences in which Theo appears to Rafe, once even stepping across the boundaries of "space,

time, place, and corporeality” (Davies 17) to do so. During “Nightmares,” however, Rafe, who often relies on alcohol as a buffer to mask his true emotions, to block his feelings, has been seeing a psychiatrist to help him deal with the loss of his brother. As he tells Dr. Blake the story of his relationship with Theo, his fears and emotions let loose, and it is revealed that Rafe blames himself for Theo’s death. Rafe had always been the family’s favorite, and as younger brother, he almost seemed to be stepping out of his role, displacing or reversing roles with his brother, and for this, he feels an overwhelming sense of guilt. He recounts a dream to Dr. Blake: “There’s very little chance I’ll ever forget it. It wasn’t like any of the others. It went completely against them. It was a first-class nightmare. When I woke out of it, I saw Theo in a sinister light, and I hated myself as well. It was like...some end to something” (265). This dream and Rafe’s session with Dr. Blake only serve to complicate Rafe’s relationship with his deceased brother. It is also shown that Theo had consistently taken care of, comforted Rafe, when he was in trouble, despite the fact that Rafe often displaced Theo as family favorite. When Rafe was a child with nightmares, he would run to Theo; when Rafe insults Snow and her family, it is Theo that smooths over the situation. With Theo gone, Rafe is left to fend for himself, clearly something that truly terrifies him and drives him once again to alcohol.

As the Quick family settles into “No Saints,” they arrive in pairs and/or separately as Clare attempts to arrange a schedule for the summer house that will allow her and Felix to spend time with each family member—just not all at once. Rafe’s tradition has been to stay in the “maid’s room,” a dumpy, tiny space

by comparison to the rest of the house. Even so, Rafe basically uses the space to sober up after his bouts of drinking and partying at Myrtle Beach. One particular night, Rafe finds himself too intoxicated to drive, too drunk to get himself home. In the past, he has relied on Theo's help, and so in his drunkenness, he calls out to Theo, through his pain of loss, across time and space, across the boundaries of life and death, and Theo replies. Rafe asks Theo to somehow get him safely home—after an otherworldly “conversation” with Rafe, where Theo contends that he now knows everything, but laments that it is too late for him. Theo mourns that Rafe will not remember their “conversation” in the morning, but just the same, he gently instructs Rafe to “Lean your head back, but not too far...let me tell you what I have learned. Let me tell you the secrets of the universe. You won't remember any of it in the morning, but you'll know I at least got you home” (505-506). Theo tells Rafe that while it is too late for him, it is not too late for Rafe. In the morning, Rafe awakens, “lying on his side, fully dressed, on a mattress from one of the lounge chairs, with the red sun rising in his face...Someone had covered him during the night or early morning with his own eiderdown. The one he always brought with him” (506). While this particular scene shows again the connection of dreams and visions, it also reveals the painful way in which Rafe has chosen to deal with his brother's death. Unable to cope with his brother's death in any other way, Rafe chooses to either retell painful stories about his brother to his psychiatrist, someone very removed from the family, in a sterile kind of space, an office, where he often breaks down into cathartic sobs, or to bury himself so deeply in alcohol where he can sometimes

seemingly reconnect with his lost brother across the boundary of death, in a mysterious, almost spiritual space where Theo can once again comfort Rafe, where he can tell him stories that have the potential to heal.

Storytelling, along with dreams, surfaces again in the last chapter of the novel, where Sister Patrick tells Lily not only her dream, but also the story of how she crossed the Atlantic from Ireland to be a nun in Mountain City, North Carolina. Sister Patrick quite carefully and simply retells her life's story about her choice to leave her family and her journey to become a nun. At the end of the retelling, Lily drops Sister Patrick back at the convent. Lily thinks wistfully, then, that, "Unlike Sister Patrick, she was not able to tell her story backwards with such simplicity and assurance" (539). Sister Patrick's story and its clarity challenge Lily to be better, and as the novel closes, Lily thinks about telling Ralph about her day, a sign that perhaps she has not given up on their relationship completely, again an instance where storytelling impacts reconciliation and healing.

At one point, Ralph accurately concludes: "All we can do is guess. Each of us will take what we knew about Theo and create our own speculations, and, knowing this family, each theory will serve that family member's particular, necessary myth" (95). What connects the characters, what drives the plot forward in this particular novel, are the consistent acts of mythmaking and storytelling, acts which have been connected to the definition of "the mind" at the beginning of this chapter. After Theo's death, each member of the Quick family, including Snow Mullins, pays tribute to him, "memorializes" him, through remembering and storytelling. They each piece together the character of Theo for the reader, using

“re-memory” as a means to reconnect with the painful event of Theo’s death, and in this way the “insoluble” becomes “soluble,” or at least a move toward healing and reconciliation.

Conclusion: Writing the Mind

By exploring female identity through her uses of “mythmaking,” “memory,” “mindset,” and the “mind at work” (i.e. academic careers and the draw of the intertextual), Godwin emphasizes the intricacies of the female mind in relation to a developing female identity. In particular, with her novels *The Odd Woman*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, and *A Southern Family*, we can clearly identify the way in which Godwin has shifted her “vision”; her female characters are no longer mainly associated with or trapped by their female bodies; in fact, with these three novels, accepting the female body as a positive attribute becomes a means by which Godwin’s female characters can better define themselves and better embrace the concept of “wholeness.” With these three novels, we find several female characters, then, who not only embrace their bodies, but more importantly, also embrace their minds. By associating female identity with the female mind, Godwin is one step closer to crafting female characters who embrace equally all aspects of their identities—body, mind, and soul.

CHAPTER FOUR

WRITING THE SOUL

If we are to have an inclusive picture of our human potential, it seemed to me, especially as this potential unfolds in the adult periods of our lives, a map is required that includes the sacred as well as the secular. Without this vitally essential component, no theory of human development can be authentic or complete. (Moody and Carroll 8)

The day you were born a ladder was set up to help you escape this world. (Rumi np)

Introduction: Manifestations of the Soul in the Novels of Gail Godwin

The soul, in contrast to the mind and the body, often refers more so to one's "emotional consciousness" (Gutzke 32). At times, the soul pertains to "a life principle, a ground of sentience" (Moreland and Rae 203), or "the soul can be a thinking or feeling state" (203), thus merging again, in interesting ways, the mind and the soul. J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney maintain that "the soul is the nonmaterial ego of man in its ordinary relationships with earthly and physical things" (564). This statement alludes to the relationship between "the physical," the body, and the spiritual, the soul, creating again a point of convergence within human personhood. Carl Jung, whose studies show an extensive search for the soul and the soul's location and meaning, maintains that the soul is part of the "unconscious life," part of "being": "Being that has soul is a living being. Soul is the living thing in man, that which lives of itself and causes life..." (IX, i). Soul, then, according to Jung could be linked to the Christian concept of the spirit (*esprit*) or one's spirituality.

Additionally, however, the soul is often regarded as distinct, as separate, from the body and mind. Other times, the soul is obviously merged with the body and/or merged with the mind to form a more cogent form of human existence, one that functions harmoniously or holistically. For instance, in Christian theology, the actions of the body or the thoughts of the mind can certainly impact the state of the soul; thus, in this instance, body, mind, and soul converge because of the way in which they interrelate, affecting the “whole” human being. Regardless, it is generally agreed upon in western thought, as well as in the Christian tradition, that the soul is the immortal coil, the non-physical portion of a human being, or sometimes what is referred to as the “footprint of God” (Meister qtd. Moody and Carroll 8); it is the element that lives on after the death of the body—thus separating soul from body in some way; it is the soul that transcends the temporal (material, body) and is capable of either (eternal) damnation (via sin/death/Hell) or redemption (via salvation through a relationship with God) in a future state of being (Heaven/Hell). This concept of the body as being separate(d) from the soul is one that emphasizes a classic dichotomous rationale supported by western thought and westernized Christian theology, a mode of thinking, a mindset, very much present in Godwin’s earliest works, such as *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*. These concepts, however, are further explored throughout her later novels, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* (1991), its sequel *Evensong* (1999), and *The Good Husband* (1994).

Often referred to as the “principle” part of humans, or the “disembodied spirit” (OED), the soul is sometimes viewed as the antithesis of the body; in

western tradition and Christian thought, the soul can be elevated, and thus has the ability to transcend, or even control, the appetites and drives of the body. Further definitions indicate that the soul can refer to the central, integral part, the *vital core*, that is, the *soul part* of an object, a property-thing, or a human being. With this dissertation, however, I define the soul as that intangible, spiritual part, the immortal essence of human personhood, the part of the human being that is directly linked to “the spirit” (*esprit*), spirituality, and “wholeness.” “Spirit,” *esprit*, then, is often defined in Christian theological terms as the essence of being alive, traced directly to the “breath of God” (Genesis 2:7). This definition of the soul, then, is central to western modes of thinking, especially those supported by a Christian ideology/theology and then strongly upheld by a particular mindset related specifically to Southern Appalachian culture, just as Flannery O’Connor reiterates in her essay, “The Grotesque in Southern Fiction”:

By and large people in the South still conceive of humanity in theological terms. While the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted. The Southerner, who isn’t convinced of it, is very much afraid that he may have been formed in the image and likeness of God. Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive. (45)

Here O’Connor traces the notion of being “created in the image of God” to a particular mode of thinking (and culture), and just as O’Connor embraces the “mystery” associated with the soul, with Christianity, so does Godwin. Godwin’s associations to Christianity (and the soul), however, are linked more concretely

with the Episcopalian, Protestant faith tradition rather than O'Connor's Catholicism.

In the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* edited by Samuel S. Hill, the deep connections of Christianity to the development of Southern culture are explained in detail. According to this volume, there are three distinct features that stand out in aligning the region of the South directly to religion, and in particular, the South's connectedness and indebtedness to Christianity. The first connection is the homogeneity of the religious options available in that particular region; the second is the "dominance" of Christianity and its direct impact on the development of a whole culture; the third is a set of four common convictions: "The Bible as the sole reference point of belief and practice"; "direct and dynamic access to the Lord is open to all"; "morality is defined primarily in individualistic and interpersonal terms"; "worship is more informal..." (2). Susan Ketchin's commentary in *The Christ-Haunted Landscape: Faith and Doubt in Southern Fiction* seems to concur with the above findings: "Ninety percent of southerners identified themselves as Protestant as against sixty percent of those from other regions...there is more agreement in belief and practice among southern Protestants than among non-southern Protestants or Catholics" (xi). The homogeneity of religious options available and the dominance of Christianity in particular become significant factors, not only in relation to the fiction produced by such a region, but also to the development of the region's culture as well. Alfred Kazin in *William Faulkner and Religion* reiterates that, for generations of Southerners, Christianity was a way of life; it was the "most traditional and lasting

form of Southern community” (5). Kazin also makes this historical and cultural connection, that the “Loss of the Civil War was a religious crisis” most of all, and that “Southerners have remained, obsessed with the elements of blood, pain and sacrifice [found in] the Christian story,” especially in relation to the recurring theme of Southern guilt found in Southern literature (5). Ketchin also relates that:

...southern children were immersed in this intense tradition, hearing from the cradle onward ancient tales of bliss, sin, guilt, and redemption from the Old and New Testaments, with their many layers of historical and psychological meaning and rich use of symbol and archetype...Bible stories were woven into everyday experience, told as part of daily life...they informed the worldview of all, believers and nonbelievers alike. (xii)

Southern culture, then, was not only immersed in the beliefs held as part of the Christian tradition, but Southern culture and worldview were often built from, that is, built out of, such beliefs. O'Connor concludes this about the connections of Christianity to the Southern writer: “The Southern writer is forced from all sides to make his gaze extend beyond the surface, beyond mere problems, until it touches that realm which is the concern of prophets and poets” (O'Connor 45). Extending “beyond the surface,” then, certainly encompasses the “realm” of the spiritual and the inner coil of the soul as explored in the novels of Gail Godwin.

Though, at times, her female characters attend Catholic schools as young girls, much like Godwin's own early education at St. Genevieve's-of-the-Pines in Asheville, North Carolina, Godwin's ties to religion and Christianity are mostly

linked to the Episcopalian denomination, a denomination dependent largely on ritual, liturgy, and a strong sense of tradition, much like Catholicism in many ways. As Anne Cheney points out in an early article, “Traditional Christianity does not affect the Godwin heroine as profoundly or overtly as it did earlier Southern protagonists. ... Within the Godwin canon, however, religion is a persistent but usually subdued theme” (210, 211). Cheney also clarifies that “Godwin’s educated women seem to find more *intellectual* than emotional power in religion, in the Episcopal and Catholic churches—with their long histories rich liturgies; quiet, aesthetic services, heightened by the aroma of incense and the music of Bach” (211). Cheney’s observations may be accurate; however, throughout Godwin’s later fiction there is a definite emphasis on the role of the church, on the role of Christianity, in connection with the development of the individual, especially in terms of Godwin’s female characters and their persistent preoccupation with the soul, or more accurately, their desire for “wholeness,” a quest which often includes a solid emphasis on the importance of cultivating one’s soul, one’s spirituality. While two of Godwin’s later novels, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* and *Evensong*, focus directly on the role of the Episcopal Church and its relationship to the cultivation of the “soul,” “female identity,” and the concept of “wholeness,” her earlier novels, including *The Odd Woman*, *Violet Clay*, *A Mother and Two Daughters*, *The Finishing School*, and *A Southern Family*, each have heroines whose formative years have been shaped in some way by the church, either in relation to their early schooling or their mothers’ and

grandmothers' continued interest in the church as a source of comfort and strength.

Interestingly enough, one of Godwin's most influential, spiritual mentors was the late Reverend Gale D. Webbe, an Episcopal minister from Asheville, with whom Godwin cultivated a mentor-like relationship for over thirty years. Godwin writes of his influence and of the influence of the Episcopal Church in the introduction to Webbe's book, *Sawdust and Incense*, and in her article, "Farewell to a Mentor," found in *The Living Church*. In *Sawdust and Incense*, Godwin writes that Webbe's *The Night and Nothing* was one of those books that "reached [her] at the right moment and thus helped...to bring into being some aspects of [herself that she] would not like to be without" when she was a young woman, living in London, in "search of sustenances more urgent...than a midday sandwich" (vii). In "Farewell to a Mentor," Godwin states:

In one of my novels a character says, "Who knows, I might have been rotting in jail if one or two people hadn't been exactly in position when I needed them." That sentence could apply to me as well as to anybody. When you consider the side range of human follies and the countless opportunities to commit them, it's not all that difficult to land in jail. ... I do wonder what my "other self" would be like if Fr. Webbe had not been in place just when I was entering what the Order of Confirmation in what the old prayer book used to call "The Years of Discretion." (15)

The associations with the Episcopal Church, and in particular to Godwin's early experiences with the Episcopal Church, are clear, and in turn, relevant to Godwin's fiction—both as a source of inspiration and as a means to unravel the importance of “the soul” to (female) identity and Godwin's vision of “wholeness” often found in her fiction. Historically, then, while Christianity has had a profound impact on the Southern Appalachian literary tradition in general, with its solid emphasis on redemption and/or damnation of the soul, the Episcopal Church has had a specific influence on Godwin's fiction; this, again, connects Godwin to the larger Southern Appalachian literary tradition from which her work extends.

The soul is, of course, some combination of the definitions mentioned above; however defined, it remains the core of human existence because it is always linked to something more than the tangible, something both inside and outside the self, an essence that both extends beyond the material, the physical, yet also unites the tangible with the intangible—it “makes whole.” “Wholeness” emerges as the ultimate theme of Godwin's later novels. In Godwin's later work, there is again a definite shift toward female identity and its connections to the soul, especially in terms of how the soul links with the body and the mind to create a better sense of “wholeness,” something essential to the realization of a “complete” female identity; this is a shift both outward and inward, not to the mind alone, but also to the yearnings of the soul. It is the desire to be connected to more than the dictates of the body or the mind, or as O'Connor relates once again to “a total experience of human nature at any time” (167); this emphasis most clearly relates to the call of the soul, the call for a connection greater than

that of family or community or even culture. The soul and its relationship to both spirituality and “wholeness” become essential to a better understanding of Godwin’s later work. Editor Samuel S. Hill in *Volume I: Religion*, part of an encyclopedic series on Southern culture, writes that there are many “spiritualities” that exist in the contemporary South. In its broadest sense, however, Hill maintains that “spirituality” reflects “the simple life well lived” (143). Hill goes on to explore the connections of spirituality to the concept of “wholeness.” Hill writes:

In the past 30 years in the South, spirituality has meant wellness, wholeness; it has stressed that the human person is more than the physical, more than what the eye can see, and so has stressed the importance of understanding and developing mind, heart, and soul as well a body. For many, spirituality has become synonymous with “finding the true self.” (143)

Hill’s explanation here can certainly be applied to Godwin’s fiction as each of her novels explores, in some way, the evolving female identity as it relates to the integration of body, mind, and soul toward the ultimate goal of “wholeness,” a primary component of spirituality.

While Godwin’s earliest novels have a heavy emphasis on the female body and female identity, Godwin’s novels of the 1990s have a focus on the relation of the soul to female identity, especially in terms of how the soul acts as a means to complete a “trinity of conscious” –body, mind, and soul. Three of her later novels, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* (1991), *The Good Husband* (1994),

and *Evensong* (1999), all transverse the concept of the soul or the soul's journey as it pertains to female identity and female self-actualization. One particular section of this dissertation chapter entitled "Confronting the 'Gargoyle' & the 'Great Uncouth': Death, Dis-ease, Spirituality, and Wholeness in Godwin's *The Good Husband*" will focus, in part, on various intertextual literary references. But more than that, this section of the chapter will also examine the ways in which Godwin begins to merge body/mind/soul in compelling ways to reformulate female identity around the concept of "wholeness." This chapter will demonstrate how body/mind/soul intersect—converge and collide—to reshape female identity. In turn, another section of this chapter, entitled "'A falling short from your totality': Sin, the Soul, and the Search for 'Self' in Godwin's *Father Melancholy's Daughter* and *Evensong*," will closely analyze the character of Margaret Gower Bonner. This section will show that these two novels comprise a pilgrimage, a spiritual quest of the soul, for Margaret, so that she can attempt to become "whole"—ultimately, her female identity becomes a convergence, a co-mingling of body, mind, and soul. Margaret's quest for self collides with the journey of her soul to make her (female) identity more complete.

This chapter of my dissertation, then, will not only pinpoint the ways in which Godwin shifts to an emphasis on the soul and the forging of female identity, but it will also examine the concepts of "wholeness" and "spirituality" (spirituality specifically as it pertains to the concept of "wholeness"). Feminist theologian and scholar, Ursula King writes in *Woman and Spirituality* that: "Spirituality...has to do with an age-old human quest to seek fulfillment,

liberation...transcendence amidst the welter of human experience" (5). King's definition resonates throughout Godwin's fiction, in that so many of Godwin's female characters are on a quest; they are seeking "fulfillment," "liberation," in the transcendent human (female) experience. King, then, emphasizes the dynamics of spirituality:

Spirituality must not be understood as something apart from or as something added on to life. Rather, it is something which permeates all human activities and experience rather than being additional to them. Spirituality can be described as a process of transformation and growth, an organic and dynamic part of human development, of both individual and society.... (5)

King's assertions here allude to Godwin's concept of "wholeness," the merging of body, mind, and soul to forge a more complete female identity. Maria Harris in *Dance of the Spirit* further explains that women must be awakened to their spirituality, and that "awakening begins with our senses and our bodiliness" (8). Harris continues, "Too much spirituality from the past, both in the Eastern and Western worlds, has taught withdrawal from the denial of the body, and even doing violence to the body" (8). This "denial of the body" can be denial of sexual pleasure, denial of food in order to (re)shape the body, denial of voice or act/ion, denial of agency; this denial of "body" and the bodily experience permeate Godwin's earliest novels, as she examines the mind-body dichotomy, concepts explored in Chapter Two of this dissertation. As the location of female identity shifts from body, to mind, to soul, a theory of "wholeness" becomes quite evident.

For this reason, the “spiritual,” in a sense, relates most to Godwin’s theory of “wholeness” and female identity, for it is with the “spirit” that body, mind, and soul may fully merge.

As Carol Ochs points out, spirituality is “the process of coming into relationship with reality” (10); this process of “becoming,” then, is one which blossoms from an exploration of the “body” and the “grotesque” in Chapter Two to a more mature concept of “wholeness” as an acceptance of “process.” Ochs continues to define spirituality as a “process,” one that involves not only the individual, but also the community and a collective history (10), thus linking the term “mind” as explored in Chapter Three. Ultimately, however, the theory of “wholeness” and the concept of “spirituality” are not ones which separate or divide, but rather they are theories that emphasize all parts working in conjunction with one another. Ochs writes, “Spirituality has been defined in a general, inclusive manner as an exploration of what is involved in becoming human” (10).

Ochs’ definition is significant to Godwin’s work in several ways; Ochs’ emphasis on “becoming” rather than “being” is of particular interest. “Being” versus “becoming” is central to understanding Godwin’s collective work. Simply stated, Godwin’s early female protagonists focus on “being,” on existing, coping with (or escaping from) their current lives, their current states of being; later protagonists focus on, and almost embrace, their imperfections, accepting their flaws as part of the process of “becoming.” “Becoming,” then, is vitally important in its connection to “wholeness,” female identity, and spirituality. In this instance,

however, “becoming” is less associated with the grotesque and more associated with “wholeness.” In *The Finishing School* Ursula Devane explores this concept of “becoming” when she defines her theory of “congealment.” Explaining her theory to a young Justin Stokes, Ursula states,

There are two kinds of people...One kind you can tell just by looking at them at what point they congealed into their final selves. It might be a very *nice* self, but you know you can expect no more surprises from it. Whereas, the other kind keep moving, changing. ...They are fluid. They keep moving forward and making new trysts with life, and the motion of it, keeps them young. In my opinion, they are the only people who are still alive. You must constantly be on your guard, Justin, against congealing. (4)

With her theory of “congealment,” Ursula embraces the “fluidity” of self, the self influx, the self in the perpetual state of change, that is, in essence, the self as constantly “becoming” rather than “being” or “congealing.” “Becoming” is the antithesis of “congealing”; “becoming” is an act toward “spirituality,” an act toward achieving “wholeness.” Ochs’ definition of spirituality, then, seems to suit Godwin’s vision of “wholeness.” Further, the “spiritual,” in many ways, relates significantly to the “mystery,” the “mystical,” and the “divine” elements associated with the Southern literary tradition.

Maria Harris in *Dance of the Spirit* emphasizes the ways in which “mystery” specifically relates to the merging and reconciliation of body, mind, and soul, and thus to a better understanding of “wholeness” as located through a

“practiced spirituality”; “Practiced spirituality” requires action, and therefore, incorporates and involves the integration of the body to the mind and soul. Harris writes, “As we reflect on our lives...we will undoubtedly be able to name the practices that foster the integration of our bodies to our spirits...things we do regularly that lead us to experience wholeness: Among them are art, sports, and sexuality...we need to take ownership of the bodily work we do” (130); the physical actions here, then, link body to mind and soul, to wholeness. Harris also maintains that spiritual beings must recognize the ways in which the “self” has been carelessly and systematically divided by cultures and societies; the acknowledgment of that division will then lead to “healing,” to the reconciliation of body, mind, and soul. Harris clarifies the connection:

Awakening to the pervasiveness of division alerts us to the power in recognizing and cultivating those practices in our lives that at first we may not think of, or realize, as practices of spirituality. These are the practices that are bodily in origin, but move in the direction of making us and our societies whole. Those practices may not be named as ‘spiritual,’ but in actuality they are, for they place us at the center of living and enable us to dwell with wholeness in the Mystery. (129)

Embodiment is another concept important to the study of body, mind, soul and the fiction of Gail Godwin. Embodiment relates directly to spirituality, to “wholeness,” to “becoming” versus “being.” As Harris points out, embodiment is caught up in action, in doing and claiming; she writes that when we “embody,” we

“take ownership of the bodily work we do” (130). Further, “embodiment as a spiritual discipline strengthens several dis-coveries. One is the truth we have already considered that in today’s spirituality we find God not by escaping from life, or from our bodies, but in a more complete involvement in life. We find God in the integration of body and spirit” (129).

The integration, the co-mingling of body and spirit, are essential to the concept of wholeness and spirituality once again. Anne M. Clifford in *Feminist Theology* broadly defines spirituality as: “Striving to integrate one’s life in terms of self-transcendence toward what one perceives to be the ultimate value” (272).

Clifford further relates that

most people desire a personal integration that brings soul and body, thought and emotion, individual and social realities together...a person’s spirituality involves a process of growth toward personal integration in a movement beyond the self...it requires a conscious striving and therefore is a purposeful pursuit.
(178)

Clifford’s concepts of merging body to soul, thought to emotion, endorse Godwin’s vision of “wholeness” as a means to achieve a sense of “totality” and balance in one’s identity. Spirituality, then, becomes the link, the vehicle, by which body, mind, and soul can merge, for spirituality claims what is valuable to the development of self-transcendence, embracing what Anne-Janine Morey calls “systemic balance” and the realization that “body and spirit would be meaningless without each other” (35). Spirituality, then, becomes an integral part

of understanding “wholeness” and the “holistic” side of the “valuable” human experience—it is, in essence, the merging of body, mind, and soul. An emphasis on embodiment and spirituality, then, helps to better illuminate Godwin’s vision of “wholeness,” the vision she strives to have her female characters achieve in her later novels; “wholeness,” however, always includes the intermingling of body, mind, *and* soul.

“A Falling Short From Your Totality”: Sin, the Soul, and the Search for Self
in Godwin’s *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* & *Evensong*

“What is the Alpha and the Omega?” inquired Madelyn Farley, at last deciding to take a sip of her wine. “Well, they’re the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet,” said Daddy. “But in Christian symbolism they stand for the all-embracing, the totality.” (Godwin, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* 17)

There’s a degree of comfort in forms, wouldn’t you say? ... People have things they want to give away, or they want things they don’t know where to look for, and they need containers to pool their information. This night is far too large for us to rattle around in on our own. It’s a perfect fit for God, but we need our containers. (Godwin, *Evensong* 126, 127).

Introduction: (Re)locating Female Identity

Contemporary literary critics of Gail Godwin’s work, including Lihong Xie, author of *The Evolving Self in the Novels of Gail Godwin*, and Kerstin Westerlund, author of *Escaping the Castle of Patriarchy: Patterns of Development in the Novels of Gail Godwin*, examine the “progression” of Godwin’s female protagonists in terms of their female identity. As stated earlier, female identity, though, in and of itself, is something problematic to define. What exactly does it

mean to be “female”? Is it tied up in biology, related to the female body? Is it related to the sociological construction of gender roles? Is it related to women’s ways of knowing? Women’s knowledge? Or does the construction of female identity extend beyond gender, beyond body, beyond the workings of the female psyche? Is female identity, rather than being demarcated, linked to one of these layers, instead located in the “wholeness” of the being, a combination of collective “selves,” which encompasses body/mind/soul? Or, is it a fluid construct, without pattern, without form, indefinable, dependent only upon individualized female experiences? The last option would leave the artist little to work with as she attempts to (re)create representations of what it means to be female. So then, how exactly does one define and/or (re)construct female identity? How does one then portray this (re)construction in/through fiction/art/poetry, etc.? Further, how does the legacy of western metaphysics, which often posits dualities of mind/body or soul/body, inform the (re)construction of (female) identity? Does a dualistic (mind/body or soul/body) construction and/or sequestered approach to identity inform Godwin’s work? That is, do the various divisions among body/mind/soul exist in Godwin’s fiction? Are Godwin’s female protagonists complex representatives of “wholeness” or rather simplistic “slices” of female identity served up for the reader’s delight? This dissertation examines, in many ways, the complexities of the questions posited above.

Westerlund in *Escaping the Castle of Patriarchy* categorizes much of Godwin’s work as written with a feminist perspective; this is despite the fact that Godwin herself might reject such an “easy” categorization of her work. Still,

Westerlund argues that because many of Godwin's novels were written and published in the 1970s and 1980s, a time when American women had begun to question more fully their societal roles and (socially constructed) female identities, that Godwin's work is indeed reflective of that time period in many ways. She writes, "Individual female development—its possibilities, preconditions, and limits—is of primary importance in Godwin's fiction" (11). Westerlund maintains, however, that through her novels, Godwin advances a "vision of transformation" (12) for her female characters. According to Westerlund, though, this "transformation" is always limited by the patriarchal structure intricately woven throughout the novels, and thus cannot be fully realized.

Further, Xie in *The Evolving Self in the Novels of Gail Godwin* expands on this idea of the "transformation" of female identity. She argues that there is a steady "progression" of female identity, a steady action toward female "self-definition" or "self-actualization"; that is, Godwin's female protagonists, with each sequential novel, are better able to define themselves. Xie writes, "...for Godwin and her characters, [self definition] is a continuous striving for coherence and control, of contesting versions of the self, with each effort brings more self-understanding, self-knowledge, and self-awareness" (36). At the same time, however, while asserting that Godwin's characters (and Godwin herself?) are in a constant search for self-actualization, Xie is also quick to point out that in many of her earliest novels, such as *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*, this search is always within a proscribed "context of patriarchal marriage and culture," and

thus this search for identity through self-actualization is always incomplete (36). Xie and Westerlund then, concur about the “limited” ways in which female self-actualization can be realized when it is largely constructed in/through patterns of patriarchy.

In somewhat of a contrast to Westerlund and Xie, Susan Kissel, author of *Moving On: The Heroines of Shirley Ann Grau, Anne Tyler, and Gail Godwin*, states again that there is indeed a steady development in the female identities of Godwin’s female characters; however, rather than interpreting this development as self-actualization of the individual, Kissel points to the ways in which Godwin’s later female characters move beyond themselves, outside themselves, to form relationships that extend their identities; she writes: “Godwin’s latest heroines come to value inclusion and connection over exclusion and isolation in their lives” (100). Connecting with others, extending beyond the self, is what Kissel sees as the factor most important to the development of Godwin’s later female protagonists.

Finding female identity, then, definitely emerges as a theme in Godwin’s work, as well as in the literary criticism associated with Godwin’s novels. Female identity, however, remains difficult to define, and we see this struggle emerge not only in the female characters that Godwin constructs, but also in the literary criticism regarding Godwin’s work. Even as Westerlund maintains that Godwin has a “vision of transformation” of female identity in her work, Xie maintains that there is a “progression” towards female self-awareness. We must also keep in mind, however, Kissel’s theory that “inclusion and connection” are the keys to

Godwin's heroines and their subsequent development. Foremost, one must first acknowledge that the quest for female identity is a common thread woven throughout Godwin's novels, but then, we must continue to not only interrogate how that transformation/progression/connection regarding female identity might occur, but also where that transformation/progression/connection is witnessed and located.

At times, it seems as though Godwin herself struggles to know just how to define/locate female identity, to demonstrate "transformation" and "progression" in her female characters' identities. And, while I do believe there is both a steady "progression" and a "transformation" of female identity demonstrated in Godwin's work, I also believe that Godwin shifts the focus of *location* of female identity. There is a stark contrast between Godwin's earliest novels, *The Perfectionists* (1970) and *Glass People* (1972), and her later novels, *Father Melancholy's Daughter* (1991), its sequel *Evensong* (1999), and *The Good Husband* (1994).

As explored in Chapter One and Chapter Two of this dissertation, in Godwin's earliest novels, she constructs female characters whose identities are largely wrapped up in their bodies, or female characters whose identities are reflected in/through their biological "difference." For instance, in *The Perfectionists* (1970), the female protagonist Dane Empson constantly references her body in a way that separates, traps, or divides her female identity, and this, in turn, creates an "un-whole" female "self"; her body only is used to define her. To set up this definition of female identity through the female body, Godwin first describes Dane's perception of herself: "For some minutes, she had

been staring at a pale, wraith-like woman, reflected in the glass of the open door of the customs building. Now she realized that this was, unfortunately, herself" (5). The at-first unrecognizable reflection is that of the female *form*, "pale" and "wraith-like." We see emerge here, then, woman as body, but also woman as unrecognizable "form"; thus Dane's struggle to locate female identity in/through the body begins. Later Dane elaborates, "Dane counted three kinds of women: the young virginal...the married and pregnant...the old and widowed, draped in funeral black" (17). Once more, woman is defined by her biology, her body—the "virginal" the "pregnant," the "old...draped in black." In addition to the formation of her developing theory, Dane also suffers from chronic headaches throughout the novel (51, 67, 154); this recurrence of "headaches" directly comments on her "divided" self, for while she is attempting to "simply" define woman in/through body/biology, she cannot. That kind of definition is too reductive. Her body and her psyche are at war with one another, and that "war" is revealed psychosomatically. The "traditional" mind/body dichotomy is symbolically explored through Godwin's description of Dane's devastating "head" (i.e. mind) aches.

In her current state of unhappy marriage and unwanted motherhood, Dane is "divided" against herself; she doesn't fit into these proscribed female roles, roles largely defined by biology (and society); and, at one point, upon suffering another headache, Dane even comments to that effect: "I am divided against myself" (153). In other instances Dane wishes to become "body," nothing more; she has dreams and visions of becoming "larger" or "smaller" than she physically

is. If she could only “shrink” or “inflate” her body, then perhaps she could (re)form her female identity. In one scene, she wishes to “retreat wholly into herself” to disappear (76). Dane wants Robin (her stepson) and John (her husband) to be robbed of the sight of her, to be robbed of her presence, her body: “They could have everything from her but the sight of her” (76). In another instance, Dane wants to use her body as a “divider,” as a “shield”: “...she saw a woman who sat in a chair all day stuffing herself with sweets and pastries until she achieved a disgusting layer of fat which would keep the world away” (77). Here, Godwin uses the female body as both a means to divide, to distance, and to separate, and as a representation of “appetite”; this theme of woman as body, as appetite, is one that emerges at the end of this novel as well as in several of Godwin’s other novels, including *Glass People*.

Another way Godwin uses the female body in her early novels is as a means to “trap” or “contain.” This theme shows up in both *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*. Both Dane, and Francesca from *Glass People*, are “trapped,” “contained” in/through/by their female bodies. It is revealed throughout the novel that Dane feels trapped and limited by this “pale, wraith-like woman,” this form—her body, merely a biological container that limits her potential. The body shows up again in the character of Robin. Robin is body. He is voiceless, powerless, merely a body—a doppelganger figure for Dane who appears to have those same limitations. She does not have a voice of her own; she has no power, no authority, no autonomy. She, like Robin, is “reduced” to a form, a body.

In addition to *The Perfectionists*, Godwin's second novel, *Glass People* (1972), also comments on "the body" as a "container" or "form," as means to establish (female) identity. In this novel, the female protagonist, Francesca Bolt, has her identity directly connected to her body. From the beginning of the novel, Francesca is identified as a beautiful "object": "She saw herself from where she sat, her mist of dark hair blending with the sofa. She had been called beautiful for so long the words meant nothing" (8). Francesca's female identity is clearly linked to her body, and her body is just as clearly linked to her objectification; she "blends in with the sofa," an object. Later Francesca is described: "Her body was an unhealthy bluish pale (even though...the Woman's Section had called it 'alabaster')" (11). Francesca is constantly being set apart by a description of her body as a "beautiful object"; her much older attorney husband requests: "Don't frown so. Preserve your beautiful forehead" (15), and later in the bedroom:

...she stood naked before him. This was the part that terrified her, when he knelt in front of her, still fully clothed...let his eyes travel slowly, very slowly upward, inspecting inch by inch of her. As a collector would go over a piece of precious sculpture, examining it for chips or flaws. (Godwin, *Glass People* 17)

Francesca's identity is consistently connected to her beauty, and, in essence, to her body. Her body is an object to be gazed upon, inspected, appraised.

Throughout the novel, it is revealed that Francesca is obsessed with her body; she sits alone in bed and plucks the hairs out of her legs with tweezers, inflicting physical pain, while participating in a barbaric "beauty" ritual, which she

calls her “project,” something from which she gets a “great sense of accomplishment” (19). Because her identity is based solely in the superficial construct of female as body, Francesca has no real sense of self; there is little progression toward female self-hood and no “connection” to those around her. She is caught up in being an object to be gazed upon. Later in the novel, Godwin writes of Francesca, “...she awakens from a beautiful woman’s worst nightmare—she has no reflection; no one, including herself, can see her, and thus she has no identity—Cameron is miraculously there to “save” her, to see her” (31). This once more links her identity solely to her body. In this novel, a woman’s identity remains affixed somehow to her biological difference, her body. Francesca cannot progress, transform, toward self-awareness; she cannot connect to those beyond herself.

To further illustrate Godwin’s emphasis on “body,” one should also examine the central male figure in this novel. Francesca’s husband, Cameron, much like Dane’s stifling husband John, continually comments on the “body” as a container, a “form” for human identity to take shape. He has a theory of people as “containers and shapes,” as mere “bodies” and “forms”: “Shapes are the ways in which we know who we are...relationships are containers...marriages are containers...Friendships and families are our containers. They provide a finite form in which we can store our identities” (105). Cameron’s definition of people as containers/shapes lends itself to the idea of the body as a mere shape/container, a location, for (female) identity. Even as Francesca attempts to reject Cameron’s oppressive objectification of her and construct her identity,

ultimately, like Dane, she is defeated; she fails to fully forge a female identity. This failure is connected to a limited definition of female identity in/through biological terms, i.e. the female body. Because Dane and Francesca's identities are solely formed around the female body, they cannot "progress"; they cannot achieve a true sense of self-actualization. At the end of *Glass People*, Francesca, after her brief pilgrimage to find her "self," returns with Cameron, pregnant with a child; her body becomes the central figure as she becomes the ultimate "container" (219). With the last chapter, the merging themes of woman/body/appetite appear once more just as they did in *The Perfectionists*:

In the kitchen, she got out the chicken salad and loaf of bread.

Cameron had made fresh mayonnaise. She poured herself a large glass of milk. Too early for wine. She could hardly wait to get things arranged on the plate and start eating. Her changing body amazed her! Here she had scarcely finished breakfast and it was ready to go again. Perhaps she would give birth to a giant. ... She took a bite, another bite, greedily washing it down with the good, cold milk.

Good calcium for the bones and teeth of a giant. She put away a hefty lunch. (Godwin, *Perfectionists* 219-220)

While the emphasis, here, once more returns to female identity through the body, through appetite, it is not without a sense of hopefulness. Francesca is defiantly eating, indulging; she reveals that she was "confident in the secret, rather sly knowledge that Cameron would never allow her to get fat" (220). Yet she does it

anyway—she eats—for, even if she cannot be a giant—she wants her daughter to be one.

As examined more fully in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the female body is clearly a female identifier being used in Godwin's earliest fiction. Yet, the female body, in her first two novels, turns out to be a rather stifling element of female identity. Dane and Francesca lack any kind of "complete" female identity, and both exhibit negative associations with the limitations of the female body; they both are involved in stifling marriages, both women lack a "calling," a purpose, a vocation. Both women, in essence, lack a solid sense of identity. Questions remain: Is that because their female identity was tied so fully to the "body"? If so, why must this be a limiting factor? Godwin's later novels address such issues, interrogating, in turn, the dichotomous understanding of the relationships among body, mind, and soul. The emphasis of the female body as a positive identifier is then what makes Godwin's later novels so much more complex.

Father Melancholy's Daughter, *The Good Husband*, and *Evensong* each depict female characters who embrace their female bodies; they find their female bodies as source of pleasure and fulfillment, each using her body as a positive means by which to define herself. Further, the body becomes a conduit, a catalyst, for a shifting, *becoming* identity, an identity which embraces the concepts of "wholeness" and "totality" to include the interconnectedness of body, mind, and soul. In addition, then, to the positive connotations associated with femaleness and the female body, Godwin also uses again a complexity of place

to impact a substantial development of the female protagonists. In particular, Margaret Gower Bonner and her extended search for self, that is, her pilgrimage, a spiritual journey, is a search that ultimately merges Margaret's body/mind/soul to form a more fulfilled female identity. Margaret is one of Godwin's first female characters who doesn't forsake "her place," the South. Place becomes centrally important to Margaret's identity; she is able to stay where she is from, without losing herself—to culture, tradition, family, and/or community.

In both *Father Melancholy's Daughter* (1991) and its sequel *Evensong* (1999), we see emerge, first of all, a drastic change in setting. In her earliest novels, Godwin purposely attempts to distance herself from her heritage, from her culture, her roots, by making her settings "other-worldly," fantastic, almost unbelievable. Godwin has commented that in *Glass People* she was trying to escape her cultural ties. In an interview with Xie, she states, "That was sort of an awful experiment to see if I could get away from all this. Because it's handicapping to bring all your truckload of culture with you" (178). So there is that element of "strangeness" associated with these early novels. There is no recognizable place; therefore, her earliest female characters exist outside of a recognizable context; this makes their quests for identity something even more complex, and ultimately, something left incomplete. These female characters almost exist solely for their own sakes; they are objects/bodies to be admired for their beauty alone, certainly not for their complicated human dynamics or diverse female identities. With these early novels, Godwin has not yet embraced her "truckload of culture," and her novels reflect that.

In later novels, however, Godwin latches onto her “truckload of culture” and creates wonderfully rich novels with diverse, complex female characters, characters like Jane Clifford from *The Odd Woman* or Ursula DeVane and Justin Stokes from *The Finishing School*. Another level of textured richness of characterization is achieved in her later novels when female protagonists like Violet Clay, Cate Strickland, and Magda Danvers emerge. What sets *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* and *Evensong* even more apart from these other rich novels, however, is that Godwin begins to further embrace a sense of spirituality, a spirituality largely influenced by place and a rootedness in her home culture; there is also a solid emphasis on the soul as it relates to the process of *becoming* “whole.” Godwin, in an interview, comments specifically about the role of the soul in *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*: “It’s more a novel about the making of a soul, a soul discovering itself, and discovering how other people you meet in your life, whether you like them or not...represent parts of you” (Xie 169). In another interview Godwin states, “Margaret’s story in *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* had to be in first person because I wanted to get the growth of one soul through the interactions of its particular history” (Donlon 19). The “soul’s history” is mentioned again in *The Good Husband*, as Magda Danvers begins to take an “inventory” of her soul. The “soul’s history” and the search for self with an emphasis on the soul and/or spirituality become infinitely important in *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, its sequel *Evensong*, and *The Good Husband*.

Specifically, we find in *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* as well as in its sequel *Evensong* that there is an interconnectedness of identity—a layering of

mind/body/soul—that exists in these two novels, a texturizing, that helps construct Godwin’s most complex female protagonist to date—Margaret Gower Bonner. Because we witness Margaret’s character develop and mature over the course of these two novels, we are able to see not only the slow, steady progression and transformation, but also able to witness where that change/shift of identity is located and how that transformation of identity/self is achieved; and indeed, it is achieved through her “connections” to others, as Kissel maintains, but it is also achieved through Margaret’s attention to the calling of her soul, to the beckoning of her body, and the summoning of her mind. Margaret’s transformation is not located solely in the body, or in the mind, or in the soul. Rather, her transformation, begins with the recognition that she is a “whole” being—she is a “trinity of consciousness,” which intricately involves balancing her body, mind, and soul—to reflect a “fullness” of female identity.

A “Soul’s History”: Margaret Gower Bonner

From the beginning of the first novel, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, it is established that Margaret is on a pilgrimage, a spiritual journey, and it is through this spiritual journey that she finds the “fullness” of her own female identity; both of these novels, then, *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* and *Evensong*, map out Margaret’s quest. Dr. Harry R. Moody and David Carroll in their book, *The Five Stages of the Soul: Charting the Spiritual Passages that Shape our Lives*, identify the five phases of the soul, and it is through an examination of these five phases that we begin to see the development, connection, progression, and transformation of Margaret’s female identity from one of separateness—one split

into distinct body/mind/soul—to one that merges and balances these elements to form a “fullness” of female identity.

As Xie points out in her final chapter of *The Evolving Self in the Novels of Gail Godwin*, Margaret’s progression in *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* is not only linked with her physical and mental maturation, but also with her spiritual maturation as Margaret learns to “embrace both tradition and modernity” (199), piecing together along her life’s journey, her soul’s journey, elements of feminist Christianity and traditional issues of faith, with her own quest toward self-actualization and wholeness. Jennifer McMullen in her article, “Gail Godwin’s Message: To Those Who Want Wholeness,” also addresses Margaret’s “progression” and the merging of the sexual (i.e. body) with the spiritual (i.e. soul), yet McMullen does not fully explore the role that Margaret’s intellectual development also plays in her quest toward self-awareness and self-actualization. Both Xie and McMullen utilize Harvard professor, Erik Erikson’s, paradigm of psychological and social development to make the connections to Margaret’s “progression.” At the same time, however, both Xie and McMullen neglect to make the clear connections either to the soul (in Xie’s study) or to the mind (in McMullen’s article). The role of the soul’s development, the soul’s journey, is vitally important, while the role of Margaret’s intellect (her mind) is also highly relevant to the progression of her female identity. In *The Five Stages of the Soul*, co-authors Moody and Carroll also make connections to Erikson’s paradigm, not solely in terms of psychological development, however, but in relation to spiritual development. Moody and Carroll conclude that while Erikson’s

paradigm is important to understanding the psychological development of human beings, it remains largely incomplete, for:

If we are to have an inclusive picture of our human potential, it seemed to me, especially as this potential unfolds in the adult periods of our lives, a map is required that includes the sacred as well as the secular. Without this vitally essential component, no theory of human development can be authentic or complete.

(Moody and Carroll 8)

Moody and Carroll have discovered, through their research, that “there are sequential stages of spiritual opportunity—spiritual passages” (8). To analyze more fully, then, Margaret’s spiritual growth and to measure her “soul’s journey,” I will employ Moody and Carroll’s “Five Stages,” so as to better show how Margaret’s progression, her quest toward self-actualization, is depicted through, certainly progression of mind and body, but primarily through the progression of her soul.

The first stage of the soul as identified by Moody and Carroll is that of “the call” or what is often recognized as a “conversion, summons, change of heart” (35). This is the turning point in a person’s life. It may come at the time of a crisis, or it can be as simple as a sudden realization, an epiphany. For Margaret, that turning point is a two-fold realization about herself. Margaret, after a childhood and adolescence coping with the pain caused by the abandonment (and subsequent death) of her mother, begins a journey toward self-actualization. With very little guidance from an adult female in her life, due to the absence of her

mother, Margaret is left to largely carve out her own ideal of womanhood. However, despite the absence of her mother, there is the presence of her father (something very different from all of Godwin's other novels). Margaret's father, Walter Gower—an Episcopal priest who is dedicated to the traditional ways of the church—treasures his daughter, and does his best to foster her young mind and soul. He is a highly intelligent priest, but one who is often plagued by depression or what he likes to label melancholy, his “black curtain,” the “dark night of his soul” (Godwin, *Father Melancholy's Daughter* 87).

Much like her father, throughout the first novel, Margaret is noted to be an intelligent child, and living with a father who is dedicated to the study of words, literature, and the Bible, Margaret continues to develop her intellect throughout her life. Ruth, her mother, once comments to Madelyn, an artist-friend from Ruth's boarding-school days and the woman who eventually “steals” Ruth away: “She is the single child in her class who already knows how to read!” (9) and later, “No, Margaret gets her brains from Walter” (10). Margaret's mind continues to emerge as a substantial layer of her identity as she attends college and eventually continues her studies in graduate school. The problem is, she has a desire to become a priest, and this is antithetical to her father's traditional values. How can she, then, reject those “traditional” values and, in turn, reject part of her father's belief system when she has always been expected to “uphold the old ways” (7)? Her desire to become a priest despite her traditional upbringing causes a sense of disequilibrium in Margaret, so in turn, she seeks her identity elsewhere—namely, in a convenient physical relationship with Ben, a boy she

has grown up with. With her initial “rejection” of the spiritual calling she has received, Margaret turns to the physical (i.e. the body).

In the meantime, Margaret’s father, Walter, has begun a sort of apprenticeship relationship with Adrian Bonner, a younger priest in a neighboring Episcopal church. The two men bond, and before dinner one evening, Adrian and Walter share a drink on the porch. As they’re talking, the topic of “sin” comes up; Margaret is curious about Adrian’s definition of sin: “People have so many definitions of sin...do you have one?” (198). Adrian replies: “A falling short from your totality...Choosing to live in ways you know interfere with the harmony of that totality” (198). Margaret has already felt an attraction—an attraction beyond the physical—toward Adrian—and this, too, is something new to her. She counters: “But...how do you know what your totality is?” (198). Adrian replies: “You learn. You unlearn. You pay attention. You feel where things balance and where they don’t” (198). The “learning, unlearning” is part of the act of becoming, and becoming is a part of the process toward “wholeness.” With this exchange, Margaret recognizes her “sin” and her lack of “wholeness.” She has been “falling short of her totality,” first by ignoring her “calling,” her vocation, and secondly by substituting the spiritual with empty sexual (i.e. body) encounters with Ben. With her epiphany, however, she also recognizes the need for redemption. Redemption, a spiritual act, is a theme that runs not only throughout *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* (the novel is set around Easter), but also throughout *Evensong* as well; redemption becomes vitally important. At one point in the novel, Walter reminds both Adrian and Margaret of the importance and

significance of understanding the role of redemption, resurrection, and the Easter holiday:

It means coming up through what you were born into, then understanding objectively the people your parents were and how they influence you. Then finding out who you yourself are, in terms of how you carry forward what they put in you, and how your circumstances have shaped you. (276)

This exchange, again, offers Margaret the chance to better understand herself even as she recognizes all she must “slough off” (276) in order to forge her own female identity, one which is not solely reliant on the appetites and drives of her body, appetites which only serve to distance her from her calling, her vocation, her purpose and ultimate quest toward wholeness.

As we discover, her relationship with Ben has been a relationship based on convenience and inexperience, based on appetite, based on the sexual needs of two people who long to connect with something or someone greater than themselves. Margaret, however, knows her sexual encounters with Ben destabilize her identity in some way, but she doesn’t know what else to do; she feels alone—and has no real sense of self to combat that aloneness. To Ben, she is simply “body.” With Adrian’s definition of “sin” in mind, Margaret hears her soul’s call. Later she responds to “the call,” as she acknowledges that she has not been living up to her totality: “After last night with Ben, I felt I might be able to forgo sex for a long while, maybe for several years...even longer. ... This morning I felt capable of taking a vow, myself: Never again will I share my body

with someone unless I am in love with that person" (302). Here, the initial "call" of Margaret's soul is met as she begins to investigate her female identity beyond body.

The response to the call is what Moody and Carroll label "the search," the second phase of the soul's journey. "The search" extends from the initial call; it is the sense, the longing, for "something-more," the notion that "somewhere, someplace, waiting for us, calling to us" is the secret of God and so it must be sought (35). "The search," then is a quest for answers, for guidance (36). The conclusion of Margaret's sexual relationship with Ben and her sudden realization about her lack of "totality," that is, her "sin" and need for redemption, cause a series of events to transpire, events that force Margaret into a deeper quest for her soul's purpose, events that push her into the second stage, "the search."

With the unexpected death of her beloved father, Margaret is forced out of the world she has always known—one involving the church, her small-town community, and her regional college. In a surprising twist to the plot, Margaret contacts Madelyn Farley, the artist-friend of her mother, the very same woman Margaret has blamed for taking her mother away from her all those years ago. Margaret contacts Madelyn out of her deep loss and sheer desperation—she has no one else to turn to and, literally, nowhere else to go, for once the new priest moves into the rectory, the place where she and her father had lived her entire life, she will be expected to move on, to forge her own way.

It is interesting to note that when Margaret contacts Madelyn, she leaves a heartbroken, angry message on Madelyn's machine, a message which Madelyn

later worries will end in Margaret's suicide, once more linking her identity to "body." Later, in an awkward confrontation between the two women, one separated by 16 years from their first meeting (a meeting which ended with Margaret's mother leaving), Madelyn comments, "I had no idea what I would find when I got here. Among the many possibilities, I saw myself arriving just in time to save you. Or being the one to discover your corpse" (367). But Margaret is beyond that; she has heard the call, and she responds to that call with the search, a search that begins with forgiveness.

As this novel closes, "the search" is just beginning for Margaret. She and Madelyn begin their relationship anew, and Margaret begins her quest: "One Wednesday, around noon, Madelyn Farley and I pulled away from the rectory in her rented Celebrity. [I]... As Father Gower's Daughter, whatever else I was on my way to becoming ..." (380). Here, *becoming* is again central to Margaret's shifting identity; it is also relevant as she continues on her soul's path toward "wholeness." The novel ends with this new pilgrimage, an unexpected literal journey, but a journey nonetheless symbolic of Margaret's continued pilgrimage. The novel concludes with her journal entries and letters written to those back "home," those who had greatly influenced and affected Margaret's life up to that point, those who had helped her to further create/develop/shape her female identity. Two of those Margaret corresponds with are Adrian Bonner and Professor Stannard. Both men are key figures who continue to influence Margaret's identity and guide her through her soul's next stages, key figures who contribute greatly to the awakening of Margaret's "trinity of consciousness," that

is, the interrelatedness of mind, body, and soul; this quest, begun here, ultimately concludes in *Evensong*.

Throughout *Evensong*, Margaret's character develops even more as we see her identity shift as she journeys through the soul's remaining stages. The third phase of the soul, "the struggle," is one that begins in part in *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, but continues in *Evensong*, for even as Margaret begins the process of forgiving Madelyn and her mother Ruth, that forgiveness and reconciliation are ongoing processes, ongoing "struggles." Moody and Carroll write that "the struggle" takes the form of the everyday "trials...tests...and challenge[s]...they haunt us in thoroughly modern garb, and in the body of thoroughly modern problems: disillusionment, depression, regret, impatience...futility and cynicism" (36). But, in essence, as Moody and Carroll point out, "the struggle is the way" toward wholeness and a more fulfilled spirituality, a more fulfilled (female) identity (37). Through Margaret's journal entries and letters that conclude *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, we are able to catch glimpses of "the struggle" that she faces. Her friends constantly question her judgment about leaving with Madelyn, and there is also Margaret's struggle to live her life more completely than her mother did, that is, to avoid the same "mistakes" her mother made. Even as her life shifts and she graduates from seminary, returns to the South, marries Adrian, and enters the female priesthood, her soul struggles with "thoroughly modern problems." Early in *Evensong*, we discover that Margaret and Adrian are not living the "happily ever after" scenario,

but are rather struggling to come to terms with the troubling nuances of their six-year-old marriage; Margaret confesses this about her relationship with Adrian:

Things had not been well between us since last
summer...Significant memories pressed close with the intensity felt
when living them, and recalled to me how much I have wanted this
life with this man and how equally much I had feared it would never
come to pass. And yet here we were in it, 'for better or worse' ...
Had I expected only to live the better side of the phrase?
(Godwin, *Evensong* 4)

Still, Margaret is astute and attuned to her soul's "struggle." In this way, then, she is able to later confront the issues that trouble her marriage, and in the end, the two reconcile their marriage woes. All of this, however, is part of Margaret's growth into a complex female character.

Moody and Carroll's fourth phase of the soul is "the breakthrough" or the inner awakening, defined as a feeling or "state of at-oneness with something beyond ourselves" ... [it reflects to us] the reason why we are born on earth, why we struggle" (37). Moody and Carroll call "the breakthrough" stage a "burst of vision...something is changed in us, and we are never the same" (37). Margaret in *Evensong* has the opportunity to interact with several dynamic characters, characters who each reflect in some way part of herself. One of Margaret's colleagues, Grace Munger, a fanatical, female evangelist, and a character whose religious fervor and vigor are reminiscent of those dynamic religious characters found in Flannery O'Connor's prose, reminds Margaret of the passion she's been

missing in her life, while Chase Zorn, a troubled teen and “orphan figure” whose antics get him expelled from the school where Adrian is headmaster, reminds Margaret how she too has been “orphaned”; this allows her to better connect with the teenager. Then there’s Brother Tony, Adrian’s long-lost father. The return of an absent parent again gives Margaret (and Adrian) the chance to reconcile the past with the present. Each of these relationships, then, aids Margaret (and those around her) in her soul’s journey, for as Kissel has alluded to in *Moving On*, by forging these relationships outside herself, she is better able to embrace the transformation taking shape inside herself. Both “outer” and “inner,” then, form a complex layering of her female identity.

The final stage of the soul, as defined by Moody and Carroll, is “the return.” “The return” occurs when “Life goes on as before and we go on with it in the ordinariness of everyday life...[realizing that] there’s still work to do, families to raise, money to earn, and further spiritual progress to be made” (38).

Evensong’s “Epilogue” showcases “the return” as Margaret writes her adult daughter a letter which reflects her “life going on as before...” In the “Epilogue,” we catch a glimpse of what happened to the characters after the fire destroyed the church. In addition, with Margaret’s letter, it is revealed just how her soul’s journey has taken shape, from the time of her mother’s abandonment to the birth of her own daughter, to the death of her husband and her life in retirement. She concludes the letter to her daughter with this beautiful summative passage which ends with a prayer:

So there we are. I've written my Advent tale. It's my gift to you in return for your rectory drawings. Please accept with all my love this inner and outer chronicle of those last weeks of our old century and our old millennium—and the first weeks of your own beginnings—when so many things were on their way to us, things we neither anticipated nor, in some cases, ever could have imagined. This is the story of how we met them and were changed by them. May we continue to meet what is coming to us with the courage of heart. “Until, Dear Lord,” as my father used to pray, “you gather us into your household and assign us to our rightful rooms.” Until them, he would always continue, “keep us generous and faithful and teach us to fear nothing but the loss of you. (Godwin, *Evensong* 405)

It is clear through this “Epilogue” that Margaret has continued on her spiritual journey; she continues to reconcile the past to the present, embracing both the “inner” and “outer,” as she continues onward with her *becoming*, with her journey toward wholeness.

With both of these novels, clearly Margaret's identity is not linked strictly to her female biology, her body, nor solely to her mind—though both body and mind are positive and significant parts of her identity, as a writer/priest/scholar as well as in her physical/sexual relationship with her husband Adrian; she is a “whole” being, who seeks a “fullness” of the female self, a self that is largely tied to the phases of her soul as she attempts to embrace a life of “wholeness.”

Father Melancholy's Daughter and its sequel *Evensong* reflect the progression and transformation of Margaret Gower Bonner's female identity; the location of that progression/transformation of female identity is not, however, centered solely on the body—or the mind (as in earlier Godwin novels); rather, it takes place as Margaret's female identity expands and enlarges to encompass the many facets of her identity, including her spirituality; this “fullness” of female identity merges body, mind, and soul, revealing just what facets of female identity had been missing in the female characters of Godwin's earlier novels. While Margaret's story appears to begin like many other Godwin novels, with the quest of a heroine to find the female self, it quickly resolves into her soul's journey, with an emphasis on the trinity of consciousness involved in female identity—a balancing of body, mind, and soul toward a life of wholeness.

Confronting the “Gargoyle” & the “Great Uncouth”:
Death, Dis-ease, Spirituality, and Wholeness in Godwin's *The Good Husband*

...the vocation, is an attempt on the part of the would-be artist or the would-be religious, to fulfill in an inner way, in a symbolic way what the outer world is failing to provide him with in the service of wholeness. (Godwin, *The Good Husband* 24)

The human condition is notorious for its lack of wholeness. (168)

Published after *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, but before *Evensong*, we find with Godwin's ninth novel, *The Good Husband* (1994), that she continues with her theme of “wholeness” and her shift in focus toward embracing spirituality and the role and journey of the soul as key components to a more complete female identity. *The Good Husband*, however, is rarely noted as one of Godwin's

most beloved novels; in fact, it has often come under scrutiny as one of Godwin's most incomplete works. A scathing book review found in the *New York Times* in 1994 begins by simply stating that "Gail Godwin is a good writer, but *The Good Husband* is not a good novel"; the review goes on to elaborate on the novel's shortcomings to include that "the end of the novel is sadly weak," and the novel is "overloaded with attempts to make it a larger-scale book than it is. The novel is overly ambitious [and] too full of unnecessarily 'meaningful' symbolism" (Maitland np). This review, of course, is a rather simplistic critique of the novel, a review that fails to truly appreciate the intricacies of Godwin's *The Good Husband*. Another, partially positive, yet limited, critique of the book can be found in the *Christian Century* book review by Trudy Bush. Bush critiques the novel, citing that the issues that the novel confronts are "not religious ones of repentance, atonement or reconciliation, but issues of self-knowledge and wholeness" (np). Though perhaps Bush does not acknowledge "wholeness" as a religious notion per se, it is important to understand that Godwin, and the cultural context from which she writes, does; "wholeness," as discussed previously, is essential to understanding both the concept of spirituality and the role of the soul as it relates to a "whole" female identity. Further, to say that this novel disregards concepts of reconciliation, repentance, and atonement is also inaccurate. Godwin with this novel captures each of those concepts along with the concept of "wholeness"; the novel particularly presents reconciliation (to the self and to others) as not only essential to an understanding of "wholeness," but also essential to basic human development, something deeply related to the interconnectedness of body, mind,

and soul as each of those connect to the aforementioned issues of wholeness and spirituality.

There are four main characters in *The Good Husband*. Each of the characters is part of a married couple. The novel is written so that each of the characters shares the telling of the story, with four different points of view, making the narrative structure of this Godwin novel much like *A Southern Family*. Magda Danvers is a noted college professor, once a star intellectual who had published a controversial treatise entitled *The Book of Hell*; it is her only major work and examines “the drama of the soul’s choice” (468). Magda is married to Francis Lake, an ex-seminarian who was but one year away from graduating into the Catholic priesthood before he met Magda, who had come to lecture about her book at Francis’s seminary in Michigan. Magda, twelve years older than Francis, makes quite an impression on the young man and the two eventually marry as Francis leaves his studies and his quest into the Catholic priesthood.

The other, secondary, married couple in this novel consists of Hugo and Alice Henry. Both Hugo and Alice are well educated and compliment each other intellectually, though not physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Hugo is a Southern writer and also a college professor at the same college where Magda teaches, Aurelia College. Alice, his former editor, has given up her editing job in New York City. As the novel begins, we learn that Alice and Hugo have recently lost a baby during delivery. The baby’s death haunts both Hugo and Alice, but Alice, having experienced the tragic deaths of her mother, father, and brother, at a very young

age, takes the baby's death particularly hard. She somehow finds her solace in conversations with a dying Magda and kind-hearted Francis.

Of these four main characters, however, it is the dynamic, yet dying, Magda that most comments on Godwin's shift in focus to the soul as a primary factor related to female identity. It is also Magda whose female identity most reflects the integration of body, mind, and soul toward a more complete female identity, and ultimately, it is Magda's death that allows herself and those around her to embrace their spirituality and individual quests toward wholeness.

Kerstin W. Shands in her article, "Four-telling, Fore-told: Storytelling in Gail Godwin's *The Good Husband*," offers perhaps the most complex and compelling critique of the novel. As Shands explores the novel's themes of "birth, death and regeneration," all spiritual concepts, she also investigates the novel's complex narrative style (77). Shands cites that Godwin's novel "deftly alternat[es] points of view...focus[ing] on two couples, doubling and redoubling, mirroring and contrasting the individual perspectives" (77). Shands argues that rather than being a novel with many shortcomings, the novel, instead, is multi-faceted and complex, stating that, "*The Good Husband* is a psychologically persuasive and well-crafted tale of intriguing, allegorical narrative design, whose characters are remarkably well realized" (77). Shands' exploration of Godwin's text proves to be the most complex as she examines the narrative structure in depth, proving with her analysis that this is not one of Godwin's worst novels, but is perhaps one of her best.

Further, in contrast to the *Christian Century* book review, Susan Kissel relates in her analysis found in *Moving On: The Heroines of Shirley Ann Grau, Anne Tyler, and Gail Godwin* that Godwin's *The Good Husband* is a novel where the four main characters ultimately seek individual fulfillment and personal spirituality, and that each of the four characters carries out the "task of personality," "leading not to happy endings but to the wholeness of self which is their spiritual obligation to themselves and to the world" (138). Kissel reasons that for each of these couples, "fulfilling their spiritual obligations, husband and wives may lose each other...nevertheless, Godwin reveals that they can still find personal fulfillment [in] the service they must provide the world, each in his or her own distinctive way" (138). Spirituality and wholeness, then, become concepts associated with moving "outward" in order to achieve an inward sense of fulfillment (i.e. "wholeness"). Outward service reflects an inward maturation of identity, something we see demonstrated in both *Father Melancholy's Daughter* and *Evensong* as well; along with this concept, then, both Kissel and Shands relate that storytelling and telling become vehicles for changing both the self and the world around the self. Storytelling and telling, then, as discussed in an earlier chapter, merge body, mind, and soul, making both of these acts, (re)telling and storytelling, acts of "wholeness."

Along with the theme of "wholeness," however, we also find Godwin once again exploring the theme of death and its mysteries. While death recurs as a theme in many of Godwin's novels, including *The Odd Woman*, *Violet Clay*, *The Finishing School*, and *A Southern Family*, death permeates *The Good Husband*.

The title itself, *The Good Husband*, is an intertextual reference to Magda Danvers' continual study of visionary art and literature, and it is linked to her interpretation of John Donne's poem, "On the Progress of the Soul," in particular where Donne writes, "Think then, my soul, that death is but a groom," (Line 85). Death here, "the groom," is wed with life—death and life, then, become linked themes explored throughout Godwin's *The Good Husband*. For instance, Hugo and Alice Henry lose their son during the birthing process. Life—birth—and death, in this instance, merge, wed. Magda's continual exploration of Donne's metaphor, itself an intertextuality, creates an allusion to death and the process of dying as a journey of the soul, thus again merging the concepts of death and life, even as Magda's character itself merges life with death as her body, mind, and soul—altogether—slowly embrace what Magda calls "The Great Uncouth" or her "Final Exam" (3).

Furthermore, much like the main character in Southern writer Margaret Gibson's short story, "And With a Vengeance," literature professor Magda Danvers, too, waits for her "good husband"—death—to embrace her, that is, to give her her "final examination," so that she might "pass on." While, for the most part, Magda has found her marriage with Francis Lake to be comfortable, in many ways, it has not been challenging; death, then, or the process (and acceptance) of dying, becomes more challenging to her, and thus more suitable for Magda's "evolving self." Magda even refers to "death" as her "good husband." During a brief conversation with Hugo Henry where Hugo, also an English professor, comments on Donne's exploration of death as a groom,

Magda in her deteriorating health croons, “My good husband...the only one I want” (227). Here, of course, she means death, despite the fact that Francis, standing close by, believes her to be speaking of him. Magda Danvers, like Gibson’s Miss Handy, does not fear death, but rather she welcomes dying and death as the chance to know more, to understand more, to complete the journey of the self.

Throughout the novel, Magda, an academic reminiscent of *The Odd Woman’s* Jane Clifford, seeks to better understand her life through close self-examination and her study of visionary art/literature; this close self-examination itself is a spiritual act, an act explored in depth in Father Gale D. Webbe’s book, *The Shape and Growth*. In *The Shape and Growth*, Webbe maintains that self-examination is a way of taking a “spiritual inventory,” of gathering a better understanding of the self so that we can positively impact the world around us. Webbe writes that: “Self-examination, let alone self-knowledge, is supremely difficult, for in it we actually resist ourselves and are greatly aided in that resistance” (42). Magda, despite her protesting otherwise, has been lulled into a life of complacency, aided by not only her own lack of enthusiasm to become more than an “arouser” but a “fulfiller,” but also, in turn, Francis’s constant care has halted Magda’s quest toward “self-examination” and, in essence, has halted her search for “wholeness.” As she lies dying, however, Magda believes that if she can just reflect on her life enough, she will then be able to understand its importance, that is, the impact and relevance that her life has had on those around her, including her husband Francis Lake. Here, during this time of “self-

examination,” body and mind merge so that Magda can address the complexity of her soul. She starts to become obsessed with preparation for her “final exam,” that is, her death, her final embrace with her “good husband.” Though she has often berated Francis for his lack of self-examination, it is Magda who finally realizes that she herself has also become complacent in her self-examination and personal growth. This realization frees Magda; through it, she finds liberation for her body, mind, and soul, making this indeed a spiritual act of reconciliation, one which reflects Godwin’s theme of “wholeness.” That Magda’s husband does not embrace this same cosmology often frustrates Magda; in the concluding chapter, Magda from beyond the grave, once again implores Francis to better examine his life: “...Frannie, people must keep track of what’s happening to them or they’re doomed to repeat and repeat and repeat” (468). Socrates’ claim that the “unexamined life is not worth living” resurfaces throughout *The Good Husband*, acting as both an intertextuality and a call for “self-examination” as “spiritual inventory.”

Body & Mind: Gateway(s) to the Soul’s Journey?

Magda, throughout the novel, is recognized as a “brilliant woman” (139), and in fact, her first meeting with Francis at his seminary in Michigan occurred as she continued her lecture tour on her *Book of Hell*, a treatise that examines the “drama of the soul’s choice” (403). In addition, she is an admired professor of “visionary” literature and has spent her academic life being what she describes as an “arouser, not a fulfiller” of “wholeness” (168). Magda reveals in one particular telling inner monologue that she has been a conduit for “infecting

young minds" (168), and that this has been her "vocation," that is, what she has been "*compelled* to do" (24 Godwin's emphasis). That her vocation is again linked to the female mind remains relevant and consistent in Godwin's later novels where the female mind is a valuable asset to female identity. Further, during her conversations with colleague Hugo Henry, it is their intellectual exchanges that Magda most comes to value; they tell stories and exchange tidbits of wisdom about life and "pedagogical" practices (107). In addition, Magda's admiration of Alice seems to stem from Alice's ability to challenge Magda's mind, while Francis's lack of "consciousness" causes Magda great distress. The (female) mind, then, remains a significant site where Godwin locates female identity. Yet, although Magda is a female character often associated with her mind and her desire to live a "conscious life" (77), it is important to recognize the role that Magda's (female) body plays throughout the novel as well. As the novel opens, we discover that Magda, a lauded intellectual and professor at fictional Aurelia College, has been diagnosed with aggressive ovarian cancer; she has refused any further treatment of her disease—a disease which is solely associated with the female body, female identity—and instead, she has decided to spend her final days at home under the care of her husband, Francis Lake.

Though we mainly see Magda's body as one full of "dis-ease," we are also given glimpses of a younger, healthier Magda through various flashbacks associated with Magda and Francis's early married life. Here, Magda is revealed to be an imposing figure, a "large woman" (21), "tall" (21), with "insolent eyes"

(23) and her “famous mahogany hair floating loose around her shoulders” (4). She is indeed an intimidating female figure as revealed by her tenacious wit and stolid intellect as well as her body, often depicted as equally large and imposing. That later in the novel, her deteriorating, dying body becomes a focal point, also seems relevant. Once Magda begins losing her mental faculties, she becomes, in essence, body once again, but it is a body in a state of becoming, a body on the verge of “what’s next” (109). Her death will not be the end; it is, instead, an awakening, a beginning, for Magda.

As discussed in an earlier chapter of this dissertation, the body and sexuality often converge in Godwin’s work; therefore, it is also important to recognize that Magda and Francis have shared a satisfactory sex-life, in that, both partners appear to be fulfilled sexually in their relationship, despite the fact that oftentimes Francis’s mind is not as “sharp” as Magda would like it to be. Magda comments: “...over the years...we took solace in each other’s bodies, and right up until my recent illness, we have kept going between us an amazingly consistent flow of mutual creaturely appreciation” (170). Their mutually satisfying sex life is relevant as so many of Godwin’s earlier female characters have had sex lives that are unfulfilling, signifying, at times, the “dis-ease” with a female identity associated with the desires and appetites of the body (i.e. sexuality); that Magda and Francis mutually enjoy one another sexually indicates a kind of reconciliation to the body that Godwin’s earlier female characters did not exhibit. Further, as we see Magda’s body deteriorate from her disease, her mind and her soul become central to her identity. She is no longer Magda with the long, flowing

mahogany hair, but Magda with clumps of thinning hair; Francis recalls: “As long as he had known Magda, she had hennaed her hair, first to give a mahogany sheen to what she called her ‘unimaginative brown,’ then, as the years passed, to cover up the gray. Madga’s hair—its thick, burnished aliveness—had been the thing she liked most about her looks...” (102). Because of her illness, Magda requests that her hair be cut short to the scalp. After Francis cuts her hair, he steps back to “survey his handiwork [and] looked on with awe and dread upon the new Magda his scissors had sheared into focus. His wife’s countenance, less fleshy since her illness and deprived of its habitual animation, possessed a stern, remote majesty” (105). Her appearance, her outward body, is of lesser importance now as she continues in her transition, in becoming. There is a recognizable difference in her appearance, in her body, and other characters comment that, “Her body under the [bed]spread was so much smaller than before. Almost like a child’s. It didn’t seem possible...that big woman” (226) ... “the motionless wizened thing in the hospital bed” (224). Magda’s transformation here, from a “fleshy” female figure with beautiful long hair, to a woman who is shriveling away due to her body’s disease, creates a stark contrast, but a contrast nonetheless that shows how the focus shifts here from Magda’s body, including her sexuality, to an emphasis on the inner workings of her mind, then onto a renewed awareness of “what’s next” (109). While her body may lose its shape and its liveliness, her mind remains fully functioning, and here, we begin to catch a glimpse of just how Magda is reconciling her life. She begins to focus on “what matters” (110).

“What matters,” as Magda defines it, is taking inventory of one’s life, that is, preparing for death and “what’s next” (109): “Her Final Examination was how she thought of the time she had left to lie here and account for her life” (205). Accountability and reconciliation, decidedly spiritual themes, again connect to the concept of “wholeness” as mentioned above. The quest for “wholeness,” that is, to reconcile body, mind, and soul, becomes central to not only Magda’s *becoming* (female) identity, but to the *becoming* identities of Francis, Alice, and Hugo as well.

Conclusion: Sin & the Soul, Spirituality & Wholeness

As in both *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* and *Evensong*, Godwin again focuses on wholeness, the soul, and spirituality in *The Good Husband*. In addition, Godwin once again revisits the concept of “sin” as it relates to wholeness, in that, “sin” has the potential to block “wholeness,” that is, it can interfere with one’s quest toward a fulfilled, “whole” identity, especially in terms of how it affects one’s spirituality. “Sin,” then, becomes vitally important because it can potentially interfere with “wholeness.” In *Father Melancholy’s Daughter* and *Evensong*, “sin” is defined as: “A falling short from your totality...choosing to live in ways you know interfere with the harmony of that totality” (Godwin 198). Here, sin is equated with a lack of “totality,” that is “wholeness.” Throughout *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, then, and its sequel *Evensong*, “totality” (i.e. “wholeness”) is a theme, but a theme which is coupled with the idea of “sin” as defined above. Ruth, from *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, early in her relationship with Walter, writes: “I want my life to add up, to mean something,

only I don't know what yet" (Godwin, *Father Melancholy's Daughter* 111). "To add up," of course, is "to total," and a life of "totality," as mentioned above, is a life that is free from "sin," that is, free from anything that would detract one from seeking his/her "wholeness." Therefore, while it would be easy to categorize Ruth's seemingly callous abandonment of her husband and daughter as a "sin," or a "sinful act," by Godwin's definition, it would have been more sinful had Ruth stayed in a situation which largely interfered with her "totality," that is, her quest for identity, for "wholeness." Godwin's definition certainly complicates more traditional conceptions of "sin," but, at the same time, her definition adds depth and layers to the idea of the evolving (female) identity, especially as it relates to issues of spirituality and the soul.

Likewise, in *The Good Husband*, Magda introduces us to her conception of sin and sinfulness, one which relates to the above definition, as she warns Francis, and others around her, repeatedly that: "It's *sinful* not to try to keep track of who you are. You'll suffer for it yet, mark my words" (210 Godwin's emphasis). "Keeping track of who you are" (i.e. the "spiritual inventory" as defined by Rev. Gale D. Webbe) becomes again a spiritual act, and an act of "wholeness," and "sin" and "sinfulness" are again terms enlisted to show the severity of what it means to lose track of identity, "who you are," that is, to abandon the quest for totality and wholeness as these terms relate to identity. Sin, then, certainly a spiritual term often associated with a Christian cosmology, converges body, mind, and soul as they pertain to an evolving identity. Magda's "taking inventory," is a spiritual act of reconciliation, an act toward wholeness, which allows Magda

to reflect, to “lie here constructing a little obituary of my soul history. Soul history as opposed to case history” (167). Magda embraces the process of dying, of death, as a means to converge body, mind, soul in positive ways, ways that enrich her (female) identity as she attempts to *become* more than an “arouser” but also a “fulfiller” of “wholeness.” Her soul’s history, in turn, acts as a catalyst for the other characters to embrace their individual quests for totality and wholeness as well. As Adrian Bonner reflects in *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, “totality” is not a one-time occurrence; it is a quest, a journey where one must constantly “...learn...unlearn...pay attention...feel where things balance for you and where they don’t” (198). This constancy of learning, unlearning, paying attention, relates to this idea of *becoming* rather than simply *being*, even as it relates specifically to each of the characters in *The Good Husband*, especially Magda.

As *The Good Husband* concludes, we find that not only has Magda finally embraced the concept of “wholeness,” but her life and her death have also impacted Francis, Alice, and Hugo to do the same. After Magda’s death, Francis returns to the seminary in Michigan to “serve” Father Birkenshaw, Francis’s spiritual mentor, in his declining health. Alice finds solace in fostering a relationship with the college’s dean’s granddaughter Elberta, and Hugo is better able to reconcile his feelings of homophobia and detachment as he genuinely accepts his son’s homosexuality. Each of the main characters, then, engages in “self-examination,” which then forces them to reconcile with themselves and others— outwardly. Reconciliation becomes a spiritual act for each of these

characters as they each resolve their inner conflicts so as to better embrace their exterior relationships with those around them. Magda's life and death become, then, the catalyst for "wholeness," even as her character more fully embraces the interconnectedness of body, mind, and soul as each relates to female identity.

CHAPTER FIVE

COLLISION & CONVERGENCE: A CONCLUSION

For the first time there were boxes visible in the hall of the rectory. Up until now, I had maintained a semblance of life as usual. The pictures on the wall were still in their places. No furniture or rugs had been removed. I had been working from the inside out. Now, as of tonight, the 'out' had made its first appearance. I was getting ready to go. But where? (Godwin, *Father Melancholy's Daughter* 351)

Body, Mind, Soul, & Godwin's Vision of Female Identity

After the publication of her first two novels, *The Perfectionists* and *Glass People*, Gail Godwin begins to create a series of female characters who either study or create visionary art and/or literature. For instance, in *The Odd Woman*, Jane Clifford becomes nearly obsessed with understanding the "visionary" art/literature of the 19th century, while in *Violet Clay*, the female protagonist of that same name becomes intent on creating her own visionary art, moving from the role of an "illustrator" of other people's ideas to an "artist" who creates her own art; she *becomes* an artist, one who has a definite vision of and for the world around her. Protagonists like Cate Strickland from *A Mother and Two Daughters* and Magda Danvers from *The Good Husband* are professors who both study and teach their students about visionary literature and art, while other protagonists like Ursula DeVane from *The Finishing School* and Margaret Gower Bonner from *Father Melancholy's Daughter* and *Evensong* engage in their own visionary theories. Clare Campion from *A Southern Family*, a fiction writer, is a character

who actually has other-worldly experiences that can only be categorized as “visions,” making her visionary as well, especially in relation to her craft of writing.

The term “visionary” is one which (re)surfaces throughout Godwin’s later work as her female characters either embrace, alter, or reject the visions they have of themselves and the world around them. The “visionary” in Godwin’s work, then, becomes centrally important as the term itself merges elements of the physical (body), the mental (mind), and the spiritual (soul). It is typically maintained that “visionary art” is art that purports to transcend the physical world and portray a wider vision of awareness including spiritual and psychological themes.

The “visionary” aspects of Godwin’s work seem to encompass a vision of the whole female self or a whole female identity. Other scholars of her work have identified such a “vision,” stating that of primary importance to Godwin’s fiction is the progression and development of female identity, “its possibilities, preconditions, and limits” (Westerlund 11), citing that Godwin ultimately has a “vision of transformation” (12) for her characters. Just how this “transformation” is to take shape, however, often remains a mystery to many of Godwin’s critics. Godwin herself suggests only that one “abiding passion on my part [is] the role of making art in woman’s freedom” (Personal Email np). Certainly, there is freedom held within acts of “transformation,” and many of Godwin’s characters’ “transformations” stem from their abilities “to create,” “to make [art],” acts linked to certain elements of body, mind, and soul, as discussed earlier, whether that art is painting, writing, acting, etc. The creative act, then, certainly becomes part of

Godwin's vision for "wholeness." Female characters who have the ability to "create" also have the ability to "transform" and the agency to become "whole."

Westerlund and Lihong Xie both indicate that the transformation of female identity takes shape through a continued progression of self-awareness among Godwin's later female protagonists. But just where is this "self-awareness" recognized? Xie poses that perhaps the vision of transformation is caught up in Godwin's attempts to "wed the traditional issues of faith to female individuality and self-actualization" (223) while Susan Kissel might attribute Godwin's "vision of transformation" to Godwin's later characters and their attempts to "become more tolerant of each other, more accepting of difference in the world around them, more capable of creating a caring community" (130). Kissel's theory of Godwin's vision, then, embraces the idea of the individual moving beyond her own self-development to instead embrace family and community, that is, social structures outside of the self. Despite some minor disagreements among Godwin's literary critics, then, a pattern emerges, one that explores a couple of common themes. Each critic agrees that Godwin's work is visionary, and that part of that vision relies on the progressive transformation of female identity. Further, each of her critics also agrees that besides the vision for a progressive female identity, Godwin's work also advances a theory or a vision of wholeness as it relates to female identity. The theory of wholeness, then, becomes central to a better understanding of Godwin's work. While Jennifer McMullen asserts in her article, "To Those Who Want Wholeness," that Godwin's vision is that of a balancing between the carnal and the spiritual, such an assertion leaves out a

fundamental aspect involved in the intricacies of Godwin's later female protagonists: The role of the mind as it forges a progressive, "whole" female identity.

Even Emma Gant, the female protagonist of Godwin's latest novel, *Queen of the Underworld* (2006), underscores Godwin's larger vision for wholeness. With Emma, we find another strong female character on a quest toward a "whole" female selfhood. Emma, who shares a background very similar to Godwin's other female protagonists is creative; she's a writer, a journalist, a visionary who desires to avoid being trapped in the traditional female narratives embodied by her mother and grandmother. Emma states at one point that life was like crafting a narrative, and: "Letting yourself be trapped in the wrong story was another way of succumbing to usurpation" (6). The "usurpation" Emma refers to here is one of the quest for an "whole" female self; here, she refers to that same concept of having the autonomy, the power, to write her own story, that is, to create her own narrative plots, plots which encompass the vision of female wholeness, a female identity that engenders body, mind, and soul.

Certainly then, a whole, progressive female identity is one that Godwin's vision encompasses; however, this vision of wholeness is incomplete without the convergence of body, mind, and soul as they continually (re)form female identity. In *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, Margaret Gower (Bonner) begins packing her family's belongings as she prepares to move from the rectory after her father's unexpected death. During this process, Margaret makes this telling observation,

an observation that keenly relates the interconnectedness of body, mind, and soul as they continually shift to (re)form female identity:

For the first time there were boxes visible in the hall of the rectory. Up until now, I had maintained a semblance of life as usual. The pictures on the wall were still in their places. No furniture or rugs had been removed. I had been working from the inside out. Now, as of tonight, the “out” had made its first appearance. I was getting ready to go. But where? (Godwin 351)

The boxes here become representative of the “forms” or the “containers” so many of Godwin’s earlier characters have commented upon. From characters like Cameron’s definition of people as “containers” in *Glass People* to Margaret’s comment to a “non-believer” in *Evensong* that people need their containers to “pool their information” (127), “forms” and “containers” emerge as important symbols throughout Godwin’s novels. Throughout Godwin’s work, “containers” seem to provide a means by which her characters attempt to make sense of the world. The box, then, in the above quote, becomes another reference to a theme that has resurfaced throughout Godwin’s work: the container. The container, in essence, becomes part of Godwin’s vision; it is a form, a shape, anything, including relationships and definitions that help “hold” together, help “contain” and “pool” information, so that one can better understand the world around him/her. The box, however, even as it is a “container,” something that holds the different pieces/aspects of Margaret’s life, is also representative of the “exterior,” and the “exterior” as demonstrated throughout this dissertation is a metaphor for

the (female) body. The female body, many times throughout Godwin's work, has acted as a "container." The (female) body, a container, as examined in Chapter One and Chapter Two, becomes almost a negative aspect of female identity, a fragile container, (i.e. the title *Glass People* likely alludes to the fragility of such "contained" identities), or the female body as a "box," a trap, something to escape.

Godwin, in an interview with Brigitte Weeks, asserts that: "The first protagonists were women who were trying to find their way out of their setting, out of their marriage, out of their family and into their work, whatever that was to be" (np). Escapism, then, emerges as another theme associated with life's "containers," even as Godwin's earliest protagonists attempt to escape the "containers" of their lives, including the "containers" of relationships, family, home, culture, community, tradition, and the female body. For this reason, Godwin's first two female protagonists, in particular, are consumed with the superficial, with the "exterior," consumed with escaping whatever "contains" them, even as the metaphor relates the exteriority of the female body. The female body, the exterior container, then, becomes a detriment, something to escape or transcend, playing into the age-old dichotomous thought that one must subjugate the body in order to have a more progressive identity. For this reason, Godwin's earliest novels depict a vision of the female body as something to transcend or reject in favor of the mind, setting up once again the dichotomy of mind over body.

As Godwin's vision of "wholeness" advances, however, a reconciliation of body and mind as they relate to (a whole) female identity must emerge, but not before Godwin begins to shift the focus of her female characters' identities from (escaping the) exterior to embracing the interiority of the mind, again almost privileging the mind over the body. Protagonists like Jane Clifford and Cate Strickland are prime examples of Godwin's female characters whose identities are forged from the "inside out," forcing a reversal of identity from Godwin's earliest female protagonists whose identities seem to stem from the opposite, "outside in." Both Jane Clifford from *The Odd Woman* and Cate Strickland from *A Mother and Two Daughters* retreat to the interiority of the female mind. Here, in the realm of the mind, these characters find comfort and meaning. The body, however, remains problematic for these characters as each of them either suffers from a disconnect to their female bodies, especially in relation to their sexuality (i.e. Jane's unfulfilling relationship with Gabriel and her bouts of insomnia), or suffers "dis-ease" of the body (i.e. Cate's persistent toothache, bell's palsy, or unplanned pregnancy); that is, these early female characters still demonstrate an incompleteness even as they have become more career or more mind-oriented than their female predecessors. Their (female) bodies once again interfere with Godwin's vision of wholeness as it relates to a fuller female identity, something that is reconciled in her later work. While it is certainly important that Godwin's female characters advance intellectually in these novels, it is their full retreat into the interiority of the female mind that interferes with their progressive female identities and Godwin's ultimate vision.

The shift from the “exteriority” of the female body to the “interiority” of the female mind, however, is significant and important to Godwin’s vision, for with her later novels, including *Father Melancholy’s Daughter*, *The Good Husband*, and *Evensong*, there is another shift toward Godwin’s ultimate vision of wholeness as it relates to female identity. Godwin recognizes a shift in her vision with the character of Magda Danvers from *The Good Husband*, when she states that:

I think in writing that book I switched over from the heroine escaping in order to come into her own to the heroine having escaped somewhat, then becoming really interested in how she fits into the bigger picture, the whole cosmos. (Weeks np)

Here, it is interesting to note that the shift acknowledged by Godwin is one that moves from the interior back to the exterior. Characters like Jane Clifford and Cate Strickland were necessary as they forced the location of female identity inward for a time, embracing female solitude, female self-awareness, and the female mind as valuable. These characters, however, also privileged the mind over the body, something that typically interferes with wholeness as it meddles with the balance of female identity. Still, this was a necessary inward shift which then later leads to another shift outward, a shift that includes the soul and “the whole cosmos,” and thus better encapsulates a more complete vision for wholeness.

This shift mentioned above, however, from the “interiority” of the mind, focusing the characters’ searches for identity, an identity solely based on the

internal rather than the external, I maintain, begins to take shape long before it surfaces as a theme in the *The Good Husband*. Margaret Gower from *Father Melancholy's Daughter*, while packing the boxes, the boxes again a symbol for the exterior, the body, has an epiphany, a sudden realization that: "[She] had been working from the inside out" (351). This realization sets forth another shift in Godwin's vision as we move again from the "interiority" of the mind, as it relates to female identity, to the "exteriority" associated with spirituality (i.e. the soul).

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the soul remains the core of human existence because it is always linked to something more than the tangible, something both inside and outside the self, an essence that not only extends beyond the material, the physical, but also unites the tangible with the intangible—it "makes whole." "Wholeness" emerges as the ultimate vision found in Godwin's later novels. In Godwin's later work, there is again a definite shift toward female identity and its connections to the soul, especially in terms of how the soul links with the body and the mind to create a better sense of "wholeness," or "fullness," something essential to the realization of a "complete" female identity; this is a shift both outward and inward, not only to the mind, but also to the yearnings of the soul. It is the desire to be connected to more than the external dictates of the body or the internal musings of the mind; it is, as Flannery O'Connor comments in *Mystery and Manners*, wholeness that relates to "a total experience of human nature at any time" (167); this emphasis most clearly relates to the call of the soul, the call for a connection greater than the self (contained), a connection greater than that of family or community or even

culture. The soul and its relationship to both spirituality and “wholeness” become essential to a better understanding of Godwin’s ultimate vision for her art, that is, a whole female identity that merges the beauty associated with both the interiority of the female mind and the exteriority of female body—a balance of body, mind, and soul. It is the collision, the convergence, of the interior with the exterior, then, that (re)shapes Godwin’s vision to include the beauty associated with spirituality and wholeness, i.e. the journey of the soul.

The pilgrimage of the soul, then, includes elements of interiority and exteriority; it merges them both to form a more cohesive female identity, an identity that includes the evolution of the self, but also extends beyond the self. Godwin’s later characters like Margaret Gower Bonner and Magda Danvers encapsulate Godwin’s vision of a whole female identity. Godwin’s shift, to include body, mind, and soul, then, shows how her work fits in with other traditional and contemporary Southern Appalachian female writers, for as Mab Segrest points out in “Southern Women Writing: Toward a Literature of Wholeness,” “Southern ... [women] writers...have a new vision...are rediscovering their obscured traditions, seeking new forms and language” (19). That “new vision,” in Segrest’s estimation, includes a vision of wholeness. Segrest identifies a tradition of Southern (Appalachian) women writers who have long suppressed their femaleness, making their female characters’ bodies grotesque manifestations that become “casualties of the war of the female mind with the female body. It is a battle in which there are no victors, only victims” (34). As Segrest further points

out, there is a “new vision” associated with Southern female authors, one in which

the strongest female fictions...are not surprisingly stories about spinsters, self-identified women spinning new time and new space...fictions [that] clearly value the creative integrity of a woman’s solitude and the absolute necessity for the sanity and health of women’s community. (Segrest 35)

Godwin’s fiction advances just such a vision, once again linking her to her Southern Appalachian literary heritage. Even as Jane Clifford and Cate Strickland initially retreat inward, they maintain a part of the vision of wholeness described above, that is, the necessary movement inward—a valuing of the female mind, a valuing of the interiority of the mind that includes embracing female solitude. While later characters like Margaret Gower Bonner and Magda Danvers continue that above vision, namely as women join in community together, their “exterior” relationships become part of community, part of an outward movement necessary for merging the interior (mind) with the exterior (body), a movement that is, again, part of the vision of wholeness. This initial outward movement, which embraces friendships, marriages, and other relationships, is also ultimately identified with the pilgrimage of the soul, as discussed in Chapter Four, as the soul also strives to move beyond the interiority of the mind and the individual motivations and drives of the self.

Segrest concludes that Southern women’s literature of wholeness will arise out of the “refusal to turn anger inward”: a refusal to accept difference as a

means to divide “black women from white women and Northern women from Southern women” (40); out of a “profound respect for female solitude and self-hood”; out of a “refusal to see either female body or female spirit as grotesque”; “out of [a] continuing tentative searching toward a creative energy”; and out of a “community of Southern women searching together in the delicate connections between solitude and friendship for our visions of ourselves and what the world should be” (41).

Godwin’s vision certainly coincides with Segrest’s larger vision for contemporary Southern women’s writing, even as Godwin’s female protagonists continually shift, slowly retreating from a superficial exteriority associated with a grotesqueness often linked to the female body, to a move inward, embracing the positive interiority associated with solitude and the female mind, on to a reemergence of the self and community as expressed in/through connections to something greater than the self, that is, to a vision of wholeness associated with female spirituality, a spirituality connected with embracing the embodiment, the “bodiliness” of female identity, along with the beauty of the interiority of the female mind. Godwin’s later female characters embrace just such an identity of wholeness; they are strong, creative, sexual female characters who emphasize with their identity the collision and convergence of body, mind, and soul as they continue to (re)form Godwin’s artistic vision, a vision which includes a female identity constantly striving for wholeness, a female identity intent on “re-vision” and resistance.

As Godwin continues to write, to create strong, creative, and sexual female characters who celebrate her vision of wholeness as it relates to the integration and transformation of the female body, mind, and soul, it will be interesting to see just how Godwin's vision continues to change, and to enlarge, to include female characters who merge the positives of the interior with the exterior—body with mind and soul—female characters who remain resistant to “congealment” and “containment,” female characters compliant solely with change and Godwin's vision for transformation of female identity, female characters like Margaret Gower who continue to pack their “boxes,” “getting ready to go. But where?” (351).

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