

Postfeminist Consumption in Female Cannibal Texts

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2019

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore novels and films from 1995 to 2016 from countries in Europe, North America and Asia which feature individual female cannibals. I use foodways as a framework for reading cannibalism as a part of wider food behaviours and consumer culture. This is used in conjunction with feminist critiques of postfeminist media culture and theories which link neoliberalism and globalisation, as well as being informed by the language and theories of the gothic. This framework provides the tools to answer what cultural work the female cannibal does; what narrative tropes are used and how these relate to local and/or global contexts; and how this figure relates to gender debates in the era.

Following on from Jennifer Brown's argument in *Cannibalism and Literature and Film* (2013) that cannibals represent contemporary fears and desires, I argue that the female cannibal represents fears and desires related to gender, patriarchal structures and feminist politics. I discuss how the female cannibal has emerged as an individual in the postfeminist era and explore how this relates to the postfeminist and neoliberal strategy of constructing the self through consumerism. I argue that female cannibalism exposes the contradictions and ironies of this strategy with the messy work of cannibalism reflecting the pleasures as well as the exploitative nature of consumption.

I argue that the texts engage with rape culture and the continuing objectification of women through the connection between incest and cannibalism. Cannibalism takes objectification literally, reducing humans to meat and therefore reflects and inverts patriarchal abuses which position women as objects. While the cannibalism is therefore a critique of patriarchy and demonstrates a resistance to it, it nevertheless leaves the structures of power unchanged. This demonstrates the limited nature of consumption as a strategy for resistance.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to my supervisors, Professors Ann Davies and Karen Boyle, whose persistence, patience, and intellectual guidance challenged me to do better and supported me when I got lost. I could not have had more accomplished guides to help me develop my initial proposal into this thesis. Thank you both so much.

This project was supported by the AHRC DTP scholarship fund administered through the Scottish Graduate School for the Arts and Humanities. I am incredibly grateful for the financial support I received. The intellectual and social support of the SGSAH team and my PhD cohort was invaluable.

My thanks and admiration go out to all those who have persevered in their doctoral studies especially a number of peers at the University of Stirling and SGSAH, particularly Jenny, Shona, and Susanne. Your friendship and shared misery have been an inspiration in times of PhD trouble. Thanks also to Roxanne Douglas who kindly shared her conference paper with me.

I had a love of learning and a belief in myself instilled in me by my family and must thank my mum, Gillian, and my grandparents, Ron and Muriel Clark, for encouraging me to pursue the best education I could get. They have supported and loved me through thick and thin, and without them I could not have completed this project. I will be eternally grateful that you are my family.

Last but not least, my warmest thanks to Georgia Clark and Lauren Brown for their unwavering friendship, encouragement and commiserations. Words cannot express how much I love and appreciate you.

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Aperitif: Introduction

Bunny: “Do a lot of feminists eat men?”

Dr Hunt: “No, Bunny! Well, not many.

“You have to understand that the Piranha women are a primitive, ancient, radical offshoot of the Women’s Movement and most feminists, like myself and Dr Kurtz, we believe in equality between the sexes not the domination of women over men. And there aren’t any modern feminists who advocate cannibalism. At least, not since the 60s.”

The exchange above is quoted from *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death* (dir. by Lawton, 1989) between Dr Margot Hunt (Shannon Tweed) and her bimbo undergraduate student, Bunny (Karen Mistal) as they venture into the “Avocado Jungle” of Southern California. They are travelling at the behest of the US Government (and under pressure from the university Dean) to convince the cannibalistic Piranha Women to move to a “reservation” of condominiums in Miami so that the “avocado market” is not dominated (in a mockery of the Cold War) by Communist countries. Little do they realise that the government actually wants to culturally assimilate the cannibals with *Cosmopolitan* magazine subscriptions and talks from conservatives. This spoof of 1980s action films and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) takes for granted that eating men is inherently feminist and characterises it as part of a radical second wave of feminism which is already seen as “primitive, ancient”. The film’s comedy comes from a parody of 1980s masculinity, and the tensions between radical and liberal branches of feminism, especially where these disagreements feed into an emergent postfeminist media culture (which may or may not also be a backlash against feminism). The film plays with the idea that feminists want female domination by, on one hand, suggesting they secretly do and, on the other, mocking this idea. It uses cannibalism to illustrate that tension between desire and repulsion. Dr Hunt knows she should not want female domination or to perform cannibalism but simultaneously accepts that cannibalism is part of the Piranha Women’s culture and desires it for herself at various points.

Ultimately, Dr Hunt rejects cannibalism but she also blackmails the Department of Defence into providing funding for research into women’s opportunities in the military. Despite saving the Piranha Women from cultural assimilation and resisting the patriarchal order, Dr Hunt brainwashes a rescued Piranha man with feminist studies courses, moulding her ideal partner, while Bunny marries their jungle guide because there is “simply no point” in educating her further. The comedy points towards feminist compromise with an academic, liberal elite manipulating the system as much as they can – apparently for all women but ultimately in line with their own interests. Meanwhile women with less privilege are ignored and looked down on. The cannibals seem decidedly (and bizarrely) beside the point, operating as a radical feminist fantasy taken for granted as existing but ultimately nowhere near as threatening as Dr Hunt’s method of playing the system.

However, the idea of female cannibalism has persisted and has, in my opinion, developed more bite. Although the representational relationship between cannibalism and feminist politics has become less explicit and overt, it is, as this thesis shows, a theme which permeates female cannibal texts. Indeed, the associative nature of this relationship reflects the ways that feminist politics have been both adopted and dismissed in postfeminist media culture.

I became aware of the figure of the female cannibal while researching the novel *Hannibal* (Harris, 1999) at the end of my undergraduate degree. I read this novel as having feminist intentions that culminated in Starling's adoption of cannibalism (which I discuss in chapter three), and as I discovered more female cannibal texts, the relationship between cannibalism, feminism, empowerment and exploitation became a central question for me. I was puzzled at how cannibalism was being positioned as pleasurable and admirable when the very idea of cannibalism is reprehensible. I was particularly fascinated that the texts I was finding were all post-1990 and being produced in a broad range of countries. I wondered what it was about contemporary gender relations, perhaps globally, that enabled a female cannibal not only to emerge but to be positioned as heroic instead of (or as well as) monstrous.

Jennifer Brown (2013: 7) argues that the cannibal is a 'mutable figure' who 'reappears in various guises at times when popular culture needs to express real fears and anxieties'. Brown's monograph *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (2013) is a seminal contribution in understanding how cannibals function within narrative texts. The study considers literature and film from Anglo-American contexts until 2001. Her use of both literature and film gives her study the ability to reflect popular culture over time as film developed into a popular medium. I employ this as a model for my project using both films and novels to better explore the range of stories we tell about female cannibalism. However, Brown's more historicist approach precludes a detailed understanding of how patriarchal structures have contributed to the figure of the cannibal. It focuses on the cannibal as exclusively male with Brown (2013: 98) stating that 'in my research the occasions of women or children performing cannibalism only occur in incestuous family or tribe situations, and they never, unlike male cannibals, act individually.' My research encompasses a wider geographic area and more recent texts and shows that as Brown was publishing her research, the cannibal had already mutated to represent contemporary fears and anxieties. Although incestuous families remain a dominant thread in female cannibal narratives, the texts in this thesis show that the female cannibal is, above all, an individual. Consequently, the gendered nature of individualism in this context articulates contemporary fears and desires about gender, patriarchal structures and feminist politics.

It is this individualism and the periodisation that led me to frame this research in terms of postfeminist media culture and neoliberalism. I explore the critical literature in detail in the following chapters, however, it is important to situate this research as part of a wider investigation into postfeminist narratives of femininity and consumption. The growth of girl power discourse

popular in the 1990s intertwined with a backlash against the mediated idea of feminism and resulted in a reclamation of traditional femininity including the renewal of beauty norms and domestic labours, much of which is commercialised or professionalised as part of consumer culture (Munford, 2004; Gill, 2007; Negra and Tasker, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). These ways of performing femininity are framed as valuable and empowering, and enable women to feel psychologically coherent in a society which constructs a false binary of gender (Black, 2006). At the same time, they represent the same pressures to look and act in ways that many second wave feminists identified as oppressive and subsequently rejected (Hollows, 2000, 2006, 2008; Negra, 2009).

Although this second wave feminist and postfeminist context is largely Anglo-American in origin, the texts I explore in this thesis are from a much wider context. I felt initially that there must be a transnational element to this figure and focused on globalisation and transnational flows as a starting point. However, as I reflect on in my conclusion, the transnational became less central as the neoliberal context became more apparent to me. The ambiguous nature of femininity in a postfeminist media culture is related to the neoliberal narrative of the self as consumption practices are used to construct identities which are actually personal brands. Consequently, the way we look, act, behave and the things we consume must generate a self which is marketable. For women, this is especially important in order to be seen as competent and attractive, able to consume the right things in the right ways in order to perform the role of “woman” (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Negra, 2009).

Consumption is central to this thesis. Cannibalism, fundamentally, is a food practice. Women, as I elaborate on throughout, are traditionally and often primarily responsible for the family foodways. That is, they often monitor and locate resources, and manage the nutritional, spiritual and cultural identities of their families through food. They often cook and deal with waste, negotiate likes and dislikes, allergies, and health. They often teach manners, customs, and appropriate behaviours through food practices. In other words, (as Joanne Hollows (2008) and Deborah Lupton (1996), among many others have pointed out) women often construct the family through food. Foodways on the broadest level, as Baron, Cohen and Bernard (2014) have discussed, involve geopolitics as food is produced, distributed, and consumed according to politics, customs, environment, and so on. These overarching foodways can tell us a lot about the wider culture of a place, political priorities, religion, and more. Scaled down to a personal level, however, it can reveal a lot about individuals and family units. For example, foodways can demonstrate what their identities are in terms of religion, priorities, class, gender, age, and so on. Many feminists, including Marjorie DeVault (1997), Betty Friedan (1967) and Martha Rosler (1975), have explored how women have been oppressed by this domestic responsibility but as femininity has been revalued in the postfeminist era, feminists have also noticed the power in this

responsibility as gatekeepers of culture, identity and family (Avakian, 1997; Couihan and Van Esterik, 1997; Hollows, 2000, 2006, 2008).

I set out to explore what fears, desires and anxieties female cannibals represent by looking at cannibalism as a food practice. This theory, I thought, would allow me to explore how consumption in general contributes to women's negotiation of everyday conditions despite the extraordinary excess and unconventionality that representations of cannibalism entail. I believed that foodways would reveal more practical, material answers to my questions rather than a more psychoanalytical response which would perhaps focus heavily on the vagina dentata, female insatiability and castration theory. A psychoanalytical theoretical approach provides an understanding of underlying psychological fears and desires but, on its own, I think it reveals less about the material conditions and changing politics of gender roles in society. For example theorists such as Barbara Creed (1993) and Carol J. Clover (1992) concentrate on the over-arching fear of women and their sexuality rather than more contextually specific gender issues and anxieties. I wanted to know what was so pleasurable about the female cannibals and whether this sense of empowerment was straightforward or whether it masked a critique of their excessive consumption. Although foodways gave me the tools to read how their consumption functions in the texts, ultimately this was combined with and informed by theories about postfeminist media culture and neoliberalism as well as an engagement with the gothic mode. I reflect further in the conclusion about the effectiveness of these theoretical tools in exploring and answering my research questions.

I initially felt that although there was a sense of monstrosity and threat, and despite the gore and violence, the female cannibals were ultimately figures the texts celebrated and positioned to be admired. The texts do this by creating a sense of identification, foregrounding a spectrum of patriarchal abuses as justification for revenge against inequality – even where the cannibalism was not directed against perpetrators of abuse – and the female cannibals always seem to get away with it. Furthermore, there seemed to me (on a rather intuitive level) something empowering in these texts related to women's assertion of desire and appetite. As I progressed on my research journey I discovered a more nuanced and often contradictory politics within these texts, centred on the tensions between female cannibals as heroines and/or monsters. As I discuss in *Digestif: Conclusion*, I have found that these tensions illustrate the limits of consumption as a postfeminist and neoliberal strategy to create and maintain a feminine identity. The female cannibal texts reveal the pleasures of consumption and the ways this can be empowering on an individual level, even while the violence of cannibalism illustrates the exploitation involved in consumerism.

A.1 The Recipe

In this project I analyse novels and films featuring female cannibals in a leading role published or produced between 1995 and 2016. Taking Brown's (2013) work as a starting point, I answer the following research questions:

- What fears and desires does the female cannibal represent? In other words, what cultural work does this figure actually do?
- How do these texts use narrative tropes and relate to national or globalised contexts?
- How do female cannibal texts engage with debates around gender and culture in the period?

The texts come from America, Europe and Asia which suggested transnational exchanges in the origins of this figure. The texts were found through internet database searches including IMDB, Good Reads, Amazon and Google, as well as library records. It was harder to find novels because reviews generally do not include plot twists or dramatic reveals and so I was limited to English language novels in which the cannibalism was foregrounded or patently obvious. I read several novels which were actually about supernatural creatures in my search for female cannibals, and I reflect on this in my conclusion. Despite my expectations that most texts would be in the horror genre, many of my texts span across genres with horror being an undercurrent due to the nature of cannibalism.

I decided to group the texts based on how the female cannibals are positioned in relation to those around them. These groups call upon traditional concepts of female positions in families and personal relationships but also draw attention to how women can be positioned outside these relationships (which are nonetheless evoked by her exclusion from them). Consequently, I discuss daughters, mothers, lovers, and what I have called the neoliberal cannibal. The neoliberal cannibals are women whose lack of familial connection may be an interesting difference between these and the other texts. Although all of these texts have elements of neoliberal ideology, this emerged most strongly towards the end of my research project. Although neoliberalism and postfeminism have co-existed in material and critical terms, feminist scholarship which theorises postfeminist media culture and its relationship with late capitalism (which I discuss in the following chapters) has, in the short period of my studies, evolved towards ideas encompassing neoliberal feminism in which feminism has been revitalised in the service of neoliberalism. This critical shift is reflected in my thesis with the final chapter drawing out neoliberal feminist tendencies in the texts to a much greater extent than in earlier chapters. Although the categories I have outlined are not always discrete, they enable the application of foodways theory on a

personal level which reveals the relationships between gender and domestic practices, especially food behaviours and consumption, in the texts.

I have worked within these dates (1995 – 2016) because female cannibals I was finding before 1995 were, as Brown stated, in families or tribes and were not developed individuals. The cannibals in *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death*, for example, speak in a fictional language which is not translated, very rarely speak anyway with Dr Kurtz instead speaking for them (but on her own behalf), and they are not given any real agency other than debating the merits of which dip goes best with human flesh. This lack of subjectivity and independence is repeated in several cannibal films in the 1980s and while this may merit its own investigation, it was not the figure I was puzzled by.

Nonetheless, the scope of this project is far wider than many would guess on first hearing the term ‘female cannibal’. I define cannibals as non-supernatural, living, human beings who eat other human beings. In the interests of both manageability and foregrounding the cannibalism as a choice, I chose to exclude any instances of survivor cannibalism. The texts I have used are by no means comprehensive but offer both novels and films from a range of countries with a variety of styles and levels of critique.

My definition of cannibalism excludes zombies and vampires (which are (un)dead by definition), and werewolves (which are not fully human). *Trouble Every Day* (dir. by Denis, 2001) was similarly excluded because the cannibalism was caused by scientific experimentation which is super-natural. My definition also excluded witches. While some of my texts including *Meat Grinder* and *Dumplings*, foreground cannibalism as a spiritual act which restores the vitality of the family and promotes youthfulness, this is not framed as magical or supernatural but rather after the style of Eastern medicine. I have not addressed witches in this thesis, partly because of the supernatural elements but also because witches have a long, complex history in critical literature that I did not have space to account for.

The Neon Demon (2016), for example, was released near the beginning of my PhD programme and I was eagerly anticipating this cannibal film, however, upon its release I was disappointed. I admit I was puzzled by this film until I heard a paper by Jennifer Richards at the 2017 Gothic Feminism conference at the University of Kent. Richards argued that this film depicts witchcraft and explained the significance of the symbolism throughout. In many ways, the cannibalism is incidental as no chewing or swallowing is shown, merely absorption through both the mouth and skin. I do not dismiss the cannibalistic elements in the film entirely. It shows the same preoccupation with beauty and communion that many of my cannibal films entail, however, the supernatural elements of the witchcraft take this in another direction. Other witch films including *The Witch* (dir. by Eggers, 2015) and *Suspiria* (dir. by Gaudagnino, 2018; remake of Argento’s 1977 version) also feature cannibalism rituals, often seemingly for the purpose of immortality/eternal youth. This type of cannibalism, while very much female-driven, was outside

the parameters of this thesis and holds different meanings that might be illuminated further only with the history and significance of witches in mind.

Despite my dismissal of the supernatural, I use ideas of monstrosity and the gothic in order to read the unease and ambiguity which is central to these texts. While the female cannibal texts vary generically, they all employ elements of horror and humour to construct tonal shifts illustrating the ambiguous nature of the cultural work which these texts carry out. As a result of this, I incorporated critical tools informed by theories and critical literature relating to the gothic mode in order to explore tone both in terms of horror and, indeed, humour. While this thesis is not organised around a gothic critical framework, nevertheless it does rely upon language and theories developed by gothicists in order to discuss the more abject or horrific aspects of foodways and cannibalism. I return to a discussion of the gothic in Chapter One: Cultural and Critical Contexts.

A.2 What's on the menu?

The thesis is divided into chapters based on my groupings of the texts and extended discussions of the literature surrounding the key themes and critical frameworks in this thesis.

In Chapter One: Cultural and Critical Contexts, I explore the broader cultural contexts in which these novels and films emerge. I discuss postfeminist media culture and how this has constructed a relationship between women and consumerism. I argue that economic conditions have contributed to the creation of postfeminist identity as feminist notions of agency have been commodified as 'choice'. I also explore the postmodern gothic and the changing attitude to monsters as these have also been commodified as marketable products. Because monsters define the boundaries of the 'normal', and because difference has been mined for new markets, monstrosity is now distinctly ambiguous and I believe that this increased ambiguity contributes to the emergence of the female cannibal. In this chapter I also explore the globalgothic (Byron, 2013a) and the idea of globalisation. Because my texts come from a range of different countries, it is important to examine how ideas about femininity and monstrosity cross international boundaries. I draw these threads together by looking at the development of the postfeminist gothic and neoliberalism.

I continue, in Chapter Two: Foodways, Gender and Cannibalism, to set out my framework, discussing what foodways is and how it can be combined with feminist approaches to postfeminist cultures to analyse female cannibal texts. I first outline foodways as a theory and how it can be useful to read cannibal texts. I discuss food horror and the symbiotic relationship between foodways and the gothic mode. I then relate this to postfeminist media culture and the ways that traditional femininity has been reclaimed as valuable. This framework allows me to explore the local and global, as well as the personal and political as foodways permeate every aspect of culture. I finally discuss cannibalism and how it has been used within cultural texts. I

discuss how it relates to incest which is a central theme in this thesis, and I highlight the ways in which cannibalism performs cultural work relating to exploitation and oppression as well as more positive aspects like communion.

In Chapter Three: Daughters of the Postfeminist Patriarchy, I explore female cannibals in *Hannibal* (Harris, 1999), *We Are What We Are* (dir. by Mickle, 2013), and *Raw* (dir. by Ducournau, 2016). I grouped these texts as they are coming-of-age narratives which focus on the developing relationships between young women and the previous generations. Clarice Starling from *Hannibal* is a grown woman, of course, however she is positioned as a daughter to many father-figures and I argue that her development from naïve detective to female cannibal models the transformation in many female cannibal texts. Although not the earliest text I examine in this thesis, its global appeal and links with the prequels plants many of the seeds which develop throughout the texts in this thesis.

The chapter explores how the cannibalism is used as a rebellion against generational authority including patriarchal institutions. I argue that the female cannibals invert patriarchal cannibalism (which is also symbolised through incest) and make it literal. This co-option of patriarchal behaviour is due, I argue, to a lack of connection to their mothers who are notably absent from the narratives. I discuss this in relation to the incomplete project of feminism which has been rejected in postfeminist media culture as women are encouraged to embrace femininity through consumption as a means of empowerment. I discuss how the foodways in these texts show the female cannibals' co-option of their fathers' power through their cannibalistic consumption, and discuss how the texts engage with celebrations and critiques of postfeminist consumerism.

In Chapter Four: Mothers and Daughters, I discuss *Meat Grinder* (dir. by Moethaisong, 2009) and *The Woman* (Ketchum and McKee, 2011). In contrast to the previous chapter, these texts focus on the generational continuity of cannibalism as a tradition passed from mothers to daughters. The food horror and the cannibalism allow women to access power by structuring the family. Cannibalism is positioned as spiritually elevating as well as revenge for male abuses, and consequently is positioned as pleasurable. However, the incestuous crimes and objectification which the fathers commit also demonstrate a continuity of abuse and patriarchal disruption of the family. These abuses are presented as realistic in contrast to the excessive and abject horror of the female cannibals which is darkly humorous. I argue that the female cannibalism parodies male objectification, revealing its true horror. However, dark humour is limited as a mode of critique, and I argue that although the female cannibal is positioned as powerful and sympathetic, these texts are ultimately ambiguous as the cannibalism is a response to patriarchal abuse which positions the women outside of mainstream society. Their power is monstrous and limited.

I explore *Taste of a Man* and *301/302* in Chapter Five: Food Lovers. I decided to group these texts because they show women obsessed with love and sex using cannibalism to satisfy

those feelings. I argue that cannibalism is both a loving and a selfish act which is linked to religious ideals of communion and incorporating the sacred. The cannibalism is also presented as the natural outcome of an attempt to embody perfect femininity. I argue that the ideals of domestic labour, caring acts and looking attractive culminate in the decision to protect the loved object by consuming it. I discuss the globalisation of the female cannibal and how she illustrates the globalgothic. Incest remains a theme in these texts and is linked to food through language and eating disorders. I discuss the cultural work these texts perform in relation to constructions of femininity within global consumerism.

Finally, in Chapter Six: Neoliberal Cannibals and Destructive Self-Care, I discuss neoliberal cannibals in *Season to Taste* (Young, 2014. Abbr. *Season*) and *Dumplings* (dir. by Chan, 2004) which feature cannibalism as an act of self-care. Like the previous chapter, these texts feature women who are very independent and although both have (or had) husbands, neither have children. These cannibals differ, however, as their cannibalism is a selfish rather than loving act. I explore how their cannibalism is used as a way to consume resources which makes them look and feel better, even at the expense of others. *Season* is one of the few female cannibal texts which does not feature incest but I continue to discuss this when analysing *Dumplings*. I explore the ambiguity in these texts as the cannibalism is positioned as both a shocking, selfish act, and as a deserved act of nourishment. I consider how neoliberal economics have prioritised individualism which can be very isolating, and I discuss how this leads, in the texts, to women who construct a sense of self and femininity by cannibalistically consuming what are positioned as ecological, powerful, and reasonable resources.

In the concluding chapter, Digestif: Conclusion, I reflect on the success of this thesis, what contributions it offers and what further questions it raises for future research. I discuss how the texts perform cultural work which is messy and contradictory, particularly in relation to the construction of femininity and the neoliberal subject. I describe how the narrative tropes used in many of the texts also foreground fears of globalisation and how my framework enables comparison of texts across the globe. I argue that my framework could be applied to read gender within male cannibal texts, putting masculinity back into focus, as well as the usefulness of further research encompassing other female monsters in the postfeminist or neoliberal feminist eras.

In the conclusion I reflect on whether the texts do ultimately position the female cannibal as a positive and effective means of resistance to patriarchy. As Dr Kurtz claims in *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death*, “Face up to the truth! This is a war! A war between men and women. Anything short of cannibalism is just beating around the bush.”

Chapter One: Cultural and Critical Contexts.

The purpose of this chapter is to address the critical and cultural contexts for this project. The cultural conditions in which the female cannibal emerges in the late 20th and early 21st centuries provide a context from which to address my research questions – particularly in regards to how the texts use narrative and generic tropes, and how these relate to national and global contexts; how they engage with contemporary debates around gender; and what cultural work these texts ultimately do. I explore the history of fictional cannibalism as set out in Brown's (2013) study in order to situate my research within a critical context. However, I discuss cannibalism as a trope more fully in Chapter Two where I consider how it fits into foodways. In the rest of this chapter I go on to discuss postfeminist media culture and neoliberal consumption, postmodern gothic monsters and the postfeminist gothic, and globalisation. These discussions are intended to illustrate the contexts which inform this research as well as the critical concerns that arise throughout this thesis.

1.1 A History of Fictional Cannibalism

In order to explore what fears, anxieties and desires the female cannibal represents it is prudent to examine the cultural conditions in which the female cannibal has emerged. Jennifer Brown's (2013) book *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* explores how the cannibal in Western, particularly British and American, culture has evolved since the 18th century. She argues that the use of the cannibal figure is culturally and historically specific, and that this use has changed over time as our conception of monstrosity and difference has changed. As the cannibal is a sign of ultimate difference, 'he [sic] reappears in various guises at times when popular culture needs to express real fears and anxieties' (Brown, 2013: 7). Brown traces the historical shifts and patterns of the cannibal in literature and film from the 18th century through to the early 21st century, and demonstrates how the dominant cannibal figure of each period relates to the dominant social and cultural trends within the country of origin.

Brown argues that the cannibal of 18th and early 19th century British fiction was mainly male, foreign, a person of colour, and savage as this illustrated the fears and anxieties relating to colonial enterprise and racial difference. The 'civilising' argument for imperialism was bolstered by the idea that the natives of foreign places were cannibals and therefore 'subhuman'. While these texts sometimes implicitly questioned whether Europeans were indeed 'civilised' at all, the cannibals were safely non-European. Although the cannibal figure changed in the 19th and 20th century, texts in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly Italian giallo,¹ revisited this variation of the cannibal figure in films such as *Papaya: Love Goddess of the Cannibals* (D'Amato, 1978), and

¹ Giallo is considered a genre of thriller and horror films produced in the 20th century, often with elements of the erotic. It is considered to be an influence on later American slasher films.

Cannibal Holocaust (Deodato, 1980). Brown suggests that the decolonisation of African nations, and American foreign policy in regards to South American countries at this time, caused questions of ‘civilisation’ and colonialism to return and come under further critique globally. No matter how violent or morally questionable the white colonisers are, however, the governing convention of these texts is that the cannibal is not white.

However, Brown also notes that in the 19th century in Britain, the comparison between the ‘savage’ foreigner and the criminal underclasses which had emerged from growing cities and dire poverty became the focus of cannibal fictions. Internal colonisation of the Celtic fringes in Scotland, Wales and Ireland also contributed to the cannibal becoming a poor, white other on the periphery of the nation. The mythical tale of Sawney Bean, a cave-dwelling cannibal with an incestuous clan in the Ayrshire region of Scotland, became popular despite the legend supposedly happening in the 16th century (if at all). Similarly, into the 20th century in the USA, after the real-life exploits of Ed Gein had been revealed,² the hillbilly cannibal became a common trope. These texts commented on the fears of the hegemonic centre in regard to their outlying populations. The rural populations did not participate in the new urban industrial economy, and often lacked the economic privileges that went with it – thus the uneducated, rotten-toothed redneck stereotype we see played out in the *The Texas Chainsaw* franchise (1974 – 2017) among others. Brown argues that in the USA these films often reference the Vietnam War or Gulf wars and thus represent fears of human waste as men were used as cannon-fodder by the state, but also may attempt to blame the perceived anti-intellectualism of the Southern states for the election of the presidents responsible for these wars. Importantly, the innocence of the white, urban middle-class victims exploring the countryside on holiday or lost trying to cross the country is challenged as they often use equally violent measures to fight back at the cannibals. But again, they never physically commit cannibalism themselves.

These rural others are white but they are not the cultural ‘centre’ producing these texts. However, Brown argues that in the late 20th century the cannibal finally came home to the cities and a kind of banality. As affluent, white, urban males the cannibals became Hannibal Lecter and Patrick Bateman.³ The media attention at this time around real life serial killer cannibal Jeffery Dahmer, who raped, murdered and cannibalised 17 boys and men between 1978 to 1991, was part of this cultural moment in which the ‘ordinariness’ of the affluent, white male was coming

² Ed Gein was a murderer and body-snatcher apprehended in 1957 in Wisconsin, USA who used human body parts including skin and bones to fashion furniture, decorative items and trophies.

³ Brown (2004, pp.12-13) variously suggests ‘middle class’ and ‘upper-middle class’ to describe these figures: ‘If [...] Ed Gein helped fuel the cult of the hillbilly cannibal in the mid-twentieth century, then Jeffrey Dahmer is the late twentieth century’s cannibal: white, middle class, male, and this is reflected in fictitious cannibals Hannibal Lecter and *American Psycho*’s Patrick Bateman (1991)’. Although Dr Hannibal Lecter is descended from the aristocratic class, both he and Bateman are professional career men whose income is, in large part, earned. Hannibal, it is suggested, also gains bequests from wealthy clients through his psychiatric work.

into question. Brown argues these texts comment on modern consumerism whereby the desire to try new and exotic products creates a culture of unending appetite. It also reflects contemporary thinking about monstrosity and otherness in that ‘monsters are as likely to be those in positions of responsibility and power as those on the margins of society’ (Brown, 2013: 206). Brown (2013: 180-181) claims that these texts are

[T]he culmination of a century of hinting and gesturing regarding white middle-class cannibalism. Monstrosity is no longer in a single, identifiable body; it is no longer the Other. It is replaced with a banality that makes resistance almost impossible because the Other becomes harder to label or locate and looks more like the Self.

Although the ‘Self’ Brown is referring to here is male, the idea of monstrosity moving from the margins to the centre is interesting because it signals a shift in ideas around subjectivity. The liminal status of the cannibal as both human (because s/he, by definition, eats the same species as her/himself) and subhuman (because eating people is seen as animalistic) is paralleled by women who also occupy a liminal position in society.

Brown’s study stops at *Hannibal* (Harris, 1999, and dir. by Scott, 2001) but she makes predictions of where the cannibal might appear next. She guesses that apocalypse fiction may be the next source of cannibals in Anglo-American texts. Indeed, *The Road* (McCarthy, 2006, dir. by Hillcoat, 2009), and *The Book of Eli* (dir. by The Hughes Brothers, 2010) are two mainstream texts that do feature cannibalism as a mode of survival in post-apocalyptic worlds, and they are not the only examples. She also guesses that future cannibal texts may include ideas about anorexia (as the body eats itself from within). However, I would like to argue that although female cannibal texts are not as mainstream as, say, apocalypse fiction, the female cannibal is a significant variation of the cannibal. Brown (2013: 98) admits that, ‘in my research the occasions of women or children performing cannibalism only occur in incestuous family or tribe situations, and they never, unlike male cannibals, act individually.’ In making this statement Brown completely ignores Starling’s cannibalism at the end of *Hannibal* (Harris, 1999) which I discuss more thoroughly in Chapter Three. Although *Hannibal* prepares the meal, Starling accepts and eats the cannibal fare independently and thus her actions nonetheless represent evidence of the female cannibal emerging in a mainstream Western text. Because Brown’s work focuses on Anglo-American texts it precludes the emergence of the female cannibal which, as this thesis shows, was already happening in South-East Asian narratives in the 1990s.

Following Brown’s theory that the cannibal changes in space and time, I argue that from the mid-to-late 1990s, the female cannibal becomes a potent figure giving expression to contemporary anxieties and desires in a range of cultural contexts. In order to explore what cultural work the female cannibal carries out, exposing contemporary fears, desires and anxieties,

it is pertinent to examine some of the major critical and cultural developments such as postfeminist media culture, the postmodern gothic and globalisation. This gives the project a starting point to explore how these texts relate to narrative tropes, national contexts, and debates around gender.

1.2 Postfeminist Media Culture and the Subject

If, as Brown (2013: 181) claims, the cannibal of the late 20th and early 21st century embodied the ‘Self’ then that self was white, male, and middle-class. In order for this variation of hegemonic subjectivity to have changed, one must examine the influence, and potentially the success, of feminism in the 20th and 21st centuries. This potential success of feminism has, according to Angela McRobbie (2009: 49) led to postfeminist media culture – the simultaneous acceptance and dismissal of feminism within popular culture. In this section I discuss the emergence of postfeminism in the late 20th and early 21st century and the critical theories that examine the intersections between feminism, postfeminism and neoliberal consumption. I explore how postfeminist media culture has created a cultural moment in which consumption has become a female-centred, even (arguably) a feminist, act. I discuss how postfeminist media culture has reclaimed femininity as empowering instead of oppressive which is both a feminist re-valuing of femininity as well as, paradoxically, a backlash against feminism. Examining the overlap between neoliberal consumption and postfeminist media culture reveals a wider cultural moment which is characterised by contradiction, exploitation and empowerment. This provides me with a critical context and framework which allows me to analyse the cultural work female cannibals do and how they engage with debates about gender within this period.

Although it is problematic to discuss feminism as a singular entity because of the many varying methods and issues which have dominated different feminist groups, nonetheless feminism has contributed to questioning the Enlightenment construction of the universal ‘I’ (Becker, 1999). Feminists have insisted on women and men being counted as equal subjects both under law and in cultural terms with varying degrees of success. Postmodernist challenges to grand narratives, as well as postcolonial theories regarding racial difference and queer theory, have also helped to destabilise any straightforward relationship between subjectivity and a universal (read: male, white, middle class) self (hooks, 1981; Butler, 1993). These theoretical developments have intersected in various discourses and created new ways of thinking about gender, the most influential of which is the movement within certain feminist thought away from the political struggle for women’s rights towards an anti-essentialist construction of identity, and an exploration of the cultural and material differences between women (Sanders, 2004: 50).

This insistence on the differences between women is a central tension and contradiction within postfeminist media culture, as I discuss below. Critics disagree about the definition of postfeminism, and whether, indeed, it is feminist, anti-feminist, or something else altogether.

Some critics elide it with third wave feminism (Munford, 2004), call it ‘choice’ feminism (Murphy, 2015), or liberal feminism (Kiraly and Tyler, 2015), while others conceptualise it as a cultural descriptor among other things (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009). It is a controversial term with many contradictory meanings. Stéphanie Genz (2007: 70) argues that ‘rather than trying to immobilize postfeminism in a rigid structure of meaning, we should interpret its polysemy as an integral part of its cultural force.’ Postfeminism’s excess of meaning has been key in creating a cultural moment in which feminist rhetoric, gender awareness, and female consumerism are prominent in popular media, both in positive and negative ways. Rosalind Gill (2007) has described this media commodification as a postfeminist media culture and this is the term I use most. McRobbie (2009: 14) suggests that we now live in a cultural moment which takes feminism into account only to dismiss it as unnecessary or passé. This reveals a contradiction across media in which feminism is celebrated but simultaneously disparaged.

Elaine Showalter claims that ‘postfeminism means after a woman’s movement’ (Interview with Gillis and Munford, 2004: 60). She continues by explaining that movements have clear goals which can be achieved through collective action whereas women after second-wave feminism have access to power and have many diffuse concerns which are not necessarily best addressed through an explicitly gendered movement. Showalter’s comment reflects the fact that anti-essentialist discourses central to postfeminism’s cultural construction both acknowledge the differences between women which humanises diverse positionalities but also, arguably, prevents solidarity through a common identity. Postfeminism has been criticised for its lack of collective action because of the individualism which has been one result of anti-essentialism (Munford, 2004; Stasia, 2004; McRobbie, 2009; Murphy, 2015). However, anti-essentialism also overlaps with neoliberal individualism and some critics such as Diane Negra (2009) argue that postfeminism relies on essentialism as it makes a ‘common sense’ argument that women all share the same fears and desires. When anti-essentialist discourse is absorbed into popular culture as neoliberal individualism it posits the ideal female subject as white, middle class, thin etc. through the imperative to consume appropriately which in turn (re)essentialises women. This contradiction – that women are individuals but are compelled to perform femininity in recognised (essentialised) ways – reveals a central tension in postfeminist media culture.

Margrit Shildrick (2004) reminds us that we always speak from some identifiable position but that position is always provisional and contingent, subject to transformation through (re)iteration. Alison Stone (2004) similarly argues that a genealogy of meaning is one way to maintain political action and feminine identification in postfeminism. She claims that although the conception of femininity is a cultural construction, it is not conjured from an immaterial mind; women live femininity, taking up older meanings, appropriating and internalising various threads of interpretation which in turn modify the meaning of femininity. Thus the female body is subject both to acculturation but also it participates in creating and modifying the culture it is in. This

acknowledges women's agency and provides one way of rationalising postfeminist consumption as potentially political. It demonstrates how gender is understood now as a performance which is subject to change, and women's actions and behaviours as generating that change. In terms of reading my texts, it shows how femininity across cultures can be compared as gender ideals have the potential to flow transnationally as articulations of femininity are popularised across global media platforms. It also suggests that cannibalistic consumption across these texts may illustrate the fears and desires related to women's construction of the self through consumption.

By acknowledging female agency within patriarchal culture, postfeminism can be seen as a critique of second-wave feminism, which it characterises as 'victim feminism'. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (2004: 14) argue that the focus on personal empowerment, the use (often ironically) of traditional forms of femininity as a basis for power, and the use of consumerism and cultural production as a platform for feminist change are strategies which take the feminist adage 'the personal is political' to another level. This conceptualisation of postfeminism rejects the idea that the performance of traditional femininity is always prescriptive and oppressive, instead acknowledging the pleasure and production of identity which beauty regimes and suchlike can create. Diane Long Hoeveler is one critic who subscribes to the idea that postfeminism more fully acknowledges women's agency and power in negotiating patriarchal systems to their advantage. Hoeveler (2007: 100-101) argues that 'in its repudiation of victim status, postfeminism seeks instead to position women as canny, flexible survivors of a patriarchal system that they actually dominate and manipulate through a variety of passive-aggressive behavioural strategies.' This positions female cultural production and individual choices at the centre of a postfeminist strategy for change – a strategy which, as I discuss below, is limited.

The ideal subject in marketing terms is now emphatically female. As Gill (2007: 249) has said: 'citizens in the West today inhabit a postfeminist media culture in which women rather than men are constituted as the ideal neoliberal subjects.' Postfeminist media culture relates to the rise of girl power in the 1990s and the idea that women's cultural production and consumerism can drive political and social change as women vote with their purse. Consequently, "feminist" appropriations and reclamations of things such as porn, pole-dancing and traditionally feminine domestic crafts have become common. Gill (2007) argues that through postfeminist media culture, women have gone from being sexual objects to sexual subjects who can 'choose' to objectify themselves to display/exercise power. The emphasis has changed from male judgment to self-policing through the invitation to be a subject on the condition that she matches the male sexual fantasy. Although feminism has fought for the sexual rights of women (for example, through access to contraception and abortion, and women's right to pleasure), the problem with this construction of femininity as the ownership and maintenance of a sexy body is that it rejects critique. As Meghan Murphy (2015: 23) has said: 'Choice without politics or theory behind it

doesn't hold power. [...] "Choosing" to objectify ourselves, for example, is not what our second wave sisters meant when they fought for the right to "choose".'

Karen Boyle (2005: 35) argues, 'If feminism is equated with women's agency, choice and subjectivity, then questions about gender, about structural inequalities, discrimination, oppression and violence are allowed to slip from view.' Many critics of postfeminist media culture similarly argue that claims for the feminine (or feminist) pleasure involved in hegemonic femininity does not challenge patriarchal culture; the appropriation of pole-dancing and porn or the reclamation of make-up art, for example, does not offer any critique or analysis of structural inequalities and intersections of race, class, etc. and furthermore, claiming these pleasures as feminist may actually strip feminist rhetoric of its subversive power (Stasia, 2004; Gill, 2007; Murphy, 2015). Rebecca Munford (2004: 148-149), for example, emphasises that while 'girlie' culture can be a site for agency, confidence and resistance, it can also be on the verge of 'slippage between feminist agency and patriarchal recuperation.'

By acknowledging different groups – whether LGBT, 'girlie', metrosexual male etc. – markets can exploit new demographics and create more wealth by selling lifestyle goods and services. It is easy to be cynical about the extent to which difference is accepted only in so far as those within that group are capable of being consumers. For example, Heywood and Drake (2004: 20) discuss how the search for new markets has glorified difference but warn that 'in this brave new world of niche marketing everyone is valued as a potential consumer, and no one is valued intrinsically. What looked like progress was a fundamental incorporation into the global machine'. In this context, if one cannot consume endlessly, what value does one have?

Indeed, one of the main criticisms of postfeminism is that it is overwhelmingly white and middle class as the basis for an empowered identity is often rooted in being a consumer. Diana Negra and Yvonne Tasker examined postfeminist culture in the introduction to their collection *Interrogating Postfeminism* (2007). They describe how postfeminist culture incorporates feminism and commodifies it in the image of the empowered female consumer. It ignores economic disparities and emphasises work as a 'choice' for women. This is 'anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self. It is also the strategy by which other kinds of social difference are glossed over' (Negra and Tasker, 2007: 2). In other words, systemic equality is replaced by personal empowerment based on the notion of 'choice'. The image-based culture that modern technology has created means that performing your gender is inextricably tied to consumer rights. For example, recent feminist issues in Europe include campaigns to revise the VAT on sanitary products (currently labelled as non-essentials) (*Woman and Home*, 2019), and campaigns to prevent underweight models being used in magazines and on run-ways (Walker, 2009; Skyes, 2017). The unrealistic images of femininity, and unfair cost of being female, are not only about gender-based oppression but exploitation by the media and the markets against consumers.

Consumption is so key to postfeminist culture because it is through consumption that subjectivity is exercised. For Negra and Tasker (2007: 8), 'the construction of women as both subjects and consumers, or perhaps as subjects only to the extent that we are willing and able to consume, is one of the contradictions at the core of postfeminist culture'. This conception of postfeminism is important for my texts because it shows the tensions between a feminist discourse which encourages agency, autonomy and independence and a popular culture which co-opts this language of agency into one of 'choice', and autonomy into consumerist productions of identity. The freedom implied in performing one's gender – the fluidity and instability – is undermined by the demand that those performances be conducted through conspicuous consumption. My texts foreground consumption, particularly women's consumption, and thus they might well comment on the fears, anxieties and desires that this type of consumerist culture elicits in women.

The centrality of consumption to postfeminism is also part of the cultural and economic conditions which shape modern life. Negra and Tasker (2007: 6) claim that 'Like postmodernism, postfeminism involves a particular relationship to late capitalist culture and the forms of work, leisure, and crucially, consumption that thrive within that culture.' Within neoliberal culture, individuals must consume the best resources available in order to conform to the images of the self and success that undermine the very idea of individualism in the first place. This socioeconomic ideology is inherently contradictory, and like postfeminist media culture, straddles an ambiguous line between empowerment and exploitation.

According to David Harvey (2007: 2) 'Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.' The strategies of neoliberalism include market deregulation, privatization and the withdrawal of state-sponsored welfare provision. Subsequently, the role of government changed 'from the provision of social welfare to the facilitation of global trade', including bail outs to failing banking systems and the implementation of public austerity (Blake and Monnet, 2017: 5). Although the results of these strategies have, as Harvey (2007: 19) states, 'not been very effective in revitalizing a global capital accumulation' (instead creating and/or maintaining an economic elite, and widening the gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots'), neoliberalism is packaged as a 'common sense' (Harvey, 2007: 5) ideology that is based on the ideals of personal freedom and human dignity. Thus, the withdrawal of state welfare is framed as the withdrawal of constraints upon individuals who are at liberty to make their own success. Blake and Monnet (2017: 4) claim that 'the neoliberal subject was recast as agent of his or her individual destiny, repeatedly refashioning him- or herself in whatever image the market demanded while being held fully responsible for any failure to prosper.'

Neoliberalism became popular in the late 1970s when it was adopted in China, the UK and USA, and spread globally by policies within the IMF and World Bank. Most countries now have at least some neoliberal policies, whether voluntarily or through coercion from international institutions like the IMF (Harvey, 2007: 3) which I discuss further in the next section. However, neoliberalism is not simply spread through economic infrastructures but has become transmitted as an ideology through the marketing of products and services in ways that are gendered as many feminist critics have discussed (see for example, Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Negra, 2009; Gill and Scharff, 2011).

Gill and Scharff (2011: 6) discuss Nike's 'Girl Effect' campaign as an example of how globalised branding initiatives popularise and exploit welfare concerns. The campaign promotes girls' participation in sport as a way of encouraging self-confidence in girls, following guidance from several NGOs, UN, and UNICEF that investment in girls is a key strategy in ending world poverty. By consuming we construct ourselves within neoliberal society so performance of the self is tied up with consuming appropriately. This means that when we buy products or services we buy into their brand or message. Thus Nike's apparently feminist message supporting girls is a marketing strategy which mobilises certain feminist narratives in order to sell its products. This shows how economics impact upon social and cultural relations, including 'the very subjectivities we inhabit' (Blake and Monnet, 2017: 3).

As I discussed above, postfeminism involves a reclaiming of femininity that was perceived to be rejected by second wave feminists. This is framed as an assertion of power with Munford (2004: 148) claiming that 'For Girlie girls, "femininity" is not opposed to feminism, but is positioned as central to a politics of agency, confidence and resistance.' Indeed, many of the main debates around postfeminist or third wave strategies are concerned with whether (all) self-determining projects can be seen as feminist resistance (see Budgeon, 2011, Murphy, 2015). At the heart of this debate is the recognition that postfeminism responds to neoliberal culture. Heywood and Drake (2004: 13) claim that 'third wave perspectives are shaped by the material conditions created by economic globalisation and technoculture, and by bodies of thought such as postmodernism and postcolonialism.' Gill and Scharff (2011) describe how both postfeminism and neoliberalism have replaced social and political collectivism with individualism. This overlooks the structural inequalities that affect individuals based on their race, class, gender, and so on. This has also encouraged people to be sceptical of essentialising gender, instead emphasising difference between women and rejecting second wave feminism as flawed (whether accurately or not) for conceiving of women as a homogenous (white, middle-class) group. By emphasising difference, neoliberal markets encourage commodification of feminism and femininity and offer a sense of liberation from expectations – whether feminist or patriarchal. Michelle M. Lazar (2011: 49) describes how 'A consumer-based emancipated feminine identity not only rides on the notion of emancipation which originates within feminism but, at the same

time, is also premised upon *emancipation from (second wave) feminism*, as misguided and curtailing of women's realization of their "true" feminine selves.' The neoliberal idea of freedom from state control is thus extended across other ideologies including feminism, despite the fact that it is feminism that initially offered women liberation from patriarchal ideals of femininity. The emphasis on realising a feminine self within a culture that positions the body as project has made femininity a bodily quality. Feona Attwood (211: 203) claims that sexual agency is 'part of a broader shift in which older markers of femininity such as homemaking skills and maternal instincts have been joined by those of image creation, body work and sexual desire.' This locates femininity in the body and emphasises (physical) sexual desirability over practical skills and places the responsibility for creating a desirable body onto the individual.

The responsibility to achieve a successful femininity has the potential to be both empowering and anxiety-inducing. On one hand, this gives individuals at least the appearance of control and rewards of feelings of achievement and self-fulfilment when they are successful. On the other hand, this creates anxiety because a desirable body is culturally prescribed, especially in terms of age and race. Although women are critical of beauty narratives, according to Paula Black (2006: 148), they nevertheless make best use of the resources available in order to achieve an 'integrated sense of self'. Beauty has become a marker of successful femininity and has been framed as something anyone can achieve if they consume appropriately. Thus 'with freedom comes the pressure to succeed' (Black, 2006: 152-153). Several critics of postfeminism explore how the popularity of the makeover television programme plays on the imperative for women to consume the 'right' way in order to embody a recognisable, desirable femininity, and the anxiety and shame that can occur when they fail (Harvey and Gill, 2011; Tincknell, 2011, McRobbie, 2009). McRobbie (2007: 35-36) argues that 'choice within lifestyle culture is a modality of constraint, for the individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the "right choices"'. By these means, new lines and demarcations are drawn between those subjects who are judged responsive to the regime of personal responsibility and those who fail miserably.'

The imperative to achieve successful femininity has become moralistic. While women are implicitly supposed to display a sexy body, beauty has been outwardly reframed as health and wellbeing. The attractive body in the postfeminist era is not simply slim but 'fit' and self-disciplined with the 'unhealthy' body reviled and fat seen as a moral failure (Lupton, 1996; Bordo 1995; DeJmanee, 2015). This kind of body is achieved through both diet and exercise, and the appearance of a 'healthy' body (and the technologies of achieving it) are connected to a 'healthy' mind, both of which are framed as 'virtues' (Negra, 2009: 127). Women, in particular, are encouraged to achieve balance in all aspects of life in order to 'achieve' happiness and a fully-formed subjectivity (see Rottenberg, 2018, and Cairns and Johnston, 2015). Negra (2009: 5) describes how 'Popular culture insistently asserts that if women can productively manage home, time, work, and their commodity choices, they will be rewarded with a more authentic, intact,

and achieved self.’ As feminism, postcolonialism, and postmodernism have challenged the hegemonic narratives of religion and cultural tradition, we have been left to create our own values and meanings. The idea of ‘projects of the self’ has, in most media depictions, overtaken religious or social reasons for ordering our lifestyles. So not only are food choices associated with ‘good’ or ‘bad’ decisions (both in terms of unhealthy or fat bodies but also in terms of ethical and environmental concerns) but other consumer choices are framed as good for the mind and body. The influence of neoliberal economics on postfeminist media culture, then, begins to demonstrate how consumption is central to constructing the self and performing femininity, as well as how it articulates critiques and celebrations of feminism within popular culture.

While neoliberalism is a recurring touchstone for this thesis, I return to it most fully within Chapter Six: *Neoliberal Cannibals and Destructive Self-Care* as I discuss how neoliberal feminism has emerged from postfeminist media culture and has impacted women’s lifecycles. Nevertheless, like postfeminist media culture, neoliberalism relies upon tensions and contradictions which, I argue, are articulated throughout the female cannibal texts.

In the following section I discuss how the economic conditions which have influenced postfeminist media culture have also influenced the gothic on a global level. In this modern world of global capitalism, multinationals, and mass migration, what it means to be a woman is influenced by race, class, ethnicity, immigration status and a whole host of other factors. Understanding the intersections between postfeminist culture, late capitalist consumption, and globalisation is central to exploring the construction of contemporary feminine subjectivities and cultural products.

1.3 Transnational Flows, Globalisation, and the Globalgothic.

In this section I discuss transnational flows and globalisation in relation to the gothic. Gothic critical literature offers tools to read the food horror and atmosphere of unease that these texts employ. Likewise, gothic critical literature offers a way of comparing texts across national boundaries that foregrounds ideas of dislocation which is, again, a central feature of the female cannibal texts. These conceptual tools provide methods with which to explore the research questions in terms of how the female cannibal texts use narrative and generic conventions and how these relate to their national (or transnational) context. I discuss regional and transnational gothics which demonstrates their comparability despite their broad range of origins. Indeed, as this section shows, the uncertain borders and merging of local and global echoes the lack of context I find in the female cannibal texts. As I highlight throughout this section, the neoliberal elements which have enabled and encouraged global flows of capital, people, and information have also influenced postfeminist media culture. Drawing out these threads within this scholarship on global gothics and transnationalism generates connections demonstrating how the

texts are comparable not only through narrative conventions but through postfeminist media culture and the foodways that are similarly influenced by neoliberal economics.

According to Steven Jay Schneider and Tony Williams (2005), where once theorists claimed that the world was undergoing McDonaldisation – a kind of cultural imperialism whereby Western (particularly American) culture was becoming dominant in non-Western countries – critics now agree that the global margins talk back and, indeed, have influenced Western culture in turn. Global flows of money, information/media, people, and discourses have become central to contemporary consumerist economies and the gothic has not escaped this. In their collection *Horror International* (2005), editors Schneider and Williams claim that horror cinema, in particular, has been influenced by international cultural exchanges. They acknowledge that horror cinema has always been subject to international exchanges - for example the influence of German Expressionism on Universal classic horror, and giallo films from Italy influencing the 1970s stalker/slasher films such as *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978) – but they claim that since around 1995:

The situation [...] has changed drastically due to the effects of the new global economy, the decline of rigid national boundaries, and the transcultural phenomenon affecting virtually all sectors of cinema from Hollywood to Hong Kong and beyond. (Schneider and Williams, 2005: 3).

They claim that Hollywood remakes of Asian, particularly Japanese, horror films has been a recent development, encouraged by economics and novelty for Western audiences in the form of new tropes and conventions, and shows that Hollywood (and other Western cinemas) is just as likely to imitate foreign cinemas as to be imitated by them. Schneider and Williams go on to argue that although it is harder to distinguish national cinemas, ultimately, American conventions and style have not ‘won’ but rather national elements are embedded in, and adapted to, global dialogues.

In a recent collection entitled *Globalgothic*, Glennis Byron (2013a: 1) introduced the series of essays by emphasising that the gothic has developed beyond any ‘geographically circumscribed mode’ as an increasingly integrated global economy has encouraged cross-cultural and transnational gothics to emerge. Like Schneider and Williams, Byron (2013a: 3) argues that these exchanges have been ‘multidirectional’ and that globalisation is no longer accurately described by ‘Westernisation.’ Emerging national and regional gothics are based in their own gothic traditions and are in dialogue with international gothics so that the term ‘Gothic’ as it is conceived from the 18th century British tradition is no longer a useful word. Instead, the term ‘globalgothic’ was coined at the symposium which inspired Byron’s collection.

Fred Botting and Justin D. Edwards (2013) go on to explore the conception of the globalgothic in their essay ‘Theorising the Globalgothic’. They argue that the gothic has become

globalised through technology, transnational exchange and capitalism focused on consumption. Furthermore, the global has become gothicised so that any expression of the global is inflected by the language of anxieties and uncertainty common to the gothic. This is because the collapse of blocs, permeability of borders, and threats of super-states cause global repercussions and concerns about boundaries and identity. The unease about identity and place is a recurring theme in this thesis and indicates a fundamental concern of female cannibal texts.

Furthermore, because transnational capitalism will go anywhere for a profit, the nation becomes subordinate to global fluctuations of capital; this decentring of the nation leads to further anxieties about borders and identity which also leads to nationalist backlashes and anti-immigration feeling. Botting and Edwards (2013: 18) claim that the globalgothic responds to these tensions and anxieties:

Globalgothic registers the effects after the interpenetration of global and local has rendered the separation of both poles redundant, thus exploding the myth of a pure globality and shredding the nostalgic fantasy of a return to an untainted local culture.

The globalgothic thus expresses the feeling of ‘unbelonging’ (Botting and Edwards, 2013: 23) experienced by the displaced, by migrant workers, and ex-pat families. The local and global are both inseparable and distinct at the same time. This ‘unbelonging’ is expressed in my texts as a lack of context. While some local features and temporal features occur in the texts, many are transnational, out of place or time, and become uncanny through repetition. The ambiguity and unease due to constantly shifting identities through consumer practices are factors common across a range of neoliberal experience. Similarly, as Chapter Six in particular explores further, this decentring of the nation and anxieties about identity also occur on a personal level as a result of neoliberalism on the individual. This demonstrates how the large-scale anxieties of the globalgothic relate to the personal fears and desires communicated within postfeminist media culture.

Oppression is also decentred in a global consumerist economy – no longer is it clearly one nation subjugating another; now we are all, as individuals, complicit in the exploitation of people and environments across the globe, and that is much harder to resist.

No longer is the fat cigar-smoking capitalist the one who stands behind vampire capitalism, with its repulsive aspect in respect of the living, human workers of the world. Enjoying the freedoms of consumerism, every member of Western culture is enjoined to feed on the rest of the world, expropriating the resources and labour of other countries, presiding, unaware perhaps, over those stripping forests or slaving all day in sweatshops to deliver the outsourced objects of

consumer desire.[...] In consumer culture all life gives itself and its dignities up, willing or not, to vampiric corporate powers for whom humans are victims of exploitation comparable to the very burgers they consume. (Botting and Edwards, 2013: 20).

Botting and Edwards recognise the cannibalism of such a consumer-driven culture which destabilises identities and boundaries, and puts profit before people. They point out how individuals are central to the exploitation of others through their consumerism. In certain contexts, this has driven consumer-consciousness as people try to mitigate their impact on the environment, exploitation of cheap labour, and the use of animal products. Instead of political and legal control over corporations and production, individuals are encouraged to take personal responsibility and vote with their money. Like postfeminism, the onus is on individual choice with collective action secondary to personal ethics. In Chapter Six this becomes a central concern for the female cannibal texts as cannibalism is used for self-care but is nonetheless exploitative. The balancing of personal responsibility for one's mental and physical health, ecological impact, and exploitation of those less privileged is explored using cannibalism as a way to render consumption practices in their barest terms.

Despite the diverse origins of the female cannibal texts, and despite the regional variations that can still be found within different gothics, femininity remains a construction which has overlapping 'chains of interpretation' (Stone, 2004: 86) meaning that while the femininity of the cannibals from various countries have differences which must be acknowledged, they do share common concerns about gender, identity and social roles. Although many countries have different discourses about what is masculine or feminine there is nevertheless a global trend in these conversations evidenced, for instance, by the participation of 189 countries in the UN Women's CEDAW convention for the elimination of discrimination against women (United Nations Treaty Collections, accessed September 2019). The global flows which globalisation allows have created a greater pop-culture awareness of feminist debates and issues from different cultural backgrounds and countries. Postcolonial theorists in particular, as well as advocates of black feminism, have broadened traditionally white, Western forms of feminist discourse (hooks, 1981; Mohanty, Russo and Torres, 1991). In 'Asian Gothic' (2014a) Ancuta identifies several ghosts common to many Asian countries and notes that many of them are female. Their deaths are often associated with childbirth, abortion, rape, madness and suicide. These same issues are, broadly speaking, common to women in the West as well although they come from a different cultural context. Asian popular culture often depicts a rigid social order which can only be escaped through madness, and Ancuta (2014a: 220) claims 'not surprisingly, madness is often seen as besetting women whose lives were broken by harsh living conditions, neglect, and abuse they suffered at the hands of their kin and the state.' In the traditional Western gothic, one of our main

female archetypes is the ‘madwoman in the attic’ who can be interpreted as similarly a result of, or reaction to, rigid gender roles and social structure (Gilbert and Gubar, 1979). While these tropes come from very different contexts, and may have different motivations and symbolic values, they also have similarities which enables comparison.

Adam Knee (2005) also identifies this preoccupation with gender and femininity in Thai horror cinema. Knee (2005: 142) claims that many Thai horror films have twin preoccupations with the past returning to haunt the present, and women’s place in modernity:

These preoccupations, moreover, are intimately linked: the hidden pasts by which these texts are haunted are primarily those pertaining to women’s oppression. The past and the feminine are figured as sources of anxiety through their linkage to the supernatural, an anxiety that these texts choose variously to exorcise or come to terms with.

This preoccupation with women’s place in society and the home is common to Western gothic traditions as well. For example, Helen Wheatley (2006) argues that gothic television production is marketed and produced with women in mind, as these shows share the female protagonist’s audio and visual perspective to explore domestic anxieties in the uncanny patriarchal home. As this thesis shows, the female cannibal texts are also preoccupied with displacement in time and space indicating anxiety and unease, and providing another point of comparison across texts. Additionally, the concern with women and gender in films and media both in the West and in Asia is a product of contemporary culture in which feminism has become part of popular culture in many countries around the world. As Gill (2007: 40) explains ‘feminist discourses are now part of the media, rather than simply being outside and independent critical voices.’ Although Gill is speaking from a Western perspective, the work of Ancuta (2013, 2014a, 2014b) and Knee (2014) demonstrates that the integration of gender-awareness and feminist politics is happening in Asian contexts as well.

1.4 Postmodern Gothic Monsters.

Although my texts range generically from body horror to black comedy, they all use gothic elements and tone. J. Halberstam (1995: 2) argues that ‘Gothic fiction is a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy, and the pure can be known’. He further defines the gothic as a narrative structure and rhetorical style which is used to produce fear and desire in the reader/audience, often through the excess of meaning. I argue that the same economic conditions and theoretical developments which have contributed to the evolution of a postfeminist media culture have also impacted how we perceive monstrosity within the gothic. As ‘normality’ has been questioned by postmodernism, feminism, and postcolonialism, and as gothic tropes have been commodified into

'safe' marketable forms by late capitalism, the position of the monster has moved from savage outsider to banal insider, perhaps becoming trivial and 'fun', on the one hand, or taking on the form of those in the very heart of the home, like the female cannibal. This shift, I argue, is another part of the cultural conditions in which the latest incarnation of the cannibal is gendered female.

I have chosen to label my cannibals as monsters for several reasons. Firstly, although the cannibals are human, they are signifiers of difference and thus are not merely gothic villains such as Ambrosio (*The Monk*, Matthew Lewis, 1796) and Schedoni (*The Italian*, Ann Radcliffe, 1797) who more straightforwardly represent human/patriarchal corruption and evil. Monsters are used within the gothic as sites of interpretation. They are the others against which we define the normal and acceptable, and as a consequence carry an excess of meaning. As I quoted from Brown (2013) previously, cannibals occur periodically as carriers of meaning in this way, each time expanding and modifying the term 'cannibal'. Secondly, as I discuss below, the concept of the gothic monster has developed in the postmodern age and is no longer only descriptive of traditionally monstrous bodies. Where monsters used to be physically and superficially monstrous like Frankenstein's Creature and Mr. Hyde, they can now look 'normal', even beautiful, but still represent a 'category crisis' (Halberstam, 1995: 6) which is productive of cultural and theoretical interpretations.

Gothic theorists such as Fred Botting have acknowledged that the gothic has been subject to commodification and, thus, familiarisation. In *Limits of Horror* (2008: 9), Botting claims that in an age of late capitalism and information-sharing technology the gothic is now familiar and our monsters are no longer different:

Clothes, puppets, masks, lifestyles, dolls, sweets, locate Gothic images in a thoroughly commodified context in which horror is rendered familiar. No longer exceptions, the monsters of and on technical screens are no different from the norms they once negatively defined.

Botting's argument suggests that in a world with very few prohibitions and a suspicion of paternal authority, the transgressive has become the norm. Other gothicists take a less cynical view but still acknowledge that postmodernism and the culture of late capitalism has influenced the gothic.

Writing in 1999, Susanne Becker, for example, claims that the gothic form has had a 'revival' due to modern cultural developments, especially postmodernism and feminism. Becker (1999: 1) points out that this might be 'because it shares with them a radical scepticism concerning the universalising humanist assumptions of modern thought and of classical realism.' Becker goes on to define a neo-gothic characterised by both familiar gothic excess and rebellion as well as postmodern ambivalence which refuses to offer solutions/resolutions. In particular, she describes the gothic as a woman's genre with a long-established tradition of female writers and consumers, and claims that neo-gothic women's writing is politicised through the use of this feminine form

with its intertextuality and challenge to constructions of femininity. While the gothic has always been provocative and concerned with domestic unease, the cultural conditions of late capitalism with its drastically changing roles for women, especially, has meant that the neo-gothic 'reflects the feminine dimensions of the on-going cultural and literary change' (Becker, 1999: 4). Postmodernism, feminism and the gothic have intersected, then, sharing their 'scepticism' and Becker (1999: 6-7) argues that this has resulted in a questioning not just of the 'Subject' (Self) but the essentialist construction of 'Woman':

After all, some of the most striking literary figures of madwomen, daemonic women or of the monstrous-feminine come from gothic texts. In this sense, feminine gothic writing partakes in the more general postmodern challenges to the master narrative of the Subject.

In essence, Becker argues that neo-gothic women's writing challenges categorisations of women as either 'good' or 'bad', 'pure' or 'corrupt', and offers instead ambivalence. This theory demonstrates how cultural and critical developments have helped to complicate subjectivities within the gothic.

Similarly, Halberstam (1995) claims that the gothic is a result of the growth of capitalism, with both 19th and 20th century gothics being obsessed with consumption, excessive production and economies of meaning. Halberstam (1995: 3) argues that 'the monster itself is an economic form in that it condenses various racial and sexual threats to nation, capitalism, and the bourgeoisie in one body.' The monster as a 'meaning machine' has to be everything that is 'non-human' and marginal, and thus they 'make way for the invention of human as white, male, middle class, and heterosexual' (Halberstam, 1995: 21-22). In other words, the classic gothic text can be seen as conservative as it constructs racial and sexual 'others' as monsters which must be overcome or destroyed. However, because monsters have an excess of meaning, this construction of powerful, dangerous difference also allows marginal groups such as women and racial others to identify with, and take power from, the monstrous. The monstrous used to be visible through embodied difference, such as Frankenstein's creature's oversized, sewn together form, Mr Hyde's short and distorted figure or Dracula's red eyes and supernatural movements. Their bodies helped to define the heroes' male, white, able bodies as human and as heroic. While *Frankenstein*, in particular, began to question the nature of constructed monstrosity and the heroism of the human, Dr Frankenstein, for all his failures, never actually kills anyone and feels remorse for his mistakes. Arguably, postmodern texts take this further as the monster becomes more innocent/human and the human becomes monstrous. Indeed, Halberstam (1995: 27) argues that

within the postmodern gothic we no longer attempt to identify the monster and fix the terms of his/her deformity, rather postmodern gothic warns us to be

suspicious of monster hunters, monster makers, and above all, discourses invested in purity and innocence. The monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities.

The need to celebrate difference, and be suspicious of purity relates to the postmodern challenge to grand narratives. The gothic, as part of culture, has helped to influence, and has been influenced by, these theoretical developments regarding the nature of subjectivity and monstrosity.

The disturbance that postmodernism has created within the gothic is focused around the movement of monstrosity from the margins to the centre. On one hand this is illustrated by the proliferation of gothic characters and ideas aimed at children in media and products – for example, *Monster High* dolls, *Scooby Doo* television shows and merchandise, monster-themed films like *Monsters Inc.* (Docter, Silverman and Unkrich, 2001), *Hotel Transylvania* (Tartakovsky, 2012) and more. On the other hand, this normalisation of difference has created an environment where our monsters have become romantic and sympathetic leads. Joseph Crawford's book *Twilight of the Gothic?* (2014) explores the evolution of the gothic monster into a romantic lead. Crawford traces the history of the gothic as a 'romance' and explores how the monster became a lonely Byronic hero, and then a postmodern romantic lead. Crawford (2014: 111) argues that as our views of traditional 'outsiders' have changed, our monsters have become more sympathetic:

horror-monsters have, historically, embodied fears of a variety of threatening cultural Others – “lower” races, sexual “degeneracy”, political subversion, urban criminality, gender nonconformity, and so on – and the representations of such monsters in fiction are consequently liable to reflect changing attitudes towards such groups.

This is similar to Botting's argument that our monsters have become familiar and non-threatening as well as Brown's claim that the cannibal is subject to historical and cultural interpretations.

Postmodern ideas of the marginal becoming less 'othered' have infiltrated the gothic and one result is the growth of the paranormal romance in which there is a tendency towards coherence over disintegration, social integration over alienation, and love rather than destruction. This is based on the concept in late capitalist societies of 'difference without difference', and its aim is 'for people of all lifestyles, ethnicities and sexualities to be united by their common desire to live like white, heterosexual men' (Crawford, 2014: 175). The monsters which used to represent the marginal - the sexual and racial others - are no longer as threatening as culture at large accepts them when they assimilate to other traditional values (e.g. gay marriage can be seen as a normative system to control 'deviant' sexuality in a recognisable institution). Although this

posits the paranormal romance as entirely conservative, Crawford argues that these texts do have the potential to be radical. He cites the backlash over Meyers' *Twilight* series (2005 – 2008) as an example of how the (gothic) excess of wish-fulfilment in these texts can generate more controversy and anxiety than the latest slashers. Furthermore, the concept of 'difference without difference' is not a smooth process as neither tolerance nor assimilation of minorities are always complete, and Crawford explains that monsters in paranormal romance who do not conform, who embrace their monstrosity and destructive potential, are disposed of quickly and without much ado.

Although none of my texts are specifically paranormal romance, I would argue that the familiarisation of traditionally monstrous characters (and the monsterring of traditionally 'normal' characters) is a key trope in the postmodern gothic. Furthermore, the concept of 'difference without difference' is particularly interesting in relation to women's status as both marginal and central to hegemonic cultural understandings. The movement of monsters from the margins to the centre reflects the movement of the cannibal to more familiar, hegemonic subjects. However, this is ambivalent as monsters still define the borders of the 'normal' despite attempts to integrate them. I explore gothic elements throughout the thesis as well as monster theories because these concepts demonstrate the broad underlying theme of ambiguity, and the challenges to the borders of the normal and acceptable which are central concerns of this thesis. Female cannibal texts perform cultural work which challenges women's position in neoliberal society, and the self-construction of the subject through consumption. The texts employ gothic elements as well as humour to illustrate the contradictions and unease of these themes as I explore throughout the thesis.

1.5 Postfeminist Violence and Heroism

Many postfeminist critics have noted the rise of the violent, active woman in all media forms from books and music to television and film, particularly within the action/adventure genre (Stasia, 2004; Coulthard, 2007; Purse, 2011). This figure is arguably a result of third wave/postfeminist reclamations of femininity as part of 'girl-power' which questions the premise that beauty regimes and fashionable clothing are oppressive or debilitating (because of exhaustive self-monitoring). Thus figures like Buffy (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) and the *Powerpuff Girls* combine feminine aspects in both looks and the display of emotions with abnormal physical strength. Stasia (2004), Coulthard (2007) and Purse (2011) all consider the growing use of the female action hero to be part of the commodification of feminism which I discussed previously. Coulthard questions whether the excessive violence of the female action hero offers a false sense of empowerment and liberation for modern women, and whether this inclusion of women in traditionally male heroic roles is simply an attempt to market action films/media to women, thus

exploiting the female consumerist in the same way that the gothic has been widely commodified for children.

Often, women's violence in popular culture is justified by her initial victimisation which also creates audience sympathy. However, violent actions can go beyond rape-revenge or straightforward vengeance, in which case, the initial violence against her is used as a pretext for less traditionally feminine actions. While this can present a liberated figure, Stasia (2004) reminds us that simply breaking the rules does not necessarily change them. Indeed, the radical potential of the violent woman is limited in many ways. Both Coulthard and Stasia argue that the violent woman in action adventure films is divorced from the political; the crimes against her are framed as personal not institutionalised, she may be pre-destined and trained/contained by a father-figure, or she may be highly eroticised or presented as perverse. Coulthard (2007: 172) claims that 'Only rarely are acts of female violence directed outwards as protest, subversive communication, or cultural critique.' While I agree that not all acts of female violence are necessarily subversive, Coulthard's argument is partly based on the conventional resolutions of the action/adventure film. In this genre, the female hero either goes happily back to her family life, vengeance accomplished, or dies/commits suicide which Coulthard claims reduces her actions to the personal or pathological. The postmodern gothic does not offer such resolutions. Indeed, the ambiguity which defines the postmodern gothic means that the justified violence of the female action hero can be subverted in the destructiveness of the gothic monster.

Many of my cannibals begin as 'ordinary' women, much like the female action heroes, but make the choice to become monstrous, sometimes in response to male violence but sometimes for other reasons. The tensions between trying 'to live like white, heterosexual men' (Crawford, 2014: 175), while also maintaining their identities as women, while also avoiding gender-based violence or discrimination are central to the female cannibal text. Their difference is both asserted by any attackers but is also asserted by the women themselves who not only reject victimhood and objectification but who actively use their position as consumers to monstrously (re)assert their subjectivity. As women demand equality and become more recognised as cultural producers and participate as part of hegemonic centres, they also change what these terms mean, demanding a distinctly feminine subjectivity which makes them oscillate between centre and margin, self and other, and human and monster.

Genz (2007) argues that this oscillation between subject and object, victim and heroine also challenges femininity and monstrosity. Genz (2007) discusses how, following from a shift in postmodern gothic towards more humane monsters, monstrosity is often placed onto feminine bodies. Genz (2007: 69-70) argues that the postfeminist monster is sexy, confident and emphatically not a victim; rather she 'inhabit[s] femininity' in order to access power. Genz (2007: 73) is well aware that this plays on a tension in postfeminist media culture between femininity and feminism/power and admits that

In postfeminist Gothic, the resignifications of femininity cannot rid themselves of the threat of phallogentricity, the spectre of heterosexism, as they still function within the same cultural imagery that transfers onto women the labels of inferiority and powerlessness.

Nevertheless, Genz argues that employing traditional femininity in this way destabilises and resignifies femininity as the ambiguity challenges any absolutes. Genz (2007: 74) claims that ‘Oscillating between subject and object, victim and perpetrator, the postfeminist Gothic monster is the embodiment of these battles of signification, a site of meaning in question’. The female cannibal, then, as a female monster, challenges the meaning of femininity, and as a cannibal, challenges the meaning of the human. The texts in my thesis play with the oscillations of power, subjectivity and femininity. The female cannibal text explores the limits of subjectivity and humanity, and expresses a central tension of the postfeminist era – that perhaps, despite feminism’s many gains, nothing has really changed.

Whitney (2016) argues that the postfeminist gothic responds to the ways that postfeminist media culture misrepresents the everyday violence and abuse women still face by celebrating individual empowerment and positioning abuse as personal rather than political. She describes the postfeminist gothic in terms of periodisation which responds to postfeminist media culture and argues that where postfeminist media culture denies inequality and celebrates feminine empowerment, the gothic reveals the fears and anxieties underlying this ideology. Thus, the postfeminist gothic, like all gothic, ‘drag[s] women’s ongoing experiences of spectacular violence up from the basement, forcing our postfeminist culture to confront the monsters it denies’ (Whitney, 2016: 22). Although the postfeminist gothic demonstrates how women are still victimised – and thus, how our culture is not post-feminist – it is nevertheless part of a media culture which refuses to position women as (simply) victims. The complex and ambiguous position this creates demonstrates women’s empowerment and victimisation simultaneously.

The female cannibal texts are part of a cultural moment in which female violence has become common in popular culture while it is often depoliticised and made personal rather than resisting structural oppression. However, Genz and Whitney both argue there is room within postfeminist gothic texts for the monstrosity of women to resignify femininity and reflect back ongoing systemic oppression. This might be achieved through ‘inhabiting’ femininity and revealing the contradictions and ambiguities that underlie postfeminist media culture.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has allowed me to review the existing literature on cultural and critical contexts which have enabled the female cannibal to emerge in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The intersections between postfeminist media culture, globalisation and the globalgothic, the

emergence of violent female characters and the postfeminist gothic, and the movement of gothic monsters from the margins to the centre which is part of a commodification of the gothic, illustrate the myriad influences and contexts out of which the female cannibal operates. This literature allows me to explore how the texts use narrative tropes and relate to national and global contexts, how they engage with debates around gender and culture in the period, and what cultural work these texts do.

In the following chapter I continue to explore the framework of my thesis, examining cannibalism in greater depth, as well as discussing foodways and gender.

Chapter Two: Foodways, Gender and Cannibalism

In order to explore how the female cannibal texts use narrative tropes and relate to national (and/or transnational) contexts, how they engage with debates around gender in the period, and what cultural work they do, I have chosen to read these texts using a combination of feminist criticism and foodways theory. This chapter discusses related literature in order to establish what foodways theory is and how it is helpful to reading cannibal texts. I link this to feminist criticisms relating to women, food and postfeminist reclamations of the domestic. The chapter then explores literature related to cannibalism. This allows me to demonstrate the benefits of reading female cannibal texts using the foodways/feminist framework I develop throughout this thesis. I argue that this framework shows material concerns relating both to the local and the global as well as the individual as it is based on the ways culture is expressed through practical, everyday interactions and behaviours. Combining feminist criticism with foodways not only reveals the ways in which gender affects the ordinary and mundane but also allows me to situate food behaviours and consumption within wider consumer practices and culture. While the concerns raised throughout this thesis have overlap with Brown's (2013) study and other cannibal literature that I discuss in this chapter, this thesis argues that they are nonetheless specific and unique and this chapter provides a framework to reveal the cultural work they perform.

2.1 Foodways

In a careers workshop I attended, the facilitator asked us to consider the production of crisps. Specifically, she asked us to consider how many jobs go into making a packet of crisps. She was amused when the group I was in pointed out the mechanics that work on tractors, fertiliser chemists, marketing executives, printers and ink makers, garbage disposal workers and myriad of other peripheral roles that contribute to the chain of production beyond farmer, pickers, factory workers, distributors and retailers that might be the obvious answers to her question. Indeed, if we consider long enough we might include lawyers and politicians who regulate (or deregulate) trade and labour laws and policies, investment bankers, and many more. This short consideration of a modern food-chain reveals how food is not merely sustenance but is both personal and political and absolutely entwined into the fabric of life on the full spectrum from individual to global. Foodways not only encompasses these material, political and economic concerns but also takes into account the cultural significance of food. Keeping crisps as an example, this food is useful for convenience; snacking; it is a processed food with a long shelf-life and relatively few nutrients; it might be individual serving or a sharing serving – to name a few attributes. These might suggest what type of consumer purchases crisps and why.

Foodways is part of broader food studies, and includes the study of food from concept to production, distribution to preparation, consumption to disposal, and all points in between. It

refers to the various intersections along these (path/food)ways including social, economic, and political concerns, as well as how these foodways construct, and are constructed by, culture, traditions and history. Don Yoder (1972/2015: 30) identified foodways as part of folkways or folklife and he argued that:

The whole subject of food preparation, preservation, and storage, along with actual cooking methods used and the consumption of food, is related to complexes of material objects, which should be viewed against the total culture.

This means that foodways should not simply be viewed as a way of looking at food and cooking but looking beyond those to seemingly peripheral material objects and culture.

David A. Davis (2010: 366) argues that older food studies (like Yoder's) used to use foodways to analyse certain groups of people and how they maintain cultural heritage and ethnic identities through foods, methods and objects traditionally associated with them. However, new food studies uses foodways as an area open to theory and interpretation. This is significant, he argues, because globalised culture has threatened, if not eradicated, associations between specific groups and certain types of consumption in industrialised/post-industrial communities. This destabilisation of food as a marker of identity means that while foodways can still reveal relationships with tradition, history and culture these should be analysed critically to reveal more about how certain groups are situated in relation to others. Foodways therefore encompasses a broad range of intersecting, sometimes contradictory, and constantly shifting concerns. I use feminist theory in conjunction with foodways to situate my texts within postfeminist media culture which encompasses idea(l)s regarding women's consumption, and critically explore how these are expressed in female cannibal texts.

In *Food and Culture: A Reader*, Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (1997: 1) claim:

Food touches everything. Food is the foundation of every economy. It is a central pawn in political strategies of states and households.

Counihan and Van Esterik discuss the importance of food studies and the value of exploring the cultural work food does. In the introduction to the third edition of their collection, *Food and Culture: A Reader* (2012: 1), they explain how although cultural anthropology is one of the main contributors to the field, food studies remains multi- and inter-disciplinary as it 'resists separating biological from cultural, individual from society, and local from global culture, but rather struggles with their entanglements.' This demonstrates how useful foodways is to this thesis as I consider the contradictions of postfeminist media culture and neoliberal subjectivity, the interplay of fears and desires symbolised through female cannibalism, and the broad national contexts which seem to share similar concerns.

Similarly, Julie M. Parsons (2015: 2) claims that foodways shows the multiple modes of practice and ways of 'doing' food by examining movements across time (history) and space (culture). 'Consequently,' Parsons (2015: 2) writes, 'foodways connect the individual with the social through everyday practices.' Reading the foodways of female cannibal texts connects the ideas of postfeminist and neoliberal individualism with culture as the cannibalistic practices can be situated against consumption in the postfeminist and neoliberal media.

Foodways is a growing area of scholarly research and is strongly connected with women's studies. Counihan and Van Esterik (2012: 2) claim the growth in food studies is due to a number of reasons including feminism and women's studies which have legitimised the study of behaviour which has been 'heavily associated with women over time and across cultures'; social consciousness and movements relating to the politicisation of food and consumption; and the depth of the subject which allows scholars to explore a broad range of food-related topics from body and self to material or symbolic, personal or political and more. Similarly, Deborah Lupton (1996: 1) points out the value of food studies when she writes

Food and eating are central to our subjectivity, or sense of self, and our experience of embodiment, or the ways that we live in and through our bodies, which itself is inextricably linked with subjectivity. As such, the meanings, discourses and practices around food and eating are worthy of detailed cultural analysis and interpretation.

Food studies, in other words, reveals not only the material and geopolitical but the individual and the abstract. The cultural significance of food is based in cultural norms, religious edicts, political machinations, and environmental resources but how these are appropriated and used can vary according to class, race, ethnicity, gender, age and many more social identifiers. Baron, Carson and Bernard (2014: 4) argue that food is deeply personal – how we perceive and use foods are mediated by the culture of which we are a part. However, even when sharing a meal, you are alone with your food physiologically, emotionally and psychologically to some extent. Thus, how we individually react to foods, the development of personal taste within given cultural norms and our use of food as a creative outlet can express a great deal of our individual personalities, as well as our identities in wider cultural contexts.

Beyond personal experiences of food and embodiment, food also demarcates boundaries and creates bonds. Sharing food is one of the most basic forms of interaction and communication between people – it suggests friendship or kinship, and is often an excuse for inviting greater intimacy. Food can tell us about the nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, class of a person as well as why they might be eating – for example, as a celebration or as a lunch-on-the-go (which then also tells us about their lifestyles and the culture in which they live). How we get food, how we prepare it and serve it, and how we get rid of waste all tell us about society and culture. Where

we eat, who we eat with, and how we eat (as in, technologies such as forks or chopsticks etc.) are all important indicators of identity. Our food patterns and rituals help to define us and identify us as different from others. However, as I wrote previously, Davis (2010) points out that this has been destabilised somewhat in a globalised age. This collapse of distinct boundaries echoes the globalgothic, as well as postfeminist and neoliberal subjectivity. Furthermore, it evokes the idea of cannibalism which, as Maggie Kilgour (1990: 4) argues, ‘dissolv[es] the structure it appears to produce.’ I discuss cannibalism in the final section of this chapter but it is important to note that the instability of boundaries and subjectivity in this period is a theme which connects strongly with foodways and cannibalism.

Lorna Piatti-Farnell (2017) has written about food in post-1980s horror cinema. Using a psychoanalytical framework, her monograph explores the ways in which food has been used in horror cinema to frighten, disgust, and communicate anxieties of modern consumption. I discuss her ideas about cannibalism in the final section. However, Piatti-Farnell (2017) argues that food horror undermines the normality of food and forces the viewer to confront the abject horror of food and foodways.

Food is abject and unclean, and often defies order. Mary Douglas (1966) describes how food laws in religious texts prohibit foods/animals which transgress boundaries such as camels which chew the cud but, unlike other ruminates, have cloven hooves, or shellfish which live in the sea but are not fish. These laws which come from Leviticus and are the basis of Jewish Kosher laws. The border between the edible and the inedible is not always based on what humans are physiologically capable of eating and is very much part of a system of cultural taboo of which these laws are an example. Cannibalism falls into this category as I discuss later.

Even where food is acceptable and edible, it is always on the verge of becoming unacceptable. Lupton (1996: 3) argues that:

Food is unclean, a highly unstable substance; it is messy and dirty in its preparation, its disposal and its by-products; it inevitably decays, it has odour. Delicious food is only hours or days away from rotting matter, or excreta. As a result, disgust is never far from the pleasures of food and eating.

This preoccupation with the disgusting draws on ideas of the abject which Kristeva (1980) theorised. This thesis does not consider the psychological reasons why food and cannibalism is scary, but rather what work these fears (and desires) do. However, the abject is a concept which is hard to escape when writing about cannibalism, especially female cannibalism. Kristeva claims that abjection is deeply related to food, waste, and the body, especially women’s bodies. In *The Powers of Horror* (1980) Kristeva claims that the original abjection is when we realise we are separate beings from the mother. She goes on to claim that the abject is that which transgresses boundaries, and is therefore ‘unclean’ and ‘improper’. Substances such as blood, faeces, vomit,

ruined food, and dirt are abject because they are things which we must reject/abject in order to live:

These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. (Kristeva, 1980: 3).

Cannibalism obviously transgresses the borders of the self, casting the body as meat, reminding us of death and waste – two very powerful elements of the abject. Food has a similar potential to be abject – as do women.

Kristeva (1980) discusses Mary Douglas's work on food taboos in Leviticus, and points out that in the same section as these food taboos, there are conventions given to govern post-partum women who are similarly considered 'unclean' and contaminating. It is worth noting that the birth of a girl makes the mother unclean for longer. These post-partum regulations are similar to menstrual taboos which exist in more or less overt forms in various parts of the world, which figure menstruating women as contaminating (Laws, 1990). In more extreme cases, women are prohibited from being near, touching, or eating certain foods or being near other members of the community in case they contaminate everyone. Women and food are linked by their potential to pollute the community through their incorporation, and potential to destabilise boundaries. I discuss the gendering of foodways in the next section, keeping this liminal potential in mind. The many perspectives on foodways shows how adaptable it is as a theory. For anthropologists it speaks to real life, when applied to literary and film studies its relationship to culture is at a remove. Cynthia Baron, Diane Carson and Mark Bernard (2014: 5) argue that reading the foodways within film texts (and, I would argue, other media) reveals the texts' politics and relationships to their cultural context:

Scholarship has shown that any film and any aspect of film can be analysed from an ideological perspective. Thus, in the same way that cinematic representations of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and colonial status warrant careful analysis, films' representation of food and food behaviour can be examined to better understand their politics. Moreover, [...] analysing films through the foodways lens produces readings that illuminate their cultural and material politics – even if food never appears in the film.

They claim that food does not necessarily need to be shown in films for foodways theory to be applied as the theory recognises the myriad ways food shapes our cultures and communities.

Bernard (2011), in an earlier paper, combines foodways with Marxist criticism when discussing *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* films which I discuss later. Other film critics have explored

how food can often seem to symbolise sexual appetite. However James Keller (2006: 6) reminds us: 'While scenes equating the gustatory and the carnal appetites abound in contemporary film, food can also be used to signify more broadly'. Keller (2006) argues that food in film can be used to symbolise other sensual, emotional and material appetites besides the sexual. This is significant because of the relationship female cannibals might evoke with *vagina dentata* or the toothed vagina which positions the vagina as a man-eating mouth.

This myth symbolises women's supposedly insatiable sexual appetite which castrates men, or alternatively, shows how they are castrated and have a bleeding wound. Barbara Creed (1999) discusses this figure within her theories on the monstrous-feminine. She argues that the female reproductive body inspires horror and uses psychoanalytic theory to discuss how vaginal symbols are used in horror films to evoke a monstrous-feminine. Like the abject, this idea of women's monstrous sexuality is unavoidably evoked by the idea of female cannibalism but if we bear in mind the broad range of ways that food constructs and is constructed by culture, and the array of behaviours, material concerns and politics related to foodways then this myth becomes less dominant. Foodways provides a way of looking critically at women's consumption without being limited by patriarchal definitions of women as sexual objects and contained by 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980).

One way of analysing the horror of female cannibalism beyond the idea of the monstrous-feminine is to consider broader food horror. Sean Kimber (2016) argues that food-based fears and desires are often evoked in the horror film using a series of overlapping strategies including 'terrible food' – food that attacks people, for example, in *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* (dir. by De Bello, 1978); 'nauseating spectacles' which may include coprophilia or the ingestion of faeces, for example in *Sálo, or The 120 Days of Sodom* (dir. by Pasolini, 1975); 'hideous appetites' for example, vampires and cannibals, or destructive food choices such as anorexia or overeating; 'uncomfortable meals' which might include the famous dining scene in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (dir. by Hooper, 1974) during which Sally is taunted. These strategies to evoke food horror 'employ the symbolic as well as the material characteristics of sustenance and ingestion' (Kimber, 2016: 127). Kimber argues that ideas in food horror include suggestions of theoretical positions including Bakhtin's (1984) grotesque and carnivalesque, Kristeva's (1980) abject, the uncanny and unconscious (Freud, 1919), as well as Douglas's (1966) purity and taboo. These may be combined and can be inconsistent, evoking fears and desires by drawing upon and subverting binaries, and creating boundaries of the acceptable as producers adapt and discover motifs from culture. Kimber (2016: 129) argues that

Horror that makes users think about food, food voices and the food environment engages us ethically, politically and ideologically. This type of horror is linked to fairness, morality, power and inequality; it can also test accepted norms and

values and confront gustatory prejudices and taboos. Horror texts that encourage us to feel something about food and eating have the potential to affect users physiologically and emotionally.

Bearing in mind the ways that food signifies in such broad ways evoking our horror of incorporation and exclusion, the pure and taboo, civilised and savage, and much more, the vagina dentata is only one small part of how foodways and food horror can be gendered. Kimber argues that theories around food horror should not necessarily be seen as discrete ways of reading food in horror film. Although I do not consistently apply psychoanalytical concepts or the theoretical concepts mentioned above to a great extent in this thesis, nevertheless I do occasionally mention these as well as the abject as they are inseparable from the language used to discuss food horror.

This section has explored what foodways is and how it can be applied to texts. It has discussed how it can be combined with other critical theories. I have outlined briefly why I am using foodways to go beyond psychoanalytically based theories like the abject and monstrous-feminine. In the following section I discuss how foodways can be gendered and how women and food are particularly culturally related. I discuss how postfeminist media culture has popularised the idea of reclaiming traditional femininity through consumption and how neoliberalism has tied into this in order to promote eco-friendliness, health narratives and fluid consumer identities as part of a feminist ideal of balance and living equality.

2.2 Women and Food

Women have a particular relationship to cooking and foodways. In most countries around the world, women do the vast majority of domestic labour including child care, cleaning and the provision of food; even in countries where women also work outside the home, they generally do more hours of domestic labour than do men. (UN Dept. of Economics and Social Affairs, 2010: 16-17). Indeed, domestic labour, particularly food preparation, is often perceived to be a woman's task (Lupton, 1996; Counihan and Van Esterik, 1997; Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Undertaking this labour can be both empowering and oppressive to women in different ways and at different times in their lives. The role as primary caregiver is intricately connected to the construction of femininity within most patriarchal cultures and any failures or successes in domestic labour can have implications regarding a woman's status as a woman/wife/mother. This section explores the ways in which women are culturally connected to food and foodways and some of the benefits and disadvantages of this association. I discuss gendered foodways in relation to postfeminist media culture and neoliberalism, and explore how this connects to women's bodies and subjectivities as products of consumption as well as consumers.

In the previous section I discussed Kristeva's theories of abjection and Creed's monstrous-feminine which position women's bodies as threatening and linked to food in various

ways. Women and food share liminal positions as at once good and proper, and threatening and polluting, and both are figured as particularly related to the body. Often women are figured as foodstuffs/livestock as part of both celebratory and objectifying discourse. We can describe a woman as 'sweet' or 'bitter'; we refer to her 'melons', 'rump', or 'meat/tuna taco'; we call her a 'chick', 'dumpling', 'hen' or 'cow' and 'bitch'. This language positions women as objects/livestock to be consumed, foodstuffs which might inspire disgust or desire, and reduces women to less-than human.

Carol J. Adams (2003) has written extensively on the relationship between food advertising and the exploitation of female bodies, describing how many adverts dehumanise women by equating them with animals – both on a sexual level, and on the level of food. Adams (2003: 46) argues that the parallels created between women and animals excuse violent, controlling and abusive behaviour towards both:

Showing women with nonhumans or showing them *as* animals is one way to convey that women are animal-like, less than human, unruly, needing to be controlled. Placing them in positions of subservience is another. Implying bestiality, that women are having sex with an animal is another.

As her title, *The Pornography of Meat*, suggests, the ways women's bodies are represented in pornography is part of this discourse. The consumption of meat/exploitation of animals and its promotion through the commodification of women's bodies is akin to pornography, thus linking the violence of meat-eating with sex (or a certain kind of violent, male-dominated heterosex, and rape).

The equation of women with animals and foodstuffs has produced a branch of radical vegan feminism, such as that supported by Adams (2003), in which the eating of all animal products is perceived to be complicit in the hierarchies of oppression which women (and people of colour) face under patriarchy. Lisa Kemmerer (2011) edited a collection by animal and social rights activists called *Sister Species* which further highlights the relatedness of social justice issues, including feminism and racial oppression, with the oppression of non-human animals. While Deane Curtin (1991) argues for a contextual moral vegetarianism which does not completely rule out eating meat or killing animals – 'Would I not kill an animal to provide food for my son if he were starving?' she asks (Curtin, 1991: 70) – she argues that a feminist ethic of care should be used to understand the choices and relationships open to people in different geopolitical contexts. Curtin (1991: 71) points out that the choice to exploit female animals for milk and eggs within a privileged country such as the USA is not a gender-neutral issue and further argues 'To *choose one's diet* in a patriarchal culture is one way of politicizing an ethic of care. It marks a daily, bodily commitment to resist ideological pressures to conform to patriarchal standards.' These feminists argue that the exploitation of female animals for milk and eggs is

based on the same power structures and misogyny that oppress human females. Therefore, in order to defy and break down these hierarchies, they argue that all feminists should be vegan (where possible).

Although cannibalism is seemingly the polar opposite of veganism as a diet, it can be used to highlight the politics of eating meat and exploiting animals in fiction as Baron, Carson and Bernard (2014: 129-130) argue. Cannibalism in fictional texts illustrates the horrific nature of procurement, breeding, maintenance and slaughter processes which we do not normally get to see in consumer societies. The feminist commitment to veganism opposes traditions within patriarchy in which women are primarily seen as breeders/livestock – evident in primogeniture which I discuss in the following section, and in the difficulties obtaining contraception and abortion services in many countries including the USA where the rights of the foetus attract considerable debate. In the following section I discuss how the idea of women as chattel (animalistic property) links to incest and cannibalism.

However, associating women with animals not only objectifies them but perhaps renders them monstrous which could be a source of power. As I discussed in the previous chapter, in a world where we are encouraged to ‘celebrate our own monstrosities’ (Halberstam 1998: 27) embracing this liminal position between human and animal presents opportunities that the female cannibal illustrates.

The identification between women and food affects the gendering of foods; not only are women perceived to be comestible but certain foods are perceived to be less appropriate for women to eat, or for men to eat. This is particularly evident in the equation of meat-eating with men and vegetarian or ‘lighter’ foods with women in many cultures. Women are associated with sweet foods, especially, although these are also seen as childish and thus infantilising. Vegetables and salads were also perceived to be women’s foods because of their passivity and purity (Lupton, 1996). Similarly, light, delicate foods like white meats such as chicken and fish are perceived to be more feminine and more suitable for women to eat than men. The ‘lightness’ of foods, of course, is incorporated when eaten, playing into ideal of weight management and the fragility of certain ideal femininities. That the cannibals feast on flesh, actively butchering others suggests a critique of these traditional femininities.

Meat-eating, in particular, is interestingly gendered; not only are women more likely to be vegetarian (Atkins and Bowler, 2001: 241-244; Ruby, 2011: 147-148) but the main exception to cooking as woman’s work is the ritual of the barbeque. The combination of fire and red meat evokes a kind of ‘caveman’ masculinity which prioritises hunting, aggression and strength. Meat, particularly red meat, is seen as a masculine food. Perhaps because when we think of food in terms of incorporation (in other words, ‘you are what you eat’) meat comes to symbolise strength, heaviness, and aggression – all terms we tend to associate with men more than women. Red meat, and its associated blood, also connotes passion, indeed, the words ‘carnality’ and ‘carnival’ both

stem from the Latin for meat (OED). This is an important context for the gendering of my cannibals. While men are more likely to be meat-eaters (Ruby, 2011: 147-148), my cannibals are female. In Chapter Three I explore texts which appear to co-opt patriarchal forms of cannibalism – both literal and metaphorical – in a postfeminist strategy to claim power. I argue that this co-option of power does not result in feminist progress but individual empowerment which reveals a certain relationship between feminism and postfeminist media culture.

Cooking and domestic labour was criticised in second wave feminism as oppressive. This unpaid labour kept women in the home. Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) pointed out the ways in which the beginnings of consumerism supposedly designed to aid women's domestic labour actually reinforced an ideal of the housewife. *The Feminine Mystique* has been criticised for its focus on a very specific strata of white, middle class, educated women and its lack of acknowledgement that the goal of going out to study and work is supported by the labour of less privileged working class women caring for middle class homes and children at the expense of their own (hooks, 1984). Nonetheless, it demonstrates an early second wave criticism of domestic labour.

Cooking, particularly is framed as a caring act with meals tacitly considered as a gift. While this creates an opportunity for women to demonstrate love and become respected for their efforts (the greater the skill and effort the greater the gift in most cases), it also can cause great anxiety. The idea that a wife's cooking is not as good as the mother's relates not only to the skill of the cook but perhaps also to the perceived amount of love and care which went into the meal. This idea is not often articulated but when care is not taken in food preparation its absence is noticed. Conversely, when food is rejected, criticised or the preparation devalued, the love (as well as the physical effort) involved is denigrated. This rarely acknowledged status of food as a gift of love can cause severe anxiety for whomever is cooking.

Women in Britain and USA interviewed by Marjorie DeVault in 1982 (1991, in Counihan and Van Esterik, 1997) repeated a desire to provide 'good' food or a 'proper' meal for their husbands and children even when it was inconvenient or not needed. Making

a sandwich for them did not seem like 'enough'. DeVault's study also revealed that abusive partners used perceived faults in the timing or content of a meal as an excuse for violence or other abuse which emphasises the connections between food preparation and the perceived role of women as servants to men's needs. The women in the study reported that they often deferred to their husbands' or children's tastes or preferences instead of what they wanted to cook even where there was no threat of abuse. Many worked around the anxiety and inconvenience this created because they wanted to use food to show love and care as part of their role as wives and mothers, and yet many acknowledged that this was taken for granted.

While other cultures also see food as a gift (discussed below), there are other anxieties as well. For example, women in some areas of South America such as Chile, Bolivia and Peru have

set up community kitchens turning private activity into a public one, encouraging entrepreneurialism and greater sense of community. However, some women may be excluded from this as they need their husband's permission to participate (Meah, 2014). There is also a fear that men who try to cook will not do it 'right' which indicates that women have invested a lot of their identity and self-worth in the ability to cook and provide food for their families, according to studies of Punjabi, European and African-Canadian women (Beagan et al., 2008; Metcalfe et al., 2009; Wills et al., 2013).

Added to these anxieties around investing time, thought and labour into cooking and negotiating family politics, domestic labour is often taken for granted. As Atkins and Bowler (2001: 311) point out, although cooking is an important skill, 'such reproductive duties have always been shunned by men and given a lowly status by society at large.' The exception to this is professional cooking in which the title 'chef' has masculine connotations. In the USA in 2013, only 20% of head chefs were women (Harris and Guiffre, 2015). This is not a choice about working in the food industry, Harris and Guiffre (2015) argue, as women make up the majority of low-waged, low-status food jobs such as cafeteria workers and fast food cooks. They argue that significant energy goes into making the professional kitchen a masculine domain in order to maintain prestige for the profession as when a job is defined as feminine it loses value and lowers the wage (e.g. clerking became secretarial work and lost both prestige and pay). They also argue that because cooking is considered an everyday feminine skill, chefs experience precarious masculinity and choose to emphasise the masculine traits of professional cooking such as 'innovation', a military history, and the intensity of labour in a professional kitchen.

However, cooking can also be a source of power for women. The ability to control (more or less) how food resources are used, how and when they are cooked and served, and how much each person receives is a powerful position for women –

Control of food across history and cultures has often been a key source of power for women. Several authors have noted that women's ability to prepare and serve food gives them direct influence over others, both material and magical. (Counihan and Van Esterik, 1997: 3).

Counihan and Van Esterik point out that this relationship between food and power is reflected in myths of witchcraft. The Mexican Inquisition, for example, noted that 'women made men "eat" their witchcraft' (Counihan and Van Esterik, 1997: 3). Similarly, Lupton (1996: 2) notes how the magic of cookery is not just the application of heat and the mixing of substances to make them more edible, instead it is a moral process which involves the 'taming and domesticating' of raw, natural ingredients into cultural, civilised meals. Although this thesis does not consider witches or the supernatural, taken in more abstract terms the idea of food as magic illustrates the power food has in our lives. As gatekeepers to this secret power, women have a

central role in preserving cultural traditions and monitoring the health and wellbeing of their communities. Similarly, Meah (2014) points out that in Bengali-American homes food has connotations of gifting and sacrifice when it follows Hindu traditions in which women confer blessings and a connection to the divine through offering and blessing food.

Marvalene H. Hughes (1997) describes how 'soul foods' were preserved through oral traditions being passed from African slaves in the Americas down to their daughters. Soul cooking relies on the instincts of the cook, using fresh foods, and the emotions she puts into her cooking. According to Hughes, the concepts of being 'big and beautiful' are African ones as 'plumpness is a symbol of the wonderful job which she is performing' (Hughes, 1997: 273). The belief that the positive (or negative) emotions of the cook are consumed as part of their food has similar connotations to witchcraft making the job of the cook one of immense importance to the community/family as she then has the ability to affect everyone for better or worse.

This role also has cultural power as by passing down recipes from mother to daughter, women take on the task of cultural preservation. Studies have shown that when people migrate their diet is more resistant to change than language or other cultural markers (Atkins and Bowler, 2001: 273-274). Partly, the preservation of culture through food relies upon women sharing recipes with their daughters and others in the kitchen. By controlling this aspect of the family's diet, women can determine the level of integration into a foreign community, and/or carve out space in that community for their identity by sharing or selling her ethnic foods.⁴ Indeed, Hollows (2008, 60) points out that

Domestic practices do not take place within a pre-given entity such as "the family", "household" or "home", but instead [...] the meanings of home and family are produced, reproduced and negotiated through domestic practices.

The kitchen can be a powerful cultural space in which women may have dominion; depending on the organisation of domestic life it may be a space for women to talk openly with each other away from men, a place for gossip, ritual, and indulgence otherwise prohibited or censored.

Where some second wave feminists criticised the oppressive nature of domestic labour and called for women's work to be re-evaluated as skilled work that is central to society and economies, the relationship between women and domestic labour in postfeminist media culture is contradictory and ambivalent. On one hand, there is a retreat back to the home and a commodification of women's traditional homemaking skills as women attempt to profit from the

⁴ As I discussed above, professional cooking is often a male province. However, women may hold parties and contribute food to community events which are more traditionally seen as feminine pursuits and subject often to feminine authority such as the Women's Institute who often judge bakery contests and so on.

new value of traditional skills and crafts in a neoliberal market. On the other hand, this again idealises women as homemakers, a position which depends on privilege.

In a postfeminist era, the magic of women's domestic skills is glorified in contrast to the working professional. Diana Negra (2009) claims that middle class women are 'retreating' back to traditional feminine roles in the face of harsh capitalist conditions and disillusionment about the results of feminism. As one heavily pregnant comedian (ironically) put it:

I don't want to lean in, okay? I want to lie down. I want to lie the fuck down. I think feminism is the worst thing that ever happened to women—our job used to be no job! We had it so good! (Ali Wong, *Baby Cobra*, 2016).

Negra (2009: 27) points out that feminism is often a scapegoat for the economic conditions which mean women must work harder for less money and less time to enjoy family life and the benefits of feminism. However, this is complicated because the return to feminine domestic roles can also be seen as the successful feminist renegotiation of the meaning of success and the value of domestic labour. One postfeminist cultural outcome of this tension is the 'cult of mom' or the professionalisation of motherhood and domestic labour.

Negra (2009) argues that being a mother has become valued to the point of fetishisation in postfeminist cultures. Middle-class motherhood is now a very specific identity which includes cultivating every talent in a child, guarding them from every predator from paedophiles to allergies, and understanding every facet of behaviour and illness. Beyond this, mothers are now also encouraged to be 'yummy mummies' or 'MILFs'⁵ which illustrates the patriarchal-capitalist need for women to be continually attractive to men by being an ageless consumer through the purchase of anti-aging products and the continued purchase of beauty services, sexy lingerie and clothing, and lifestyle products. While it can be empowering for many women to still feel like a 'woman' rather than just a 'mother' after childbirth, it also creates social pressures relating especially to thinness which were not as prevalent when a 'matronly' body was a positive thing. The requirement to lose the 'baby bump' is evident in celebrity gossip magazines marketed at women who often feature detailed commentary on the status and shape of celebrities' bodies in the days after childbirth.

The moral imperatives relating to feeding children are part of broader neoliberal imperatives that have positioned food and consumption in moralistic terms. One could argue that the decline of religion, as well as movements like feminism and the sexual revolution of the 1960s onwards, contributed to a shift in postmodern cultures towards food as a sign of morality instead of sex. Rosalyn Meadow and Lillie Weiss (1992) argue that where Anglo-American women of the 1950s and before used to obsess about how 'far' to go sexually, women from the 1960s

⁵ 'Mother I'd Like to Fuck'

onwards obsess instead about food. They claim this is a concern with the effect food has on the construction of a desirable body. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Gill (2007) claims that postfeminist femininity involves constructing and maintaining a sexually desirable body – objectifying the self – in order to be an empowered subject. Food is a central way in which women control their bodies through consumption.

Consumerism's moral dimension extends to judgements on the body as others can guess levels of self-discipline, self-indulgence, efficiency, hard work, affability and so on through the appearance of the body. Sometimes these signs are contradictory as older discourses around fatness still have cultural valence despite newer understandings of fat – so for example, a fat person might seem 'jolly' like Santa Claus, in one circumstance, but in another might seem to be lazy because they have not made successful efforts to become thin (Klein, 2001). While these moral judgements are applicable to men and women, the perception of femininity through appearance is paramount. As women's gender roles have been changing in many countries around the world due, in particular, to feminism and late capitalism, the way to display femininity has become not what a woman is allowed/able to *do* but what she *looks* like. While body size and weight are only a small part of the rituals which contribute to the performance of femininity, the politics of appearance have economic and social significance which can affect if and where a woman works, and her social status. Thus, the rituals of femininity as well as weight management and food behaviours are important cultural indicators of the construction of the self through consumerism.

Klein (2001) discusses Hillel Schwartz's conjectures made in 1986 that diets do not work. Schwartz argues that on the surface, the relationship between dieting and capitalism seems paradoxical because dieting requires we consume less, not more. However, he argues that dieting frustrates the appetite, thereby increasing it and stimulating more consumption when the diet fails. This type of claim has gained popularity so that now dieting has become secondary to the use of 'superfoods', 'healthy alternatives', and health fads such as 'juicing' or eating raw foods. Orbach (2009: 97) claims that 'with dieting beginning to be frowned on, feature writers offer ways to analyse your food allergies, construct eating plans to avoid them and take supplements to enhance personal immunities. This ruse is dieting by another guise'. Women are more likely to associate body dissatisfaction with low self-esteem (Furnham et al., 2002). This may indicate that the body is a central element of identity for women, and so the false promises of dieting and other disordered eating behaviours have a negative impact on women's sense of identity when they inevitably fail.

Many feminist commentaries such as Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990) blame media influence for women's eating disorders and negative body image. Wolf argues that the rise of the beauty industry is not about looks but about controlling women's behaviour after the successes of feminism. This has been criticised by Paula Black (2006), however, as placing

women in too passive a position, and fails to account for class and race, as well as ignoring the ways in which women are already critical of the beauty industry even while they participate in it. Black (2006) discusses the reasons why women participate in the 'beauty myth' if it is so harmful to them. She argues that although women are sometimes critical of the beauty industry they want to make best use of the resources available to them. They do this in order to create their gendered identity through these practices:

In this sense, her subjectivity as a woman is created and ensured by attention to these disciplinary practices. In a society that genders its subjects into binary categories, there is no other way of being outside of masculine and feminine. In order to achieve an integrated sense of self, and to avoid both formal and informal sanctions attached to any disruption of this gender order, the woman must achieve both an internal and external femininity. (Black, 2006: 148).

The emphasis Black puts on women making the most of the resources available goes some way to explaining the growth of the beauty industry. In postindustrial economies women have more money to spend as well as more time for themselves (Black, 2006: 152). Black argues that because in postfeminist terms women *can* 'have it all', we often feel like we *should* 'have it all', and that includes displaying beauty as an indicator of success.

Indeed, maintaining femininity in a postfeminist era is a challenge that has consequences not only on how women look but what women do. Some women can use their race/class privilege and feminine skill-set to negotiate these discourses of beauty but nevertheless, women face many, often contradictory ideals, about how they should look and behave. Cairns and Johnston (2015: 32) argue further that women must pursue ideals without seeming to be too invested in them as 'there is a thin line between hegemonic and pathologized femininities.' They argue that 'Even as thinness is equated with health and responsible citizenship, the embodiment of healthy femininities is complicated by the neoliberal imperative to consume' (Cairns and Johnston, 2015: 90). This means that women must balance consumption carefully, avoiding over-consumption but not appearing to be too restrictive (and thus disempowered).

However, the contradictory nature of postfeminist culture offers multiple ideals framed as 'choice' which often share underlying features. As women 'retreat' back to the home, the emphasis is on managerial skills, and traditional crafting such as quilting, knitting, cooking and preserving/canning (Negra, 2009; Hollows, 2006). Negra (2009) argues that these skills valorise domestic labour through an emphasis on skill, but they also offer alternative discourses of the body. Sexiness, the most important facet of femininity in postfeminist/post-sexual revolution times, can be achieved through appeals to the sensuality of domestic labour and cooking making fatter women more acceptable in an age where thin, lean female bodies are generally more desirable/acceptable:

New rhetorics of domestic practice symbolically extend the female body to include the home, and as a result housekeeping and cooking become classified as embodied, sensual acts. In this way postfeminism redresses the crisis over the female body, subject as it is to intense, deeply anxious and often conflicting discourses of management, regulation, and surveillance. The postfeminist domestic body is relaxed, integrated, bountiful, connected to nature and to others. It is healthy and free from the stress of weight management as is suggested by the fact that both [Nigella] Lawson's and [Rachel] Ray's bodies are voluptuous in a way that television seldom sanctions. (Negra, 2009: 130).

The important connection between the fit, lean body-type of the ideal professional woman, and the voluptuous, sensual body of the homemaker (although these are not necessarily discrete categories) is the emphasis on sexiness and sexual desirability which is illustrated through the body-type. The slim body, on one hand, illustrates the desirability of 'genderless human capital' (Rottenberg, 2018) while the voluptuous body becomes acceptable, on the other hand, because it is connected to marketable skills and motherhood. Essentially, these differing body-types are acceptable for the same reasons – they are marketable and contribute to the neoliberal market through labour, reproduction and consumption. Femininity (now synonymous with sexiness) must appear to be effortless; Nigella Lawson, for all her curves, is never shown to be in a sweaty frazzle over a steaming pot. And, after her drug habit was revealed in 2013, Nigella's return to television included a thinner shape and 'healthier' recipes – perhaps illustrating her new self-control. Similarly, fat women unconnected to domestic skills and ideal motherhood – for example, women who order takeout instead of cooking – do not enjoy the same benefits of this postfeminist 'type'.

For Joanne Hollows (2006) this retreat back to the kitchen for middle class women is as much about fantasy as reality. She discusses how highly educated, feminist-influenced, professional women dream of a different life 'making jam'. Again, these are highly reliant on class stratification as women who have means can 'downshift' to a life out of the 'rat race' of urban life. Hollows points out that rural and urban femininities are perceived differently. The perception of a 'country woman' as being more robust, as well as the romanticising of female domestic skills, and perceptions of moral superiority for leaving behind 'consumer society' might well be part of the attraction of this fantasy. This ideal feeds into neoliberal individualism and its insistence that consumers should be individually responsible for their impact on the environment and exploitation of labourers which I discuss more fully in Chapter Six. Hollows argues that this fantasy is about deciding *not* to 'have it all' but relies heavily on class privilege as middle class femininities are a product of the choices these women have to stay at home or work, and to engage in paid-work or unpaid-work. For women of means these really are 'choices' but to others there

is only fantasy. Indeed, Hollows points out that for women who have inherited middle-class there is less social risk involved in leaving paid work but for women who have climbed the social ladder, leaving paid employment puts them at risk of losing social capital. The anxieties of negotiating femininity through these every day practices and consumerism is a theme central to this thesis as the female cannibalism is used to illustrate the negotiation of constructing femininity through consumerism and domestic practices.

This section has begun to explore the ways in which women are related to food and animals through objectification, and how this might be an ambivalent position which can be exploited for empowerment. I have discussed the ways that food and gender intersect in every day practice and how this can both oppress and empower women. This provides context for interpreting the consumption of the female cannibal. I have related this to feminism and postfeminist media culture to show how the contradictions of these ideologies can produce anxieties and desires which might contribute the cultural work the female cannibals do. In the following section I discuss cannibalism and how it has been read previously; how foodways can be applied to cannibalism; and how it relates to women's experience as food/property which speaks to themes of incest and what it means when women consume.

2.3 Cannibalism

In this section I explore the meanings of, and theories about, representations of cannibalism. I discuss the ways in which the cannibal figure carries out cultural work, particularly through its ambivalence and contradictory nature. This highlights the ways cannibalism is linked to inequalities and oppression, especially exploitation of marginal groups, as well as being framed in the more positive terms of communion. Incest is a theme which is implicated in cannibalism and the discussion of this is central to this thesis. I consider how representations of cannibalism have been read which gives some context as to how the female cannibal departs or continues tropes from previous manifestations of the cannibal figure.

Kristen Guest (2001: 1) argues that 'representations of cannibalism help us to produce, contest, and negotiate our identity as subjects.' This is because cannibals are figures which illustrate 'difference'. However, Guest claims that cannibals are even more productive as symbols for the permeability and instability of boundaries and borders. Cannibalism is used to show the contradiction of the mainstream, critique mainstream practices and construct oppositional perspectives and identities outside the mainstream. It can be either a symbol of oppressive power or of radical defiance – or both, I would argue. Cannibalism does this because it challenges the idea of binaries. 'The idea of cannibalism,' Guest (2001: 3) writes, 'prompts a visceral reaction among people precisely *because* it activates our horror of consuming others like ourselves. Ultimately, then, it is the shared humanness of cannibals and their victims that draws our attention to the problems raised by the notion of absolute difference.' Cannibalism, in other words,

unavoidably positions the consumer and consumed as the same – both are human, both are animal – and thus challenges the very concept of the binary between human and animal, monster and victim.

Guest (2001: 3) claims that the instability of the cannibal figure ‘gives voice’ to marginalised groups. As Brown (2013) discussed, 18th century narratives involving ‘savage’ cannibals did question the brutality of the white colonisers even while they were innocent of cannibalism themselves. Cannibalism has always been implicated in economics, imperialism, and the feeding of empire since the word was conceived. Indeed, that we use the word cannibalism instead of anthropophagy tells us a great deal. According to William Arens (1979: 44), ‘Cannibal’ is a bastardisation of ‘Carib’ which occurred during the Spanish conquest of the West Indies. During their explorations, the Spanish encountered natives who seemed to accuse the natives of neighbouring islands of eating other humans. Although enslaving the natives was not permitted, the rumours of ‘cannibals’ gained ground and the Spanish monarchy gave permission for any cannibals to be enslaved as part of a ‘civilising’ process (Arens, 1979: 49-50). Thus, it was in the interests of European imperialism to accuse the natives of the Caribbean of widespread cannibalism. In *The Man-Eating Myth* (1979), Arens claims that these tales of foreign cannibals were almost certainly false; the evidence and ‘eye-witness’ accounts are flawed at best, and faked at worst. Although his claims created a deep debate within the field of anthropology what is clear is that, true or false, white Europeans benefited economically from the idea that people of colour were subhuman and therefore acceptable to exploit.

Cannibalism has had different connotations and been used as metaphors for various social and economic problems ever since. Because of its history, it is primarily linked to the economics of conquest, and power. Food can be key to political strategies and social movements such as the boycotting of sugar by abolitionists, the throwing of tea into Boston harbour, and various state-sanctioned embargoes. This fundamental relationship between food and trade or economics makes cannibalism a very potent metaphor for the exploitation of the locals and/or producers which is often involved in imperialist enterprises. Cannibalism, in these cases, symbolises a particular kind of power linked to the life and death nature of being able and allowed to feed oneself. For example, Jonathan Swift parodied this relationship between economics and exploitation in 1729 in his pamphlet, *A Modest Proposal*. Swift suggests that the Irish poor rear and sell babies and youths to the wealthy English as food, satirising the oppression already happening across the country. The power of the British over the Irish meant that mismanagement of land, among other things, produced less food – indeed, the potato (coincidentally discovered in the Spanish conquests of South America) became popular in Ireland throughout the 1600s after lands were burned and animals killed by the British to put down Irish uprisings (Pomeranz and Topik, 2006: 136-137). Comparing the British to cannibals drew attention to the barbarism of the

economic and political policies which were effectively indirectly eating-up the Irish as their starving bodies consumed themselves.

Later in the century, Thomas Paine compared the aristocracy to cannibals in his *The Rights of Man* (1791). Primogeniture meant that only the first son would inherit wealth and property while any other children were left to a dog-eat-dog slog and intermarriage to maintain their status and lifestyles. Thus cannibalism was again connected to the economics of power and, also, to incest.

I use the term incest instead of child sexual abuse, intra-familial abuse or rape although these are all implicated in the term, despite its euphemistic nature. Incest, like child sexual abuse or rape, is about power, and involves violation and betrayal by those meant to protect and nurture but does not specify an age-range or one particular act and therefore is a more flexible term to use in relation to my texts which show a range of incestuous abuse occurring to children and adults. Additionally, within cannibal literature and food theories, incest is the term most commonly used – as Levi-Strauss (1981: 141) states, ‘cannibalism is the alimentary form of incest.’

Incest has been used to talk about colonialism, Marxism and other political situations, but for many young girls especially it is a daily reality. Feminist analyses of incest like those carried out by Herman and Hershman (1981), Louise Armstrong (1996), or Sarah Nelson (1987) suggest that it is a common crime against pre-pubescent girls from ages usually between 6 and 9 onwards but some have been younger still (Nelson 1987: 17). This crime has historically been seen as part of certain cultures and early feminist critiques describe how some psychologists have claimed that the girls seduce the fathers; that there is no long term damage unless it is damage done through intervention, tearing the family apart and demonising this “act of love” (Nelson, 1987: 51-52). These early feminist critiques point out that where incest was viewed as a crime, the mother was often blamed for being frigid, absent or otherwise unavailable to service her husband’s needs – practically forcing him on the daughter (Herman and Hershman 1981; Nelson 1987). Of course, the feminist analyses offered by these writers frame these responses as maintaining the patriarchal status quo, refusing to place the blame on the shoulders of the men responsible, and acknowledge the long-term damage that can occur as a result. These feminist analyses of incest orient my reading of incest as a material crime against women and girls. Incest is not (simply) a metaphor for cannibalism but cannibalism may be a way to explore the power dynamics of incestuous rape.

I discuss incestuous abuse throughout the thesis, using the idea of a spectrum of abuse. This allows me to explore how subtle gestures like hands on shoulders and proprietary behaviour on the part of a father figure can be read as one end of a spectrum of abuse which is linked to rape or murder at the other end. Identifying less overt behaviours as having the same meaning and effect as the more extreme or obvious forms of abuse is central to addressing rape culture and

everyday misogyny. Thus, identifying the incestuous behaviours in these cannibal texts reveals cultural work related to a commentary on the continuing inequalities of patriarchal abuse.

Incest is a form of power which is exercised over the vulnerable, particularly dependent women. One form of this type of incest, as Paine (1791) points out, is marrying close family members in order to maintain wealth and power within the control of one family (or a patriarch). Poor families, especially cannibalistic ones like the mythical family of Sawney Bean, were also accused of being incestuous. The father (usually) has control over his brood, his 'ownership' extending to the rape of his offspring. Both cannibalism and incest are signs of otherness and difference; both display a preoccupation with the sameness of the group, and are acts which attempt to condense power – e.g. the 'purity' of royal blood; the 'ownership' of daughters by the father.⁶ As a consequence, cannibalism within cultural texts is often accompanied by references to incest. Because cannibalism 'gives voice to the diverse marginal groups it is supposed to silence and questions the dominant ideologies it is evoked to support' (Guest, 2001: 3), gendering the cannibal female has the potential to use the ambiguity and contradictions of cannibal narratives to explore power and oppression related to women as sexually comestible objects, giving voice to women's exploitation.

The instability of categories is suggested by cannibalism which posits the human as both eater and eaten, as well as by incest which situates daughter as both offspring and mate. These taboos are in place to maintain social order by defining the limits of the acceptable. Transgressing this order is considered abject. Thus, when economic policy and social relations are linked to cannibalism (and/or incest) their abjection is made apparent as a political strategy to make systems such as primogeniture or exploitation of colonies/imperialism unacceptable and beyond the pale. Thus reading cannibalism and incest in the female cannibal texts should reveal the politics of, and commentary on, postfeminist media culture.

Maggie Kilgour (1990) has explored the ways that cannibalism dissolves boundaries by reading cannibalism as an act of incorporation. Food and eating are highly fraught activities when one considers how we perceive the limits and boundaries of ourselves. The question of where one begins and ends is threatened by the act of eating. What is not me becomes me, and I become it (as fatty foods will make me 'fat', and healthy foods will make me 'healthy'), and then just as quickly, the waste becomes not me but comes from me. At what point we draw a limit can be a fraught exercise. This naturally becomes even more complicated when the food in question was once another person with a distinct personality and physical boundaries. If I eat my mother will I become her or will she become me? Kilgour (1990) argues that the ambivalence of this question often goes towards cannibalism instead of communion in the west as the modern individual

⁶ While other forms of incest exist, in the literature I am examining it is primarily this relationship which is most often exploited.

wishes to consume without being consumed or becoming that which they have consumed. This is not just about eating but about incorporation; what I take in from the world becomes part of me. Thus, eating adopts a moral dimension; the outward appearance of a body may indicate what it ingests, and may be civilised or grotesque, disciplined or unrestrained, healthy or unhealthy, a site of contamination or purity. As Kilgour (1990: 4) discussed, the anxieties of individual incorporation are reflected within the body politic as reluctance to assimilate outsiders/Others into the centre, while at the same time nothing may be outside the centre as the very idea of outside is terrifying. This tension between inside and outside is reflected in the concept of ‘difference without difference’ (Crawford, 2014) that I discussed in the previous chapter. Others must be continually incorporated to protect against the idea of the absolute other/outside, while at the same time, their difference is a representation of the outside and makes incorporation into the centre difficult to say the least. The tension lies between an identification or communion with that which is admired and the destruction of the other in the pursuit for complete autonomy. This relates to postfeminist media culture’s debates around femininity and the tension between whether the reclamation of traditional femininities empower or oppress.

Just as Brown (2013) argues that the cannibal has become the Self, Priscilla L. Walton (2004: 3) claims that ‘the segue [of the cannibal from savage other to westernised figure] indicates the ways in which the fear of the Other is brought home, domesticized, made both more familiar and more insidious. Consequently, as the threat is brought home, so is a transition from the cannibal as object of the gaze to the cannibal as subject *with a gaze*.’ Although Walton addresses the cannibal in the more abstract terms of disease, anorexia/starvation, and consumer practices, she argues that the cannibal has been impacted by globalisation. Walton (2004: 4) argues that to make cannibal credible to a modern audience it is no longer awaiting discovery but is ‘a discovering and active subject, demonstrative of cannibalistic migrations from ‘elsewhere’ to the home space (once the ‘elsewhere’ comes to signify in ways that render earlier characterizations incredible).’ That is, as the west has become decentred and global flows of money, information and people have increased, the cannibal can no longer belong to a distant ‘elsewhere’. In line with the increasing humanity of monsters that I explored in the previous chapter, the cannibal has become integrated into modern life, making it at once more threatening and more familiar.

Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper (2017: 5) claim that

Undead beings that feast on the flesh and blood of the living fascinate and terrify because they are visibly, tangibly Others. Living, fully human cannibals add another dimension, concealing their Otherness behind a mask of utter normalcy.

This ‘normalcy’ which Brown (2013), Walton (2004), and Miller and Van Riper (2017) all allude to reveals how the cannibal has been adapted to function within the contemporary culture in the same way as individual consumers are encouraged to take responsibility for their consumption

because, as Edwards and Botting (2013: 20) describe, all are implicated in the exploitation and oppression of environments and people around the globe.

This return to class power and exploitation of those less privileged is reflected in much cannibal commentary. Mark Bernard (2011) produced a critique of three of the films in the *Texas Chainsaw* franchise, using foodways to examine the class ideologies at these points in the series. He argues that the changes in food behaviours surrounding the cannibalism of the families 'signal larger shifts in how the films depict issues of ideology, class and power' (Bernard, 2011: 415). Thus, Bernard traces how cannibalism is used in the first film, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) to show how the labouring poor are exploited and abandoned by the capitalist machine, left to eat others out of desperation. However, in the third film, *Leatherface: Texas Chainsaw Massacre III* (Burr, 1990), they are middle class, benefitting from technology, being able to kill without getting blood on their hands, which demonstrates how cannibalism has become a symbol for the 'natural order of things in a capitalistic society' (Bernard, 2011: 416). Finally, Bernard examines the sixth film in the franchise, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Liebesman, 2006). He argues that the cannibalism in this film has undergone a complete reversal in meaning from traditional cannibal narratives; where colonists used to justify annihilation of indigenous peoples because they were supposedly cannibals, *The Beginning* seems to claim that the white, capitalist centre (in USA) must use cannibalism to conquer its enemies and protect itself from outside cultural threats. Again, this progression in the franchise suggests the cannibal becoming more familiar while still commenting on consumer culture and oppression.

As I mentioned previously in the chapter, modern consumerism has removed most production from the view of the consumer and as a result foodways are not always visible to the general public. Baron, Carson and Bernard (2014) point out that cannibal films are so disturbing because they do make foodways visible. The use of human meat highlights socio-economic conditions, and foregrounds the interactions between people and food productions. While some cannibal films are sensationalist, others signal personal and social disorder by using troubling representations of our foodways to comment on larger implications of consumerism and food behaviours. Baron, Carson and Bernard (2014: 131- 132) argue that

cannibal films reflect the fact that food consumption in consumer society is fraught with uncertainties; people do not know where their food comes from or where their disposed food will go. The films capture and hold audience attention because their shared focus on humans as the food product implicates all the other foodways elements.

Indeed, the excess and shock of butchering human flesh illustrates the brutalities of meat-eating, and even the harvesting of eggs and milk, that Adams (2003) and feminist vegans point out. Baron, Carson and Bernard (2014: 130) claim that cannibal films rely on people's knowledge that

cannibalism can signify both primitive savages/monsters *and* the savagery of empires and corporations. It is the often unacknowledged impact of food production – labour and environmental impact – that cannibalism forces us to confront. Consequently, according to Baron, Carson and Bernard (2014: 130), cannibal films may be any genre, often with either a utopian or dystopian tone. The female cannibal texts use horror elements but also black comedy and irony. They are dramas, ‘chick noir’ (Kennedy, 2017), gothics, and more but by foregrounding cannibalism they carry out cultural work that forces the reader/audience to confront the boundaries between consumers and consumed.

These associations between women and animals, or people and food, are created and mediated through various discourses as we have seen. These are also linguistically situated in the English language. The idea of appetite and hunger come to be associated with not only food but sexual/sensual desire, and give rise to a host of cannibalistic ideas around incorporation. Cute young children will often be told that they are going to be eaten up by parents and strangers. Many parents will pretend to bite their babies’ toes or fingers, not to mention tell stories about cannibalistic witches and bone-crunching giants for entertainment. Equally, lovers talk of eating each other, and bite playfully. We may even express the desire to eat puppies and kittens or want to squeeze them until they miraculously pop inside us. Similarly, by eating we destroy and so many of our metaphors of hate and destruction are also cannibalistic. For example, we claim that people have ‘chewed us up and spat us out’ when we feel used. We might describe a ‘dog eat dog’ world in which everyone must ‘eat or be eaten’. Cannibal metaphors then can not only describe incorporation but annihilation – after all, what could more dead than the thing which you yourself have managed to fit into bitesize pieces?

Lorna Piatti-Farnell in *Consuming Gothic: Food and Horror in Film* (2016) describes how cannibalism is threatening because it entails not only the confrontation with humanity as monstrous or the food horror – the brutalities of meat-eating – but because it illustrates complete annihilation of the subject. Piatti-Farnell (2016: 144) argues that

Consumption consolidates the subject into an object, and makes it fully expendable. While aggression seeks to control the victim – a control that finds its ultimate fulfilment in the dehumanising act of slaughter – consumption also defiles the body by depriving it of its humanity. The body is not the only thing that is butchered. With cannibalistic butchery and consumption, what is slayed is also the image of the superior, and culturally untouchable, human being.

Cannibalism, then, literalises the objectification of people and takes it to the extremes of object-status. Using cannibalism to illustrate the brutalities of objectification has the potential to comment on objectification on the spectrum of abuse that women face in patriarchal societies.

That these cannibals are female complicates this, foregrounding the ironies and contradictions inherent in the cannibal text, and in postfeminist media culture.

I have discussed cannibalism as a narrative trope and the ways it has been used to challenge binaries and boundaries. It can be used in varying and complex ways to critique difference, challenge binaries, and comment on consumption and communion. It is often used to illustrate exploitation and oppression but its ambiguity means it can also 'give voice' (Guest, 2001: 3) to the marginalised. I have explored how it can illuminate often invisible foodways, particularly the brutalities of meat-eating and animal exploitation. This connects to the objectification of women as I discussed in the previous section and reveals how cannibalism can be used to explore gendered oppression. I have also discussed briefly how cannibalism is linked to incest and how this sits on a spectrum of abuse which encompasses objectification, proprietary behaviours, rape, and murder. These theories show how cannibalism is subject to context and interpretation, how it interacts with globalisation and feminism, and how it can be used to perform the cultural work involved in commenting on the politics of consumerism, subjectivity, and exploitation.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to establish what foodways theory is and how it can contribute to the interpretation of cannibal texts. I have discussed how foodways is concerned with all elements of food production and consumption and how this reveals the politics of narrative texts. I then linked this to postfeminist media culture and the tensions in postfeminist reclamations of the domestic. This combination of theories allows me to put gender into foodways and expand foodways theory beyond food and its immediate material objects to consumer culture at large. I discussed how women have been connected to food both in material and abstract terms and how this has been both oppressive and empowering. In the final section I discussed cannibalism as a narrative trope and how its ambiguities and contradictions are often used to explore the boundaries of subject and object, and human and animal. I also linked cannibalism to incest as this is a theme which recurs throughout the thesis. The framework that I have begun to develop here reveals the cultural work the female cannibal texts carry out, how they relate to national/transnational contexts, and how they engage with debates about gender in the postfeminist period.

Chapter Three: Daughters of the Postfeminist Patriarchy

This chapter explores how the female cannibal develops consumption as a postfeminist strategy for exercising power in relation to generational authority, represented by the mother and father, as well as by institutional father figures. The women ambivalently reject these older authorities as role models, with the struggle for power and autonomy in these coming-of-age texts represented through an engagement with cannibalism and consumption. This shows fears and desires relating to the exercising of agency and helps to answer what cultural work these cannibal texts carry out. The texts employ a range of narrative tropes including food horror, as well as decontextualizing the space and time through repetition of places and historical events. The food horror gothicises everyday eating and cooking rituals and behaviours, and emphasises consumption as a site of contested power with cannibalism (whether literal or metaphorical) positioned in these texts as a well-established method of exercising power, and oppressing others, within institutions such as the family, law enforcement, religion, and education. The texts generate a focus on consumption as a gendered act by playing with contextual markers such as place and time, creating surreal or uncanny settings, often decontextualizing, or refusing to contextualise, these texts. There is a fundamental ambiguity and instability in the female cannibal text which permeates these on a formal and textual level which is best described as evoking the gothic mode. The parental figures try to control consumption and thus the identities of the women but these female cannibals co-opt this consumption for their own ends. They often alter their relationship to power structures and gain personal empowerment but because the texts refuse to engage with a history of feminism, the female cannibalism ultimately leaves the overall structures of consumption and oppression intact. I argue that the ambiguity in these texts reveals the tensions and incoherencies of a postfeminist patriarchy in which the legacies of feminism are enjoyed while feminism itself is invisible. This shows how the texts engage with debates around gender in the period.

In this chapter, I examine three texts, *Hannibal* (Harris, 1999), *We Are What We Are* (dir. Mickle, 2013), and *Raw* (dir. Ducourneau, 2016). I have chosen to group these texts as they all position the female cannibal in relation to generational authority, and, as with subsequent chapters, the mixing of novels and film as well as countries of origin illustrates a broader cultural engagement with this figure than a simple trend across one media type and one location might indicate. I do not look at the film adaptation of *Hannibal* (dir. Scott, 2001) for the primary reason that there is no female cannibal in it. However, in the next section I discuss Thomas Harris' works and their adaptations briefly to situate my female cannibal texts in relation to the late-twentieth century cannibal which is typified, according to Brown (2013), by Harris's Dr Hannibal Lecter.

Hannibal is the third novel to feature Dr Hannibal Lecter, and the second to feature Clarice Starling. In both *Red Dragon* (1981) and *The Silence of the Lambs* (1989 – abbr. *SOL*), Lecter is an imprisoned psychiatrist cannibal who helps law enforcement on other serial killer cases until his escape at the end of *SOL*. Starling is a trainee FBI agent in *SOL* and shares personal

information with Lecter to gain his help to capture a killer called Buffalo Bill, aka. Jame Gumb. Starling and Lecter's relationship develops over the course of the novel, as I discuss in the following section. In *Hannibal* Starling is scapegoated for a drug raid gone wrong. The tabloid publicity of the failure prompts Lecter to contact Starling which reinvigorates the manhunt for the cannibal outlaw and temporarily saves Starling's career. Mason Verger, Lecter's only surviving victim, begins a manhunt of his own aided by corrupt officials in Italian and American law enforcement. Starling breaks the law to save Lecter from Verger's torture but is injured in the process so Lecter nurses her and carries out therapy with her including hypnosis. They then feast on the brain of Paul Krendler, the corrupt Justice Department official who has a vendetta against Starling, and the reader leaves them living happily ever after together in a South American dreamlife.

The second text in this chapter is *We Are What We Are* (abbr. WAWWA) which is an American adaptation of the Mexican film, *Somos Lo Que Hay* (dir. Grau, 2010). In an interview for the DVD, the director, Jim Mickle, calls it 'more of a companion piece' and the plot is indeed very different. The Mexican film focuses on the aftermath of the father's death in a poverty-stricken, inner-city cannibalistic family. The sons must attempt to take over the father's 'hunting' role, and while the mother and daughter do compete for power over the boys, the film focuses on the eldest brother's struggle to reconcile Mexican machismo with homosexuality and, consequently, is less relevant for this project. It is worth noting, however, that the only survivor of this family is the daughter, Sabina. She escapes justice after the eldest brother bites her during the police raid, enabling her to pose as a victim. As with *Hannibal*, this open ending with the female cannibal left at large is one that recurs throughout this thesis.

In Mickle's version, set in rural Northeast USA, Emma Parker (Kassie Wesley DePaiva) dies in the midst of a storm in the first five minutes and her husband, Frank (Bill Sage), daughters, Iris (Ambyr Childers) and Rose (Julia Garner), and small son, Rory (Jack Gore), cope with their grief while planning a cannibalistic religious ritual. The town doctor, Doc Barrow (Michael Parks), whose daughter went missing many years ago, finds human bones washed downstream from the Parker residence and becomes suspicious, enlisting the help of Iris's would-be boyfriend, Deputy Anders (Wyatt Russel), to help him investigate. Frank, struggling with his own health, his children and his grief, obliges Iris to take over her mother's role in the ritual and kill the woman he has captured. Iris enlists Rose's reluctant help and the two prepare the woman's body into a meal to break a three-day fast. As the investigation continues, Frank kills Anders when he discovers Anders having sex with Iris in the family graveyard. This leaves Iris distraught and solidifies the girls' plans to run away. Realising he is about to be caught, Frank attempts to poison his entire family but this is prevented both by Rose and the arrival of Doc Barrow who confronts Frank. After a showdown in which Doc Barrow is knocked unconscious, the family sits down to eat their last meal when Rose, joined by Iris, attacks their father and eats him alive. The girls then take Rory and drive away into the sunrise.

The third text I consider in this chapter is the most recent. *Raw* is a Belgian-French film that relates Justine's (Garance Marillier) coming-of-age journey after she begins at the same veterinarian college as her older sister, Alex (Ella Rumpf), and which was once attended by her parents (Laurent Lucas as the father and Joana Preiss as the mother). During the first week of hazing rituals designed to humiliate the freshmen, Justine is coerced by Alex into eating raw rabbit liver despite her family's strict vegetarianism – staunchly enforced by their mother. Justine develops physical symptoms, including a new and intense appetite for flesh. As she struggles for acceptance at college and attempts to bond with Alex, she discovers her appetite is only fully satisfied through cannibalism. Alex is revealed to share her appetite for human flesh and the sisters' antagonistic relationship continues until Alex kills and eats Justine's roommate and ambivalent lover, the gay Adrien. While Alex is imprisoned, Justine remains free to be with her mother and father. The film concludes with the bombshell that their mother also shares their cannibalistic tendencies and is only able to control them through the father's bodily sacrifices as he allows her to consume parts of his flesh.

These texts position the girls in conflict with parental authority. While the focus of this varies between the American and European texts, they all respond to the female cannibals' struggle for autonomy and power against the authority of previous generations. Unlike texts I discuss in later chapters, the mother is largely absent in these texts – in *Hannibal* she is lost and in *WAWWA* she is dead. In *Raw* the mother is emotionally unavailable and geographically distant for much of the film. The fathers (and institutional father-figures) fill this gap. They become central figures who are ambiguously respected and rejected as the girls confront their shortcomings. I argue that the texts use these generational relationships to begin to explore the postfeminist response to the 'incomplete realization of the feminist project' (Karlyn 2011: 29). They do this by positioning the female cannibals in a postfeminist patriarchy – a world in which patriarchal authority is imposed but their expectations seem to be at odds with this. Feminism however, like their mothers, is relatively absent from the texts. Consumption, especially cannibalism, becomes a site for negotiating power between the generations.

I read consumption in these texts, then, as a postfeminist strategy for the negotiation of power and autonomy which responds not only to second wave feminists' rejection of feminine consumption but also to the edicts of capitalist-patriarchy which encourages uncritical consumption and adherence to ideal femininity. The foodways and food behaviours in these texts are a key site of this consumption and can be read as representations of this power struggle. As Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (1997: 1) have said, 'food touches everything. Food is the foundation of every economy. It is a central pawn in political strategies of states and households.' The cannibalism is an excessive and gothic expression of this process, illustrating the exploitative nature of consumption.

In *Hannibal* cannibalism is diffused throughout the text in both literal and metaphorical guises. For example, Verger's meat-packing plant has 'inadvertently' (60) rendered several workers into lard used in commercial bakeries, and the FBI is characterised as an institution which

chews you up and spits you out. Against this background of consumption, several male figures within law enforcement, including Crawford, Brigham, and Krendler, become father-figures for Starling in both a positive and negative sense. Thus the diffuse cannibalistic structures of law enforcement and American corporations (which lobby lawmakers and thus construct what law and crime is in the first instance) are reduced metonymically to institutional father figures and given a relation in Starling's mind to her own father (killed while working as a night watchman). As Starling begins to acknowledge her father's flaws, and thus her own, she begins to challenge the hypocrisy and corruption of these institutions and uses literal cannibalism to monstrously embody the attitude of 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em'.

In *WAWWA*, the cannibalism is an established part of the Parkers' religion. It has been passed down from pioneer settlers who ate family members to survive the winter. Like the original father who obliges his daughter to butcher her dead mother, Frank forces his daughters to participate in the ritual, solidifying the butchery as the woman's role in the household. However, as the girls read the diary/cookbook of the original pioneer daughter they begin to rebel against Frank's authority and co-opt the cannibalism in their own way, negotiating space within the established structures of gendered labour for exercising their own power.

Finally, the mother in *Raw* fails to communicate her experience entering the professional world, leaving Justine, in particular, vulnerable to the institutional sexism which targets her self-confidence and educational success. The institutional sexism permeates the college and references to rape culture and the objectification of women and animals is signalled by women's rejection of consumption through self-destructive acts such as anorexia and bulimia. The parents are complicit in this institutional sexism as their lack of communication and their relative absence leaves the girls to negotiate the power and consumption of the patriarchy in the school around them. The girls' lack of knowledge about consumption leads to a choice between cannibalising others and starving. The sexism within the text is not figured as cannibalism but rather revealed to be the reason for women's non/self-consumption (e.g. anorexia or bulimia) as they are metaphorically consumed through objectification and rape culture. The girls negotiate the objectification and consumption of the patriarchy with Alex embracing patriarchal strategies and choosing to cause car crashes to eat, while Justine suffers as she attempts to follow her mother's (apparent) rejection of meat-consumption with varying degrees of success. This reveals a tension between embracing consumption – but being monstrous, as Alex is eventually locked up – and rejecting consumption while simultaneously being unable to completely avoid it.

I first explore the significance of the Hannibal Lecter/Clarice Starling novels, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1989) and *Hannibal* (1999) and their filmic adaptations (1991 and 2001 respectively), to the emergence of the female cannibal. I argue that these texts create a trajectory of transformation – in Starling's case from investigator to cannibal – that recurs in many female cannibal texts. I discuss briefly the origins of the Lecter/Starling relationship and the framework of transformation that is set up in *SOL*. I also mention the omission of the female cannibal in *Hannibal* (2001).

In the following section I discuss how the absent mother in all three texts creates a gap which represents a failure to engage with a feminist legacy. Instead of drawing on the mother as a role model, the girls must negotiate their femininity through consumption as an existing power structure. The girls' peer relationships reflect the different attitudes towards excessive consumption as a strategy for empowerment.

Finally, I argue that the gap left by the mother leaves room for the father and a critique of postfeminist fatherhood. While these fathers and father figures cling to patriarchal definitions of the father as protector and provider, they also have a nurturing role to fill that exposes their faults as fathers. Furthermore, the texts frame the fathers in relation to patriarchy which is itself figured as cannibalistic. The girls' cannibalism responds to this, particularly in the American texts, and their co-option of cannibalism and consumption destroys, literally consumes, the father/father figure.

I conclude the chapter by outlining the themes, points of ambiguity and motifs that continue throughout the thesis.

3.1 Thomas Harris's Cannibal Mythology.

In this section I discuss Harris's Lecter novels and their film adaptations as their global popularity establishes their position as part of a global flow of popular culture, and the importance of considering cannibalism as a cultural motif. I also establish how Starling's transformation is integral to the series which reveals the evolution of the female cannibal in relation to the late 20th/early 21st century (male) cannibal. I argue that the controversy in adapting *Hannibal* to screen, omitting Starling's cannibalism, demonstrates the threat of feminine monstrosity which underlies the female cannibal text.

The importance of Thomas Harris's Lecter novels, particularly *SOL* and *Hannibal*, to the evolution of the cannibal figure in postfeminist popular culture cannot be overstated. As Benjamin Szumskyj (2008) notes in his collection *Dissecting Hannibal Lecter*, Harris's novels sold in the millions, have been translated into several languages, and were quickly adapted to cinema. The release of *Hannibal* was phenomenal – Lanchester (1999, quoted in Fuller, 2005: 821-822) points out in a review, '*Hannibal* went straight in as number one on the bestseller list, to no one's surprise; what did attract comment was the fact it outsold numbers two to fifty-one combined.' Perhaps part of this frenzy for the sequel was due to Anthony Hopkins' award-winning performance of the cannibal psychiatrist in Jonathan Demme's adaptation, *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991 – abbr. *Silence*). The film was only the third ever to win the 'Big Five' at the Academy Awards (for best film, director, actor, actress and screenplay) and has continued to attract much critical and popular attention. As a consequence, Dr Hannibal Lecter is probably the most famous cannibal of all time. Brown (2013: 202) claims that Dr Hannibal Lecter 'is the culmination of the twentieth-century cannibal-as-self' positioning him as the quintessential cannibal of the period.

However, it is not Lecter alone who is a cannibal. Far less famous for her cannibalism is Clarice Starling who transforms from detective to cannibal at the end of *Hannibal*. This transformation has its roots in *SOL*. Indeed, Simpson (2008: 50) argues that ‘the bonding between Starling and Lecter into one murdering couple is quite predictable [based on Harris’s previous work] and fits well within the Gothic tradition.’ Critics argue over the classification of Harris’s wider writing. For example, in a collection of criticism on Harris’s novels (2008, ed. Szumskyj) Simpson places the Lecter novels squarely in the gothic genre for their chaos, doubling and extremity. Mana argues for their classification as a neo-noir while Joshi claims that Harris’s novels are firmly suspenseful detection/mystery stories and not horror at all. Focusing on transformations, Magistrale argues for the gothic classification as well. This range of opinion points towards an issue which permeates this thesis. The female cannibal is unconstrained by genre appearing in gothic novels, torture porn, black comedies and ‘chick noir’ (Kennedy, 2017), amongst others, including texts whose genre is similarly difficult to define. Instead of focusing on genre, I read these texts through the lens of the gothic mode, exploring the repetitions, excess and moments of horror throughout the female cannibal texts as illustrations of the unease and ambiguity which feature heavily throughout the thesis, and which are established in the generic instability of Harris’s Lecter novels.

Starling’s transformation formulates the narrative trajectory of many of my subsequent texts in which the female cannibalism occurs as a transformation in reaction to patriarchal abuse or oppressive gender roles. Furthermore, the controversy surrounding Starling’s cannibalism and its subsequent omission in the film adaptation serves to highlight how threatening and disruptive the female cannibal is as a figure. Although I would not argue that these novels are templates for other female cannibal texts, these highly influential texts raise many of the issues such as incest, abuse and misogynistic gender roles that I return to throughout the thesis.

Lecter and Starling meet in *SOL* and although I do not analyse this in detail, it begins to show the instability surrounding Starling’s identity and the ambivalence between human/monster and male/female. Impressed by her fortitude, manners and style, Lecter helps Starling capture the serial killer known as Buffalo Bill (aka. Jame Gumb) before his next murder. Starling is a rookie detective in training at the FBI academy, although armed with a double major in psychology and criminology from the University of Virginia, and a history of doing forensics for the FBI. She is asked to go to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane to talk to Lecter about a survey for the FBI’s new database on violent criminals by Jack Crawford, head of the Behavioural Sciences division. Unbeknownst to Starling, however, Crawford is actually using her enthusiasm and desire to succeed to draw Lecter out for information on Buffalo Bill. Although Crawford warns Starling not to give Lecter ‘personal facts’ (7), Starling is set up to fail and must swap personal information for leads on the case. As Mezejewski (2004: 159) claims, this ‘cold “use” of Clarice’ is paralleled with Gumb’s use of women as material.

Ostensibly a detective novel, *SOL* presents a ‘female dick’ (Mezejewski, 1993; 2004), a woman in a man’s role, struggling against a man who, as a “failed” transsexual, wants to be a

woman and goes as far as killing and skinning women to make his transformation complete. Mezejewski (1993) argues that while it is usual in detective fiction to have an affinity between criminal and detective, the similarities between Starling and Gumb are distinguished by their lack of stable identities and the concurrent association with monstrosity. The transgressions of these characters causes the transgression of *SOL* into the horror genre and highlights the instability of the human/monster dialectic.

When this relationship between Lecter and Starling continues in *Hannibal*, the relationship between human and monster becomes even more blurred with Starling's transformation into a cannibal. This idea of cannibals becoming 'the Self', as Brown (2013: 181) claims, has enabled texts such as these to question who exactly that 'self' is and what fears, desires and anxieties it might represent when it is gendered female. *Hannibal*, with its roots in *SOL* and its mass global appeal, is one of the first to do so.

However, Starling's transformation from detective to cannibal caused considerable controversy. According to Fuller (2005), it was seen as a betrayal of her integrity and as a shocking departure from the expected trajectory of her character. The controversy about Starling's cannibalistic transformation is solidified in the film adaptation. Jodie Foster who played Starling in *Silence*, refused to reprise her role claiming that it was 'bad timing'. However, she later stated that "I could never betray a person to whom I owed so much" (quoted in Mezejewski, 2004: 168). Despite being a 'stroke of genius', according to Szumskyj (2008: 208-209), Starling's cannibalism proved too threatening for film. Instead, the wholesome, gritty portrayal by Julianne Moore concludes with Starling watching Lecter feed Krendler his own brain. Starling handcuffs Lecter to her to prevent his escape. Impressed by her integrity – he whispers 'that's my girl' – he cuts off his own hand to escape, leaving hers intact. In the final moments Starling stands on the bank of the Chesapeake, 'on Puritan shores' (Mezejewski, 2004: 172), with police guns pointed at her, while Lecter escapes.

The omission of her cannibalism points to the threatening and disruptive nature of the text. Both Fuller (2005) and Mezejewski (2004) use psychoanalytic theory to argue that the cannibalism is omitted because of its connection to Starling's sexual awakening with her relationship with Lecter. Fuller (2005: 829) claims that the cannibalism 'signifies her literal and symbolic embracing of carnality, a transformation of feminine sexuality beyond most social conservatives' tolerance threshold'. He points out that this resolution destroys the idea that Starling is an American 'gunslinger' who pursues justice because of her 'conservative credentials' (832). The gothic instability of the novel, then, is recuperated in the film through the omission of both the cannibalism and sexual relationship.

By focusing on consumption within the novel, and situating *Hannibal* alongside similar female cannibal texts, I argue that the cannibalism is not merely a sexual awakening but the culmination of a transformation towards autonomy. The cannibalism represents the excesses of consumption and is a strategy for exercising power within a capitalist-patriarchal system. *Hannibal*, *WAWWA*, and *Raw* demonstrate the tensions between consumption as an empowering

reclaiming of femininity, as I explore in the next section, and consumption as an exploitative part of patriarchy which is connected to a crisis of masculinity. In the final section I explore how cannibalism is linked to patriarchal father figures and how the female cannibals in these texts co-opt this strategy for exercising power.

3.2 Absent Mothers and Troubled Traditions

Each of the texts in this chapter places the female cannibal in a struggle for autonomy in the face of the previous generation's authority. This is represented through the relationships with the girls and their parents and other institutional fathers, particularly in regards to consumption. The texts foreground a postfeminist struggle to negotiate the legacies of second-wave feminism but the texts do not contextualise this in relation to a history of feminist progress. Rather, the texts place the female cannibals within a postfeminist patriarchal context but without the benefit of a feminist legacy to draw upon. I explore, in this section, the mothers in these texts and how their relative absence creates a gap that signifies the refusal to engage with a history of feminist progress. The mother does not directly stand for feminism, then, but rather the possibility of feminist legacies, a connection to the past. The different waves of western feminism have often been represented in terms of mothers and daughters, especially, as Astrid Henry (2004: 27) points out, because many third wave feminists are literally the daughters of second wave feminists. Karlyn (2011: 28) argues that the daughterly desire for distance from the mother cannot be separated from the ideology of individualism which is a central feature of the postfeminist era, as well as a feature of neoliberalism. These texts can be seen as products of, and commenting on, a postfeminist media culture in which feminism is taken into account only to be dismissed as irrelevant or a failure (McRobbie, 2009: 49). This is significant because this mother-daughter relationship potentially performs cultural work related to postfeminist consumption (for example, through the commodification of femininity and feminism) and its relationship to feminist ideologies.

In the American texts the mothers are completely absent. In *Hannibal* it is unclear if Starling's mother is dead or alive; she is remembered but does not exist in the present. In *WAWWA*, the mother dies in the first five minutes of the film. Both *Hannibal* and *WAWWA* present and dismiss a pre-feminist mother which suggests both a failure within the second wave to impact the rural poor in USA, and a generational discontinuity in feminist knowledge and engagement. This is complicated in *Hannibal* by Ardelia Mapp's relationship with her grandmother which I discuss further in this section.

In *Raw* (dir. Ducournau, 2016), the mother is distant both physically and emotionally. Despite her influence in her daughters' lives, neither girl knows that their mother shares the same problems they have. Her absence and lack of communication regarding her consumption practices and the institutional sexism that the girls will face at college represents the girls' lack of connection to a legacy of feminism. The mother has agency and authority, especially over Justine's consumption and subsequent identity, despite being geographically absent throughout

the majority of the film. I argue that the mother's failure to communicate and her inability to resolve issues of cannibalistic consumption represent an expression of anxiety about the 'incomplete realization of the feminist project' (Karlyn 2011: 29).

As Gloria Steinem has said 'It will take a while before feminists succeed enough so that feminism is not perceived as a gigantic mother who is held responsible for almost everything, while the patriarchy receives terminal gratitude for the small favours it bestows.' (Steinem quoted in Karlyn, 2011). Postfeminism has been seen as a backlash against feminism, blaming it for domestic and economic restructuring caused by a number of factors including globalisation. Negra (2009) points out that feminism has become a scapegoat for economic conditions that have undermined women's choice of whether to work by necessitating it for all but the very wealthy. Feminism is blamed for the changing economic conditions as the success in gaining increased access to employment has occurred in tandem with economies that have increasingly placed the burden of breadwinning on women, at the further expense of stable (albeit oppressive) gender roles (Pagnoni Berns and Rodriguez Fontao, 2016: 166-168). Furthermore, Henry (2004: 20) describes how 'for [postfeminists in the 1980s], feminism had indeed had a radical effect on society, but it had failed in substantially replacing the old pre-feminist ways of living with workable alternatives.' In other words, women were rejecting the feminism of their mothers because it was perceived to have done both too much and not enough to alter women's lives and the patriarchal institutions that structure society.

Karlyn (2011) explores the relationships between second and third-wave feminism by examining mother-daughter relationships in contemporary films. She argues that one of the reasons for a postfeminist retreat from second-wave feminism is that girls who have privilege – e.g. white, middle-class, sexually attractive, etc. – have more opportunity to identify with the patriarchal status quo as they come of age as they can access power more easily within those structures than women without privilege. However, Karlyn (2011, 29) claims 'lesbians and girls of colour, for example, are less likely to assume that playing by the rules will give them a fair chance to win.' Therefore, girls with less privilege may not retreat completely from second-wave feminism but may also be sceptical of its efficacy. Thus mothers in cinema (and other cultural texts, I would argue) are rejected to varying degrees along with second-wave feminism because of its perceived inadequacies to improve women's everyday lives.

The female cannibals in this chapter do have privilege, and do try to play by the rules at first. There is an expectation within the texts that is postfeminist in nature; the girls initially behave as though they have a level playing field and can make whatever choices they want to as long as they play by the rules. Ultimately, however, the texts explore how the female cannibals come to realise that playing by the rules does not fundamentally benefit them. However, because they do not have access to a history of feminism through their mothers, they turn instead to the already-existing patriarchal-capitalist power structures of excessive consumption (cannibalism) in order to gain power and autonomy. I explore how the texts formulate cannibalistic consumption as an example of patriarchal power in the next section.

Consumption is a central site of the postfeminist critique of second wave feminism. Karlyn (2011: 34) explains that for second wave feminists, being called ‘girls’ was infantilising and represented their lack of power within patriarchy which led to a ‘wholesale rejection of femininity and many of the pleasures of female culture that have long been trivialized by the culture at large, from shopping and dressing up to gossiping.’ Hollows (2000: 2) goes as far as to say that ‘For many feminists, feminine values and behaviour were seen as a major cause of women’s oppression. [...] the identity “feminist” was predicated on a rejection of femininity.’ Given that the second-wave project was felt to be incomplete, third-wave feminists have reclaimed the label ‘girl’ and the feminine pleasures that accompany this, effectively inverting the second-wave strategy of rejection. The strategy of claiming power through femininity places a huge amount of emphasis on consumption and display of feminine lifestyle services and products as a central site of power. Munford (2004: 148) argues that reclaiming femininity is crucial to the third wave’s reconfigurations of the politics of subjectivity. In other words, the idea that women can be powerful and equal without rejecting their identities as women – however that might be configured culturally. While third-wave feminists both critique and co-opt beauty culture and ‘raunch’ culture (Levy, 2005), the efficacy of embracing cultural constructions of femininity which have traditionally oppressed women is debated as I discussed in Chapter One (Boyle 2005; Black 2006; Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Murphy 2015). The texts in this chapter add to this debate. I discuss whether they present the female consumer-cannibal “straight” or ironically and how these tonal differences suggest she is powerful and challenging to the status quo or is embodying traditionally monstrous depictions of insatiable femininity which give her personal power but are ultimately not challenging to patriarchal structures.

In *SOL* (93), Starling is able to draw on her mother’s memory for strength in the morgue:

Clarice Starling, standing at the sink, needed now a prototype of courage more apt and powerful than any Marine parachute jump. The image came to her, and it helped her, but it pierced her too:

Her mother, standing at a sink, washing blood out of her father’s hat.

She understands women’s history of dealing with death in rural USA and uses that legacy of authority to clear the room of men. However, in *Hannibal* Starling does not have this feminine authority to draw upon. Linda Mezejewski (2005: 122) argues that Starling is the ‘less fun feminist phase’ of the female investigator. Indeed, Starling initially adopts the feminist strategy of rejecting femininity facilitating the postfeminist belief that she can succeed if she plays by the men’s rules. I argue that as Starling loses ‘her faith in technique’ (*Hannibal*: 264) realising that playing by the rules does not benefit her, and becomes ‘weary’ of ‘purely functional equipment in utilitarian settings’ (264), she begins to recuperate a feminine aesthetic and embraces a more postfeminist strategy of consumption which eventually leads to her cannibalism.

Starling’s rejection of femininity is justified within the world of the FBI. Before her hearing about the drug raid Starling ‘called her representative in the FBI Agent’s Association.

His advice was to not wear dangly earrings or open-toed shoes to the hearing' (33). The patronising and useless advice suggests that Starling's competence relies upon looking less feminine. Starling's competence as an FBI agent is a central connection and contrast to her mother who is only ever mentioned within *Hannibal* in relation to working as a chambermaid. After the death of her father, Starling's mother worked as a maid in a motel but was unable to earn enough to keep her children together and subsequently had to send Starling off to relatives and then to an orphanage. Starling's rejection of the feminine is figured in terms of labour – she has followed (actually, bettered) her father's career in law enforcement while cleaning is figured in the text as women's work and is considered inferior, and often degrading with Starling recalling 'people leaving wet Trojans [condoms] on the nightstand' (525). As Krendler attempts to ruin Starling's career, he has power fantasies in which 'he pictured Starling as old, tripping over those tits, those trim legs turned blue-veined and lumpy, turning her face away from the stains on the sheets, working for her board at a bed-and-breakfast owned by a couple of goddamned hairy old dykes' (397-398). This fantasy of Starling "reduced" to chambermaid is repeated in the novel as Krendler relishes this as a humiliating and sexually titillating outcome for Starling. The mother's absence results in a pre-feminist/patriarchal attitude that cleaning is unskilled (and therefore low paid) labour and is linked to Starling's desire to succeed in a more traditionally masculine line of work by rejecting femininity and that perception of incapacity.

The mother's absence means Starling has no connection to a history of feminism. In contrast, Ardelia Mapp has a connection to the past through her grandmother. Mapp's grandmother paid up premiums on life insurance and borrowed against it to fund Mapp through college. She has passed on a secret tea recipe that Mapp uses as a way to reflect and heal. Furthermore, Mapp has inherited her skillet, a symbol of the kitchen and the care and comfort that her 'fierce little grandmother' (463) offered through her labour. This relationship to a feminist/feminine legacy allows Ardelia to 'wait and work from within' (519) when the FBI abandons Starling as a 'missing person'. While this seems to contradict Karlyn's theory that women of colour are less likely to play by the rules, the reader already knows that Mapp and her black friends at the post office use their knowledge of, and position in, these governmental systems to break the rules without being caught. Of course, the text never reveals whether Mapp's strategy of waiting and working achieves any results as Starling is never found and the structures of the FBI remain unaltered. This adds to the sense of ambivalence about women's power throughout many of the female cannibal texts, and illustrates the tension between these strategies.

In absence of a legacy of feminism, Starling has rejected femininity in favour of the masculine world of the FBI with the expectation that 'if you could cut it, you would be accepted, regardless of race, creed, color, national origin or whether or not you were a good old boy' (87). However, as I discuss in the next section, the institutions of law and order are revealed to be corrupt and cannibalistic. '[Starling] survived most of her life in institutions, by respecting them and playing hard and well by the rules. She had always advanced, won the scholarship, made the team. Her failure to advance in the FBI after a brilliant start was a new and awful experience for

her. She batted against the glass ceiling like a bee in a bottle' (32). As Starling realises she is nonetheless still discriminated against for being a woman, she turns back towards the femininity she has previously rejected or hidden and turns the cannibalistic tendencies of the patriarchal establishment against them.

The text signals Starling's initial rejection of femininity by emphasising its recovery as Starling transforms throughout *Hannibal*. For example, after interviewing a devout Christian woman who has rejected fashion on religious grounds, the narrator tells us that 'Starling was coming back to herself a little. She knew she was weary of something. Maybe it was tackiness, worse than tackiness, stylelessness maybe. An indifference to things that please the eye. Maybe she was hungry for some style.' (83). Later in the text we are told Starling 'had read couture publications on the sly, guiltily as though they were pornography. Now she began to admit to herself that there was something in those pictures that made her hungry' (264). The association in these quotes between aesthetic pleasure and hunger ironically hints towards consumption in alimentary terms, and signals Starling's growing desire to consume the kind of femininity that has been figured by feminists like Naomi Wolf (1990) as oppressive.

By turning towards consumption, Starling is able to find and rescue Lecter – 'she would have arrived at her tactic anyway, in time, but she was aided by the sea change inside her' (265). She traces Lecter's taste in rare goods, using the globalised foodways of fine wines, 'foie gras', 'wild boar' and 'red-legged partridges [...] from Scotland' (308) to reveal Lecter's fake identity. This suggests how an appreciation 'for the shapes of things' (264) can be a useful addition to the masculine 'technique' in the workplace. Furthermore, her decision to save Lecter links her to her parents – 'she felt [them] strongest in her sense of right and wrong' (464).

Although she recovers her femininity Starling enhances with it a sense of power that consumption can give. Indeed, as she partakes of her cannibal feast with him, Lecter wonders whether Starling 'had the .45 on her leg beneath the gown' (541). Fully rejecting masculine authority, Starling challenges Lecter as well as devouring Krendler which seems to give her equality with Lecter but her monstrous consumption, while it breaks the rules and gives her freedom, more accurately removes her from the game entirely. While she remains free and happy at the end of *Hannibal* the FBI is not concerned with her at all – she is simply a missing person. Lecter's face is the one on the FBI's 'Ten Most Wanted' (561). The text is full of irony, inter- (and intra-) textual references, and changes in form with the narrator occasionally addressing the reader directly which draws attention to the text as a constructed narrative. This ironic treatment of the novel as a whole turns Starling's cannibalism comic. It suggests that despite her power, and the threat her existence poses (but not to the FBI apparently), her power is based on the same structures that oppressed her in the first place. It is a feminist novel that refuses to include feminism and instead critiques with humour the postfeminist pick 'n' mix that invests consumption with some of the individualistic power of capitalist-patriarchy.

The female cannibalism in *WAWWA* is similarly a co-option of patriarchal cannibalism that the girls challenge by subverting it. With the mother gone, Frank obliges Iris to take over the

mother's role in their cannibalistic religious ritual and expects the girls to look after their younger brother, Rory. Karlyn (2011: 52) argues that 'Whenever a film or cultural narrative centres on a midlife male, a young girl who arouses his sexual or proprietary interest, and a mother who is missing or otherwise characterised as inadequate, the incest theme is likely to be lurking in the background.' I discuss the girls' relationships with Frank further in the next section but it is important to note that the mother's absence creates a gap which destabilises the family structures. Her absence also precipitates a connection into the more distant past of their ancestors, the first family of American settlers who became cannibals to survive the harsh winter. This provides Rose, in particular, the opportunity to co-opt and subvert her father's religion by learning from a history of female oppression she would not have had access to had her mother continued to be complicit with the religion that kills her.

The film creates an ambiguous tone by using a relatively vague setting in the northeast USA. Shots of cars and mobile phones later in the film set it in the mid-1990s but this is contrasted with the Parkers' dress and lifestyle throughout the film which alludes to much earlier times. In the opening scenes, shots of the turbulent weather blocking roads and the wide angled shots of the landscape communicate the isolation of the Parker's home. A shot pans from the rundown trailer park across the road to their American Gothic-style house. Known also as Rural Gothic or Carpenter Gothic, this is an architectural style popularised in the late nineteenth century typified by steeply pitched roofs, asymmetrical floor plans, lacy bargeboards, and one-story porches (Jackie Craven, 2019). A cut to a pan up the door shows paints flaking and a general sense of neglect.



Figure 3.1 The Parker's old-fashioned house, the washed out colours, flat lighting and heavy rain create a gothic atmosphere of isolation and uncanny temporality. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 3.2 The mother's face is hidden, creating an anonymity and forcing the audience to notice her old-fashioned dress and the decay of the house. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The bleak weather and muted, almost sepia, colours and lighting contribute to this tone of decay. The mother stands behind the door in an old-fashioned button-up dress, her face in shadows drawing attention to her clothes. The old-fashioned style of dress and house, and the general neglect position the Parkers as stuck in the past. The mother's modest dress evokes images of colonial-era Christian aesthetics such as the Amish or Fundamentalist Mormons might wear today with all the strict gender divisions with which they are associated. Later, as Rose and Iris stand in the doorway watching the downpour, they discuss their mother's illness briefly before they know about her death. It is clear that Frank does not approve of doctors and that his approval would be necessary for his wife to visit one. These initial scenes position the mother as pre-feminist and subject to her husband's power as part of a very traditional gender role division. The ambiguity of the setting, almost as if abstracted from a specific time and place, emphasises the gendered nature of this narrative – the figures are more important than the context they are in. The film goes on to present postfeminist ideas but without any glimpse of a feminist influence or legacy of any kind.

The mother has held the family together, participating in the rituals that give their family an identity. In Chapter Two, I discussed how Atkins and Bowler (2001: 273-274) have noted that traditional foods are some of the cultural and religious markers most resistant to change and are often perpetuated through mothers passing recipes on to daughters. Before the girls learn of her death, they are complicit with the family religion, telling Rory that he cannot have breakfast because they are fasting. They are shot from below which makes them appear towering and authoritative as they act on behalf of their parents. However, once they realise their mother is dead, Rose immediately begins to question the ritual of fasting and cannibalism. As Pagnoni Berns and Rodriguez Fontao (2016: 176) argue, the girls 'challenge the patriarchal axiom and prepare a future rebellion against the father' because he is alone; there is no mediating maternal presence. Rose leads this rebellion as she continues to reject her father's authority by questioning him and through active consumption which, as I return to below, culminates in her eating Frank alive. The mother's absence, then, destabilises the traditional running of the home and leaves a gap for the girls to question the received behaviours of their mother.

In one scene, for example, Rose is making tallow candles in her nightgown. The close up shot brings attention to the old-fashioned process and evokes a sense of the past and of the domestic work done at home by women instead of in modern mass-manufacturing.



Figure 3.1 The washed out colours mimic an old-fashioned photographic aesthetic and reveal the boredom associated with this mundane, repetitive task. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The camera cuts to Rory at the table as he complains of being hungry. We see Rose grab a box of cereal from the shelf and signal for silence as she opens the box.



Figure 3.2 In contrast, the colours and graphics of the cereal reflect a more modern use of consumer products. Rose's nail polish is also featured here as a source of colour and modern consumerism. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The shot is framed so that the cereal box is central to the frame. The brightly coloured 'Snap Pops' are the only processed foods on display in the kitchen and one of the few specks of bright colour in the entire film. Rose secretly pours some cereal in Rory's glass of milk, breaking the rules of their fast. She then throws some cereal into her own mouth while almost rolling her eyes at Rory who also puts a finger to his lips to show he understands the secret. Shot upwards, Rose is made to seem bigger, and more authoritative, indicating her power in this moment formally but in contrast to the earlier scene, she is acting on her own authority. The contrasting images of Rose making candles and pouring cereal present two seemingly contradictory images of feminine care. On one hand, she is associated with a traditional domestic gender role where feminine labour demonstrates an ethic of care. On the other hand, she is linked to neoliberal consumerism which

promises that everyone can eat well and save time by using ready-made products. The ease with which she slips between identities embodies the postfeminist consumer in that she is able to exercise power and agency while continuing feminine traditions and identity. As Hollows (2006) points out, many women are returning to the kitchen and traditional crafts such as canning, quilting and soap-making because of nostalgia for a time when gender roles were more stable but this represents a privileged position. For Rose, trapped by traditions of feminine domestic labour, this represents oppressive gender role expectations. Thus, despite the authority and skills traditional skills might bring for some women, Rose uses consumption as a way of both caring for her brother and herself, and as a way to secretly rebel while seeming to follow the rules of traditional gender roles that her father and their religion insists upon.

Iris, on the other hand, wants to play by the rules. As the sisters quietly discuss the ritual while going through their mother's things, Rose asks Iris 'what would happen if we refused to do it?'. Iris rejects this idea telling her 'I just want to get it over with then we have a whole year to figure something out'. Iris is more interested in performing the ritual so that she will have time. Her interest in Anders indicates she believes that she will be able to marry (if not him then someone in the abstract) and move away from her family home, thus playing by the rules of the patriarchy which position women as property of their fathers until marriage. It is only after Frank kills Anders that Iris seriously contemplates rebelling against her father. This shows the different strategies to cope with patriarchy without feminism – where Iris is complicit with it as she can access some power within the status quo, Rose takes traditional feminine qualities like empathy and care for others seriously enough to (ironically) break the rules that mandate she care for others in the first place.

The contradictions of postfeminist femininity are emphasised through the formal structure of the film which contrasts women in the distant past and the present all while abstracting the present from contextual markers. The opening scenes are precluded by a short quote by Alyce Parker, who we discover is their ancestor, which says 'It is with love that I do this. God's will be done.' This quote positions cannibalistic consumption as an act of care that is taken within a patriarchal Christian context. After their mother's funeral, Frank gives the girls an old diary and cookbook belonging to Alyce. As the girls read it we are shown several flashbacks that explain the origin of the family cannibalism. Alyce Parker is compelled by her father to butcher her mother's body in order to survive and feed her younger siblings. By framing these family rules as religion, we can read the cannibalism as part of a patriarchal morality that is logical within and despite civic law and order. Through this cookbook diary, the girls can connect with Alyce's experience but instead of obeying as the pre-feminist Alyce did, Rose decides to turn Frank's consumption against him. Like Starling in *Hannibal*, Rose uses what McRobbie (2009, 3) identifies as a postfeminist strategy and subverts dominant culture to give her power within it rather than to dismantle it. As the girls prepare to serve their cannibal meal, Rose tells Iris 'I won't do that again. He can't make me. Nobody can, not even God.'



Figure 3.3 The candles, traditional costumes, and sepia-like colour palette position the Parker's cannibalism within an old-fashioned religious context despite the chrome toaster in the background - one of the few signs of modernity. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

Again, the girls wear old-fashioned dress, and the room is lit with candles as the electricity has been turned off due to the storms. This anachronistic aesthetic serves as a way of demonstrating the anachronistic nature of patriarchal traditions found in religion and gender role divisions.

After Frank kills Anders, we see Rose comforting Iris and plotting their escape from the house. Her hair has been tightly braided throughout the film but from this point it is let out in wild looking curls signalling her new determination to break free from her father's authority.



Figure 3.4 Rose's unbound hair signals her letting go of traditions and the rules she has lived by. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

Entering the kitchen, Rose finds white powder near the food and recognises that it is a foreign substance. Her knowledge of the food helps her to realise that her father has poisoned their meal, and she prevents her brother from eating it. After the final confrontation between Frank and Doc Barrow, the girls choose to consume their father raw and alive in contrast to the formal, ritualised butchering of their sacrificial victim. As Lorna Piatti-Farnell (2016, 144) argues, eating raw flesh reduces the eater to bestial while also dehumanising the victim. 'The body is not the only thing that is butchered. With cannibalistic butchery and consumption, what is slayed is also the image of the superior, and culturally untouchable, human being.' Their sudden, raw cannibalism creates a visceral food horror in contrast to the previous murder.

In that scene, they follow the rules, draining the blood neatly from the veins into rivulets in the table. They plan with lipstick where to cut the flesh. They dehumanise the victim but maintain a certain kind of logic, rationality and ritual which helps to redefine them as humans using tools, especially given that this image echoes professional animal butchery.



Figure 3.5 The red marking echo professional butchery, a rationality to the cutting. The book to the left authorises the girls to participate in what they have learned despite their horror. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

It also emphasises that women are often equated with animals and viewed as comestible. As the girls are forced to participate in this ritual, they learn both their supposed place and how to practice patriarchal consumption thus giving them the tools to rebel against their position. In the final cannibal scene, which I discuss in detail in the next section, the blood is everywhere, dripping down the girls' chins and covering their hands. They embody an animalistic and monstrous incarnation of what their father envisioned. Despite the gore the scene is solemn, and afterwards Rose gives Doc Barrows his daughter's hairclip back which is a sweet, loving gesture. This tone suggests that although the girls are monstrous in that moment, they are still caring, still capable of humanity, and that their destruction of their father is done with love if not with rationality. Although, like Starling, they turn patriarchal consumption against their father, this can be read as more positive and meaningful than in *Hannibal*. They are both monsters and humans in a way that is less ironic and comic than Starling.

The cannibalism in *Raw* is similarly played straight but is far more threatening. The film creates a claustrophobic and nondescript setting in the concrete block buildings of the university campus. The sense of isolation is enhanced by the relative lack of adults in the film and the excessive, often surreal acts the teenagers commit – for example, partying in the morgue. The camera and lighting reflect this formally with canted angles, a very mobile camera, sometimes clearly hand-held, and coloured lighting. The music which features heavy, repetitive bass notes and alarm-type sounds adds to the sense of threat and surrealism. This isolation and surreal sense of a place out of time sets a tone which reflects the themes of the film – namely, a lack of connection to others and the repetitive cycle of history, particularly in relation to an absence of feminist legacy. The repetitiveness of the music and images illustrates the troubling repetition of the women's experiences across the generations.

Justine's mother is in several scenes in the film but her face is rarely shown clearly. Despite being an influential parent, the indirect way she is shot suggests an impersonal, or mysterious figure that the girls, and the audience, know very little about. For example, in the car her face is never shown, and in many shots is obscured by her hair. In contrast, the father makes direct eye contact and seems watchful.



Figure 3.8 The mother's face is often obscured by her hair, the camera angle or the lighting. This positions the mother as an unknown figure.

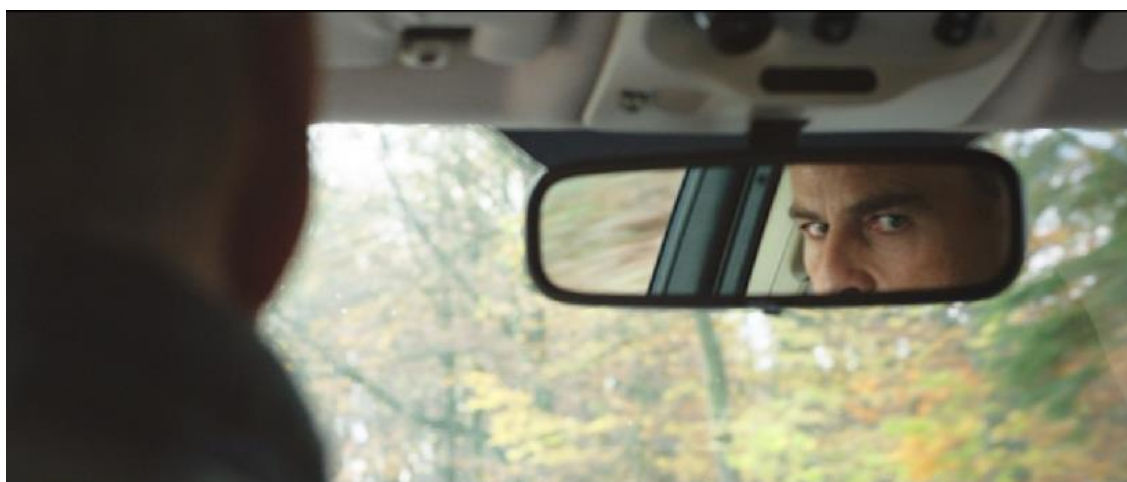


Figure 3.9 The father watches, often making eye contact with Justine or the camera. His face is always very clear and this positions him as the more attentive parent. However, he also refuses to communicate about the issues Justine will face.

This shows that although there is an expectation of a feminist legacy – the mother has been to the same college, after all, and appears very assertive and is an active agent – the strategies she used are mysterious and contradict the rules she lays down now. The mother's relative absence illustrates a lack of connection to a history of feminism and feminist strategies as it is eventually revealed that the problems Justine faces are repetitions of her mother's.

The mother's non-consumption, which is encapsulated by her vegetarianism is linked to victimhood, not feminist strategy, as we shall see in the next section, but it initially seems like a feminist behaviour which values animal life in the ways which vegan feminists like Adams (2003) equate to feminism. The ambiguous nature of vegetarianism in this film reflects the contradictory nature of postfeminist consumption in that vegetarianism can symbolise both an assertion of

identity and ethics but also a submission to patriarchal gender expectations. Indeed, the vegetarianism represents a suppression of desire and power, and the non-consumption of meat leads to physical suffering along with rapid malnutrition with one of Justine's teeth inexplicably falling out. She then eats this, consuming herself which, as I explore in the next section, can be read as women being comestible within patriarchal structures.

During the initial hazing ritual, Alex shows Justine that their mother participated in the ritual too as it is recorded in an old photograph. This confuses Justine who does not know what rules to follow. She is part of a tradition that her parents and sister have apparently negotiated successfully but which contradicts the vegetarian ethics her mother has imparted when Justine is required to eat a raw rabbit's kidney. Alex forces her to eat it and from then Justine is tempted by a new set of rules regarding femininity and consumption. In order to be perceived as a successful woman and student, she must become 'sexy'. In one hazing ritual, female students must wear sexy clubwear but when Justine tells a 'veteran' that she has nothing like that, the older girl takes out a 'uniform' which turns out to be a nappy. Because Justine is not able to embody the feminine ideal of sexiness she is infantilised, humiliated and made late for class.

Alex also implies that she is still a child when she is disgusted by Justine's body hair and encourages her to remove it. Alex attempts to give her a bikini wax which goes wrong. Justine feels objectified and threatened with the camera showing Alex looming over her and their dog, Quickly, sniffing her crotch as she lies with legs open.



Figure 3.6 This shot puts Justine in a vulnerable position with the bestiality illustrating how Justine is here being treated as meat. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The bestiality and objectification, the lack of power shown in this scene is juxtaposed with Justine's first cannibalistic act when she consumes Alex's finger which is accidentally cut off. Justine discovers that consumption can give her power but she must be the one to exploit others, not the one who is exploited. This reflects the adoption of patriarchal strategies as women, particularly, are figured as comestible. Justine does not adopt this strategy wholesale, however, and her struggles with the ethics of cannibalism and consumption illustrate how postfeminist strategies of consumption are often ambivalent and contradictory. She must consume the right things to fit in – be sexy, get a wax, etc. – but she does not like herself and hides her shame by

self-medicating with alcohol. However, at the same time Justine wants to succeed so she plays hard, trying to negotiate the line between objectifying people and objectifying herself. This is illustrated when she becomes so drunk that she acts like a dog for Alex, snapping at a corpse in the morgue during a party and incurring her classmates' disgust. Her attempts to be powerful by consuming others are undermined by her bestialisation.



Figure 3.7 Justine fails to negotiate the line between objectifying herself to be sexy and becoming bestial. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

Alex has the same cannibalistic cravings but chooses to cause car crashes to kill people to eat. She shows Justine how she does this, trying to teach Justine how to consume appropriately. At the denouement of the film, their father describes how they always let Alex be completely herself as a child which resulted in her being unable to moderate her consumption. Alex is an ideal, postfeminist neoliberal consumer – she is willing to exploit others to maintain her own comfort and satisfaction. She is willing to display a sexy body and encourage her sister to do the same. However, Alex's competitiveness with Justine leads to her murder and consumption of Justine's erstwhile lover, Adrien. The reveal of his half-eaten leg, bones showing through stringy muscle, is accompanied by jarring, repetitive music as Justine whips back the blanket, distraught at his death. This emotionally charged, tense moment and the food horror of the leg show how Alex's consumption ultimately hurts people she values as well as strangers. Her (postfeminist) strategy of embracing patriarchal consumption is ultimately framed as self-destructive.

The mother clearly tries harder to curb Justine's consumption and teaches her to self-police her consumption through vegetarianism. However, this is not the feminist ethical position that it could be but instead is a position of self-denial, self-policing and victimhood. This is ambivalent and contradictory because Justine's self-denial does ultimately keep her out of prison, creates empathy with her, and has a basis in vegan-feminist ethics. As I explore in the next section, Justine's non-differentiation between women and animals elevates animals to the same level as humans, but most of her classmates and wider culture equate women with animals but position both as comestible and subhuman. These two paradoxical ideologies are ambivalent through much of the film with Justine not fully understanding the gap between her views and others' until she discovers her mother's cannibalism. Her shock at her father's scarred chest uses food horror

to illustrate how excessive, selfish consumption can be animalistic as her mother's ethics are revealed to be hypocritical and unsustainable. Consumption is still necessary and exploitative, and the mother has not discovered a way to exist without it despite her insistence on non-consumption. Their cannibalism is part of a cycle with Justine unaware of her connection to the past. The film shows how little has changed as the consumption remains the same but is subject to different perspectives. Similarly, femininity is performed using traditional beauty ideals, domestic skills and sexual desirability but is subject to two competing perspectives in the postfeminist era.

This section has examined how the absent mothers in these texts represent a lack of connection to a history of feminism and feminist strategies. The girls negotiate how to be feminine using consumption but must simultaneously avoid being positioned as comestible. Initially, they try to play by the rules but realise that this does not give them power. Starling, who had rejected femininity as oppressive, slowly embraces her femininity while simultaneously imbuing it with the power which she has learned from patriarchal consumption. However, as I argue in the next section, this is framed somewhat ironically, critiquing this postfeminist strategy. While Iris embraces a feminine role uncritically, Rose embraces an ambiguous femininity, taking her caring role seriously by rebelling against patriarchal rules that oppress her and others. Finally, in *Raw*, Justine attempts to negotiate space between what she believes are a feminist ethics of non-consumption and the power that consumption provides within a patriarchal education environment. The texts use distortions in time and place to connect the girls' current struggles to the past and to patriarchal traditions which have not yet been resolved. As I go on to discuss in the next section, the absence of a maternal tradition and history of feminism leaves a gap in which the female cannibals learn how to consume from their fathers and father figures.

3.3 Fathers and the Cannibalism of Patriarchy

The absent mothers create a gap in each text which represents a failure to engage with feminism, leaving the girls to turn to consumption as a way to gain empowerment. This gap also creates an opportunity for the father to become an emotionally significant character in these texts. I argue that the fathers' crisis of masculinity reveals the exploitative nature of consumption and shows how cannibalism, both literal and metaphorical, is already a patriarchal method of exercising power. This, then, complicates whether consumption such as female cannibalism is an effective postfeminist strategy of empowerment which challenges patriarchal structures or whether it is an extension of patriarchal power structures open to those girls who more easily identify with the status quo.

The father figures in these texts are positioned as providers and protectors but are also expected to be nurturers in absence of the mother. As Pagnoni Berns and Rodriguez Fontao (2016) argue, the postfeminist father must negotiate his desire for traditional forms of masculinity with the postfeminist ideal of nurturing fatherhood. They argue that fathers have become central figures in the gothic since the new millennium because they articulate fears relating to a renewed

desire for men to protect and provide for families and the reality that many men can neither protect their families from external attacks (e.g. the 9/11 terrorist attacks) nor financial crises (e.g. the 2008 housing market crash). The texts show the fathers' vulnerabilities to create and explain the initial sympathy and compliance of the daughters. This establishes how the girls try to play by the rules, believing they will succeed if they adhere to the edicts of the father and patriarchal institutions generally. However, as the narratives progress, the fathers' shortcomings are revealed through this tension between patriarchal fatherhood and postfeminist fatherhood. The exploitative nature of the father's consumption is revealed and the girls co-opt these strategies for their own benefit.

As I explained briefly in the introduction, how the father is articulated in these texts differs. In *Hannibal*, Starling idealises her dead father and connects his memory to institutional father figures such as Crawford, Brigham and Krendler. The characters are named in the text as father figures (for example, all three are mentioned as father figures on page 528), but they metonymically represent the FBI. Her father's nurturing, postfeminist fatherhood is linked with feeding Starling oranges and SNO BALLS and provides Starling with a connection to the past through her memories of him in the kitchen. She ignores his failure to protect and provide for his family, bettering his position in law enforcement, and rejecting her mother's femininity and apparent inadequacy in order to progress within the FBI. Starling's willingness to play by the rules despite the corruption of the FBI, which I discuss below, is explained by her reluctance to criticise her father's masculinity. We discover that Starling resents him for his failure of masculinity represented by a failure to be competent. Starling admits to Lecter that

“I'm really mad at him, though. I mean, come on, how come he had to be behind a goddamned drugstore in the middle of the night going up against those two pissants that killed him. He short-shucked that old pump shotgun and they had him. They were nothing and they had him. He didn't know what he was doing. He never learned anything.” (524)

His failure of masculinity is presented through his inability to protect himself against ‘pissants’, and his lack of knowledge and education. Starling also goes on to criticise his commitment to law and order as his bosses did not respect his sacrifice and decided to re-use his badge instead of burying him with it which reflects her own experience of the justice system as cannibalistic. By accepting her ambivalent feelings towards her father, and reclaiming her femininity, Starling realises that playing by the rules cannot benefit her, she turns the cannibalistic consumption of her father figures against them. Her rejection of patriarchal figures culminates in her cannibalism of Krendler's brain.

The institution of the FBI is positioned as cannibalistic. It uses its employees and then ‘wasted’ (288) them. After the failed drug raid the Director of the FBI tells Crawford that ‘Judiciary Oversight wants a meat sacrifice. Fresh, bleating meat. [...] And we have to throw them some. But in our case, they just might be satisfied with poultry. Krendler thinks we can give

them Clarice Starling and they'll leave us alone' (28). This positions Krendler and the FBI as cannibalistically using Starling as a sacrificial victim. This is particularly gendered by the idea that she is 'poultry' instead of 'meat' as it evokes the image of gooseflesh, prostitution and coquetry.⁷ When Starling is called into a meeting to answer for the raid, we are told the bosses are like 'a sidling pack' (43) when they finally look at Starling. Krendler is described as a 'hyena' (43) whose 'nature [is] to both appreciate Starling's leg and look for the hamstring' (51). This emphasises Krendler's (and the FBI's) gendered cannibalistic consumption of Starling for their own benefit.

The (metaphorical) cannibalism of the FBI is only one instance of cannibalism that permeates this text. The many references to cannibalism in the text include the Catholic Mass in which 'the devout believe that [...] they eat the actual body and blood of Christ' (116) which shows how cannibalism is fundamentally built into patriarchal structures. Mason Verger's meat-packing plant is also a hotbed of cannibalism. 'Several Verger employees had been rendered into lard inadvertently' (60) and the Vergers escaped any repercussions because they sponsor politicians. This points to the wider cannibalism of the political-legal system implying how power is circulated and reproduced through capitalist-patriarchal structures. This is further emphasised when we are told that Margot Verger is disinherited by her father because she is a lesbian and not therefore expected to reproduce. This reflects the concept of primogeniture in which wealth is circulated within small, potentially incestuous circles, as fathers marry off daughters to solidify business and political connections. As discussed in Chapter Two, Thomas Paine (1791) characterised this practice in the 18th century aristocracy as cannibalistic, demonstrating how embedded it is in patriarchal structures.

Lecter, on the other hand, is framed ambiguously within the text. He is the real cannibal and is called a monster throughout the novel but it is unclear whether his cannibalism is part of, or a parody of, the underlying cannibalistic structures in society. His relationship to Starling is similarly ambiguous. Starling considers him like the lambs she tried to save from slaughter as a young girl. When deciding whether to save him she reflects that 'she could not abide the thought of Dr Lecter tortured to death; she shied from it as she had from the slaughter of the lambs and horses so long ago' (464). While this demonstrates Starling's morality, it also equates Lecter with innocent animals. Despite this, Starling is also aware of his shortcomings from the outset. She understands that his comprehension and acceptance of her subjectivity comes without empathy which is a complexity she does not extend to the other father figures within the text, again setting him apart. However, Lecter undoubtedly mentors her, both provides for, and protects her successfully, and nurtures her as well, making him the most successful father in the text. However, as I go on to discuss, even Lecter is challenged by Starling's consuming femininity.

⁷ *Poulet* (meaning 'chicken') is one French slang word for prostitute, comparable to the English term 'gooseflesh'. Similarly, a coquette is a wanton woman, the etymology again developing from the French for a male chicken (*coq*).

In the novel, Starling is shot with two sedative darts when she rescues Lecter from being fed alive to Verger's pigs. Lecter takes her to his rental home and nurses her. What exactly Lecter does and how far he influences her is left ambiguous. Starling drinks herbal tea, she feels 'once the sting of a needle' (512) either of which may be hallucinogenic or innocently medicinal, and she is described as 'awake and not awake' (513). Their conversations begin by looking at 'a single bright object' (520), a form of hypnotherapy but perhaps also a simple talking point. While Starling is 'under the influence of a major hypnotic drug and deep hypnosis' (524) Lecter shows her father's bones and encourages her to accept her ambivalent feelings about him – 'he became Lecter the Protector of her father's memory' (525). The rhyme of that phrase infantilises Starling, and mocks the romanticism of her memory but at the same time, it shows Lecter acting as psychotherapist and not cannibal corrupter. Starling is described as 'herself and not herself' (515), and Krendler, lobotomised at the dinner table (and therefore not entirely reliable) claims "'You're not Starling. You've got the spot on your face but you're not Starling'" (548). These hints suggest that Starling's subjectivity is in flux but, as I discussed in the previous section, Starling is already described earlier in the novel as 'not quite herself' (465) before rescuing Lecter. These suggest that Starling is in the process of transforming before Lecter ever has a conversation with her. Starling is also coherent enough when she is with Lecter to look at her car's wipers and decide to change them, and to locate a tracking device on her car in 'less than two minutes' and rationalise that Krendler used it illegally (515). Her rationality in this scene casts ambiguity on her state of mind and whether Lecter is really changing her personality at all.

The gothic nature of the ending with its dreamlike quality and fragmented sense of time and place positions any reading of the text as ambiguous. Indeed, even the narrator is uncertain whether 'Starling may [...] come to some unwilling awakening, if indeed she even sleeps' (562). The deliberate ambiguity of whether Starling becomes a cannibal (and Lecter's lover) consciously is purposefully troubling, and troubles Lecter as well. The equivocal (and contested) nature of this ending, prohibiting certainty, reflects the nature of the neoliberal consumer who must adapt to market needs. Although Starling's transformation begins before Lecter's psychotherapy it nevertheless responds to the prevalence of cannibalistic consumption as power – demonstrated not just by Lecter but by the patriarchal systems in which Starling lives.

When she embraces consumption by wearing the dresses and jewellery Lecter provides and comes to dinner, she is beyond Lecter's control and causes him rare moments of fear when he realises she is autonomous – 'It occurred to Dr Lecter in that moment that with all his knowledge and intrusion, he could never entirely predict her, or own her at all. He could feed the caterpillar, he could whisper through the chrysalis; what hatched out followed its own nature and was beyond him' (541). This metaphor of the caterpillar refers back to the rearing of moths that was a central metaphor of transformation in *SOL* and links Starling's transformation into a fully autonomous being as beginning then. While Fuller (2008) argues that Starling's cannibalism represents her incestuous desire for her father which is resolved by becoming Lecter's lover, I

would argue that Starling's cannibalism is the culmination of her transformation towards a consuming femininity.

The intertextual reference here draws attention to the constructed nature of the narrative. The novel is dotted throughout with intertextual humour such as officers named Burke and Hare, which were the names two real life body-snatchers in 18th century Edinburgh. The repetition within the novel also creates a sense of irony and the uncanny. Place names such as Belvedere in Florence and in Ohio are repeated, as are historical events. When Lecter kills the avaricious Commendator Pazzi, a corrupt Italian detective, he hangs him from the window of the Palazzo Vecchio and slits his torso so his bowels fall out which is the exact same place and manner of death as Pazzi's ancestor. These repetitions mix the past and present which abstracts the events from a specific context and draws attention to the permeating cannibalism throughout Western history, and the gendered nature of it.

This culminates in the cannibal scene in which the excess and irony generates a comic tone which renders Starling's cannibalism absurd. Following this therapy, Lecter prepares his dining room in excessive detail. 'He could see he had too many flowers in the room, and must add more to make it come back right again. Too many was too many but way too many was just right' (534). The excess here is surreal, with Mezejewski (2004, 165) commenting that it sounds like the Mad Hatter's tea party. Against this backdrop, Lecter performs his dinner theatre lifting the top of Krendler's head off and frying slices of his brain at the table side. The moment of cannibalism is comically elided with the food horror rendered absurd through the dialogue of the characters.

"Smells great!" Krendler said.

Dr Lecter placed the browned brains on broad croutons on the warmed plates, and dressed them with the sauce and truffle slices. A garnish of parsley and whole caper berries with their stems, and a single nasturtium blossom on watercress to achieve a little height, completed his presentation.

"How is it?" Krendler asked, once again behind the flowers and speaking immoderately loud, as persons with lobotomies are prone to do.

"Really excellent," Starling said. "I've never had caper berries before." (550)

The horror of the scene comes from the contrast between Lecter's coldly calculated, excessive presentation with the knowledge that the brain, perhaps already disgusting as it is normally considered offal, comes from a living human being. However, the horror is undermined by Krendler's overly loud interest in the food, with the aside about lobotomies which can be read as glib. It is dramatic irony, a knowing comment on behalf of the narrator that contrasts with the gravity of the damage inflicted. The horror of the cannibalism is even further distanced by Starling's comment. That she chooses to identify capers as new to her and not the human brains creates a comic distance between our expectations and what we are given. Although it may also suggest that cannibalism is not new to her, another ambiguous moment which ironically elides

the female cannibalism into a vague sense of threat. This scene almost parodies the expectations of cannibal horror and in doing so challenges what about cannibalism, particularly female cannibalism, is horrific in the first place. The parodic nature of this scene shows how Starling's consumption, while excessive, is of a piece with the wider context of the novel and the similarly humorous repetitions and ironies that figure patriarchal institutions as cannibalistic. Her monstrosity, then, reflects back on society its own monstrous nature. It also emphasises that power based on consumption will always oppress someone so it can only ever provide consumers with a veneer of equality based on their level of privilege and access to power within the status quo.

The father-daughter relationship in *WAWWA* is also framed in terms of cannibalism, incest and the tensions between nurturance and patriarchal masculinity. Frank, the father in *WAWWA*, exercises his control over the family through his position as patriarch. He is expected to provide for and protect his family. However, Frank's belief that God is directly responsible for the family's health, as well as his lack of money to pay for a doctor, means that his wife's death is a symbol of his failure. The wife's death brings their cannibalism to the attention of Doc Barrows and so Frank not only fails to protect his family's health but he also fails to protect them from the law. Frank also fails to provide and maintain the family income. As a landowner he rents space to itinerant workers but in one scene one of his tenants pays his bill and tells Frank he must take his family elsewhere as there is no work for him in the area. Iris later tells Anders that 'there is only the new girl left' in their trailer park. Frank's failure to provide for his family occurs just as he is obliged to take on a caring role as widower.

Hannah Hamad (2014: 24) explores postfeminist fatherhood in American films and claims that in many cases the father is widowed in order to frame the father as a victim and generate sympathy for him and his attempts to 'cement bonds with [his] children'. This tonal register creates 'sympathy for lost male power' (Hamad 2014: 26) while maintaining an appearance of being apolitical. Frank does indeed attempt to bond with his son, Rory, in several moving scenes as he comforts Rory when he is afraid of the dark, and helps him dress and comb his hair. However, he is unwilling to take on the mother's role fully, leaving the girls to slaughter and prepare his selected victim for their ritual. Furthermore, he leaves Rory in the care of the girls throughout the film and, in one memorable scene, sends the girls to identify their mother's body as he is apparently too grief-stricken to do so. The gothic mode of this film also twists Frank's attempts at nurturing into something more sinister.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, often cannibal films include references to incest. This is because of the similarities between alimentary and sexual consumption within the same group – that is, humans eating humans is comparable to incestuous abuse/rape. While there is no overt suggestion of incestuous abuse, there is nonetheless an implication that along with the mother's feeding and childcare role, Iris may be expected to service her father's needs as well. As I explore further throughout the thesis, obliging the eldest daughter to take on the mother's role is one sign of covert incest according to Herman and Hirschman (1981: 45). They explain that

The family may come to rely on this daughter for a large part of the housework and child care and for emotional support and comfort. For the daughter, the duty to fulfill her father's sexual demands may evolve almost as an extension of her role as "little mother" in the family.

The subtle suggestions of Frank's incestuous abuse of Iris frame him as cannibalistic in a patriarchal way. As Christine Grogan (2016: 18) points out 'incest reflects and maintains the status quo: the order of the patriarchy. Perhaps an exaggeration, it is not a departure from patriarchal family norms but its inevitable by-product.' This hints towards a spectrum of abuse in which incestuous acts are a continuation of patriarchal norms. However, the hints in the film are subtle and ambiguous thus adding to the sense of unease and tensions between nurturing fatherhood and patriarchal dominance.

When the family discusses their ritual in relation to their mother's death, Frank sits next to Iris with his hand on her knee and informs her that the mother's role is her responsibility now. His hand squeezing just above her knee is an ambiguous sign of comfort and ownership, and his expectations reflect both a burdening of his daughter and a vote of confidence in her abilities.



Figure 3.8 The framing of this shot draws attention to Frank's proprietary hand on Iris's knee. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The editing and mise-en-scène subtly draw attention to his hand as the scene cuts between close ups of Iris's bowed head, and a shot of Frank in focus with Iris's head out of shot, dehumanising her, and Rose's head out of focus in the foreground, filling the space so that the audience is forced to focus on Frank's body language. The dimmed lighting and tight framing also create a sense of claustrophobia which illustrates the girls' entrapment.

Frank squeezes Iris's shoulder in several scenes and in one scene, Iris sits on the edge of her father's bed while he is lying in it and questions why they are different. Frank attempts to comfort her by telling her god chose them to 'be this way' and tells her she is 'stronger than she knows'. Iris then leans over and blows out the candle which leads to a cut to black. This film convention usually indicates a sex scene, and is immediately followed by a close up of strips of bacon sizzling in a pan. While it is revealed that the bacon is in a café, not the Parker home, this jump in time from night to morning further reinforces the implication that Iris does not leave her father's room. Furthermore, when Iris later has sex with Deputy Anders, Frank creeps up behind them, driving a shovel into Anders' head. The camera is positioned from Iris's perspective looking up at Anders' face which is then eclipsed by her father's face above her as blood drips on her.



Figure 3.13 Anders' *petite mort* becomes a real death. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 3.14 Frank's possession of his daughter is suggested by his sexual jealousy in killing her lover. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

This type of sexual jealousy exhibits what Herman and Herschman (1981: 60) describe as the patriarchal expectation that the daughter belongs to the father until he disposes of her in marriage to another man. The implied incest in this text is very much ambiguous and subtle and many of the signs which might suggest incest are also suggestive of innocent comfort and care. Frank's position as father, then, straddles the boundary between patriarchal fatherhood of which incest and cannibalism are an extension, and a nurturing postfeminist fatherhood.

His failure as patriarch encompasses both his failure to provide and protect and his failure to nurture. Indeed, his nurture becomes twisted as he decides to kill his children to protect them and himself from retribution by Doc Barrow and the law. As I explored in the previous section, the father's cannibalism is turned against him by his daughters as they reject his fatalistic nurturance and become monstrous versions of his ideal as they consume him. In the DVD commentary, Bill Sage, who plays Frank, admits he decided to act the cannibal scene as though he was 'surrendering' to the girls. This is translated in the scene in vaguely religious terms as Frank opens his arms into an approximation of the crucifixion and Iris stabs his hand with a knife in a domestic parody of the nails being driven into Christ's palms.



Figure 3.9 Frank is splayed in a crucifix shape as he surrenders to his daughters' cannibalism. His facial expression is one of peace. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

Despite the obvious martyrdom of Frank, the scene is not played as parody. The scene generates sympathy for the misguided Frank, and communicates a passing-on of the baton as his daughters both become the cannibals he had hoped but do so in their own way and for their own benefit. As I argued in the previous section, the girls are framed ambiguously as both monstrous and human, their consumption of their father is at once both a capitulation to his desires and a rebellion against his authority which reflects postfeminist consumption as both rebellion and complicity. The final images of the film is Alyce Parker's diary cookbook on Rose's knee as they drive into the sunrise which suggests an ambivalent relationship between postfeminist consumption and patriarchy. The viewer is left to question whether the book is a memento of their past or a guide to continue their father's cannibalism themselves, or perhaps both.

The patriarchal cannibalism in *Raw* is signalled by its effects on women's bodies. Throughout the film, references are made to women's non-consumption – that is, anorexia, bulimia, and, in this text, vegetarianism – in relation to the exploitation of their bodies through rape, medical and educational discrimination, and oppressive beauty ideals. Patriarchy eats women up by causing their self-consumption. This is illustrated not through the father, although he is complicit with the silence that allows this consumption to thrive, but through institutional authority figures, especially other male students and the 'male, pale and stale' professor who is one of the few adults present in the film.

The professor tries to humiliate Justine, wondering if her reputation as a genius is deserved and correcting her in an adversarial manner when she finishes her work early. He later insists that either Justine or Adrien have cheated on a paper and interviews Justine in his office, pressuring her to admit that Adrien cheated. The camera cuts between the two with Justine shot from above making her look small, chewing her hair and looking visibly upset, and the professor shot from Justine's perspective below him which frames him as powerful.



Figure 3.1611 Justine looks small shot from above. Chewing her hair illustrates how her distress is translated into self-consumption. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

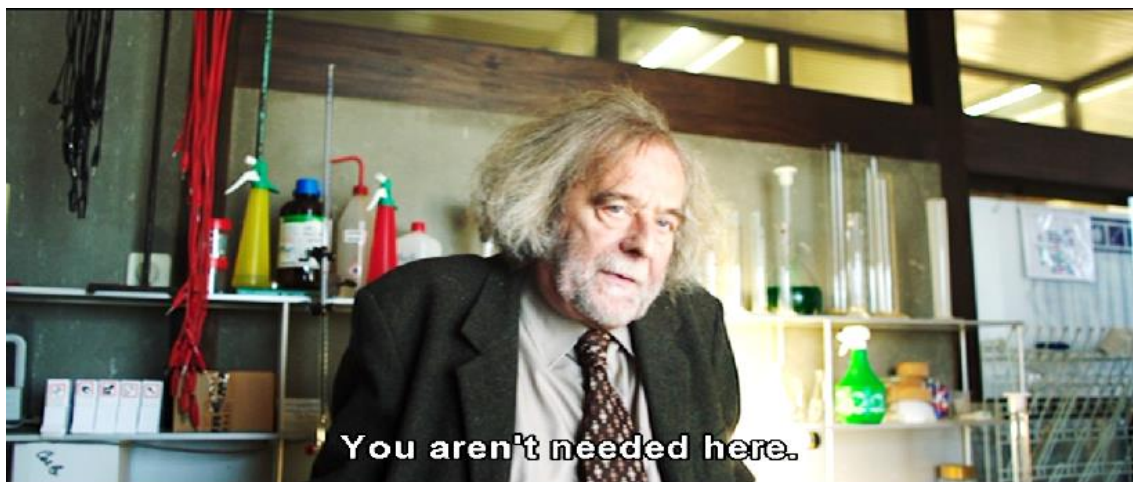


Figure 3.1711 The 'pale, male, stale' professor perpetuates institutional sexism as he denigrates Justine's ability. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

He rants at her telling her that her intelligence scares away good doctors as many would rather leave than compare themselves to her. The misogynistic disdain for her intelligence shows that there are still institutional barriers for young women that may encourage women to return to the home, disillusioned, as Negra (2009) claims, with the results of feminism.

This confrontation triggers one of the more abject scenes in the film as Justine rushes to the toilet to throw up. What comes up is a giant hairball as she chokes, pulling the hair out of her throat in a seemingly endless moment of food/body horror. The camera jump cuts to various positions in a series of nauseating close ups of her regurgitation.



Figure 3.12 Justine's surreal regurgitation of her hair emphasises that she has consumed herself, and suggests bulimia which is also a form of self-consumption that is framed in the film as a reaction to patriarchy. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

Not only does this surreal scene evoke a comparison with cats throwing up furballs but it hints towards bulimia, a sign of victimhood according to Adrien's earlier glib remarks. Indeed, at the sinks afterwards, a girl informs Justine that 'two fingers make it come up quicker' showing how disordered behaviours are normalised and common within certain contexts. Justine's educational victimisation positions her as animalistic illustrating how the rejection of her intellectual capacities causes her own bodily rejection in the form of her long hair – a symbol of femininity in Europe.

In an earlier scene the connection between rape culture and eating disorders is established when students debate the myth that AIDS was contracted through sexual relations with monkeys. Despite the homophobia of the discussion, Adrien dismisses Justine's concern that animal rape is equivalent to human rape by stating that 'the monkey won't turn anorexic and see a therapist'. Justine continues to argue that a monkey is self-aware and would suffer until other young women look at her with disgust when she claims that a raped woman is the same as a raped monkey. The students do not see the act of rape as the same but as contingent upon the subjectivity of the victim which is problematic if women are consistently dehumanised. Furthermore, Adrien's comments reflect the idea that a woman must show visible signs of suffering to prove that she has been raped, effectively performing a victim role. This is the identity that postfeminist media culture tries to deny through encouraging empowerment through consumption and self-objectification.

Justine illustrates rape culture again when explaining to the doctor how she got a severe rash from consuming the rabbit kidney. Alex pushes the kidney into her mouth when Justine initially refuses the ritual. When the doctor asks if they forced her, Justine says 'no'. She looks guilty, breaking eye contact as she admits this. This display of shame illustrates how the concept of consent is confused through eating metaphors as Justine was quite clearly coerced and forced to participate with her sister literally putting her hand over Justine's mouth. After the examination the doctor lights a cigarette – something which has been illegal indoors in Europe for a number of years – and looks directly at the camera as she tells Justine about a fat girl who was wrongly denied medical testing because of her weight until the girl was sent to her. This surreal staging

draws attention to the doctor's monologue as it seems to break the fourth wall and the flow of the film. This vignette again links sexual discrimination to women's bodies as desirable and comestible showing how patriarchal institutions such as medicine exploit women, wasting their bodies when they do not obey the ideals of femininity.

The cannibalism, then, illustrates the violence and exploitation of this (self-)consumption of women. At the same time, the girls cannot avoid cannibalism. As I mentioned previously, Justine consumes her own tooth and chews her hair which indicates her struggles to negotiate self-objectification, but she also eats others, biting a boy who pushes her to engage in a kissing game. It is not framed as retaliation but as desire overtaking reason. The assertion of desire is cannibalistic and Justine ambivalently embraces this despite feeling pressured not to consume. In a sex scene with Adrien, she bites into her own arm only reaching climax when allowed to vent her desire for flesh. This connection between desire and eating reflects how patriarchal rape culture has framed sexual acts as exploitative and people as comestible while also showing how Justine tries to negotiate this without harming anyone else.

Alex and Justine's cannibalism seems to rebel against the idea that women should not consume or should self-consume and Justine's assertion of desire is an ambivalent subversion of the expectation that she is the one to be consumed by others. This is emphasised when Alex claims the dress she let Justine borrow fits her better now and warns Justine that she 'better not be anorexic'. The comment is a knowing one as Alex refers to cannibalism not just normal food. She seems to imply that Justine had better be consuming others and not herself. Cannibalism and consumption is accepted as inescapable except through non-consumption. However, as the revelation about their mother confirms, there is no such thing. If we read this as an expression of fears and desires about postfeminist consumption and its relationship both to patriarchal culture and an incomplete feminist project, it becomes clear that the rejection of femininity through non-consumption did not work, and that silence around objectification, consumption and rape culture is complicit with the self-destructive and exploitative femininity that these girls embody. The repetitions throughout the film, of the images, spaces, past, and music all contribute to this bleak tone and the inescapability of consumption.

As I have discussed in this section, cannibalism is framed as a patriarchal source of power in these texts as women are positioned as comestible and animalistic. The female cannibals co-opt this power negotiating cannibalism on their own terms. The American texts show the tension between a nurturing postfeminist fatherhood and a traditional one which is supposed to protect and provide for the family. This tension causes the fathers to fail in one way or another, disillusioning the girls and creating a space for them to critically adopt elements of power while asserting it within a feminine role. *Raw*, on the other hand, uses continued but unexpected misogyny and patriarchal consumption to reveal the tension between an expectation that non-consumption is ethical and equitable, and the reality of the text that power is accessed only through exploitative objectification and consumption.

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, these texts explore the female cannibal in relation to generational authority and its relationship with consumption. On one hand, second wave feminism is a conspicuous absence in these texts, represented by absent mothers and a lack of feminist legacy. Starling rejects her femininity initially, while Iris and Rose can only embody an oppressed femininity. Justine, also rejects consumption initially in order to gain the approval of her emotionally absent mother. The girls instead are left with an example of patriarchal cannibalism which is linked to a crisis of masculinity and reveals the exploitative nature of the patriarchy. The female cannibals co-opt this cannibalism and excessive consumption, and they destroy their father figures using the exploitative power they have been subject to. The texts play with the contextual markers of time and space in these text, abstracting the patriarchal consumption from a specific historical context. This not only focuses the texts on the gendered nature of the consumption but occasionally creates a comic, parodic tone. This maintains the ambiguity and ambivalence in these texts.

The texts only mildly critique postfeminist consumption as they use food horror to illustrate the exploitative and abject nature of objectifying others. *Hannibal* uses humour to critique the individualised nature of Starling's cannibalistic empowerment but nevertheless positions her as rebellious, autonomous and her life of glamour at the conclusion is enviable. The Parker girls are similarly framed as sympathetic and Rose, in particular, is positioned as heroine and a point of identification because of her assertiveness and critical nature. *WAWWA* uses the historical cycles to reveal that consumption is continuous and inescapable and so the girls may as well benefit from it even if it makes them monstrous. *Raw* is perhaps the most critical of cannibalistic consumption as it challenges the nature of subjectivity and autonomy, as well as the inevitability of consumption. However, all of the texts position the female cannibals as rebellious and coming-of-age, framing their negotiation of consumption and cannibalistic practices sympathetically against a background of patriarchal consumption which oppresses all women and is built into the structures around them.

The themes of incest in the texts begin to explore how cannibalism and incestuous abuse are comparable behaviours and this continues to arise through the thesis. Cannibalism and incest have often been linked in literature and film, however, the gendered nature of the cannibal draws attention to incest as a material reality for women and girls, not just a metaphor. It justifies cannibalism in many texts but cannibalism is not always caused by or revenge upon incestuous figures. As the thesis continues I argue that incestuous abuse becomes an excessive way of illustrating a spectrum of patriarchal abuse which female cannibal texts address in relation to a continuing need for feminism. However, as I discuss throughout this thesis, this is only a small part of the cultural work that female cannibal texts undertake.

Chapter Four: Mothers and Daughters

Unlike the previous chapter, the cannibals in this chapter are mothers (and daughters). I argue that by making the cannibal a mother, and part of a maternal tradition, these texts allow us to examine the tensions and anxieties relating to the definition of the family, women's roles within it and the ways in which feeding others can be a site of contested power. The texts idealise the female cannibals as mothers, illustrating a neoliberal ideal of reproduction by positioning them as powerful and capable even at the expense of patriarchal hierarchies and heteronormativity. Despite this idealisation, however, the texts foreground the cyclicity of patriarchal abuse and feminine resistance which demonstrates a lack of structural progress.

As Hollows (2008: 60) claims, the family is 'produced, reproduced and negotiated through domestic practices.' The postfeminist (and neoliberal) reclamations of domestic labour as professional and pleasurable skills are in tension with second wave criticisms which posit domestic labour as unpaid and oppressive. The texts in this chapter feature this tension, showing how women are oppressed within the home and how they can resist this by constructing the family and accessing power through foodways (and cannibalism). Although the cannibals are empowered figures whose actions reveal cycles of patriarchal abuse, their power is only effective when it operates outside mainstream culture with their consumption often positioned in comic terms. By positioning the female cannibals as part of a maternal tradition, these texts question whether women's access to power has really changed over generations and to what extent this power is limited, even while they idealise female-led families.

These texts use cannibalism to visualise women's potential domestic authority. The food horror involved in this illuminates the male violence against women by contrasting ridiculous or excessive food horror with the insidious sexual horror and resultant disruption of the family which occurs through incest, objectification and domestic violence. Thus, the horror which is most visible is, in some ways, least horrific. Instead, the true horror of patriarchal systems is rendered visible by the excessive reaction to it. The father figures disrupt or ignore family foodways which in turn disrupts the structures of the family. By objectifying women as animals or objects, the fathers assume ownership of the women in their families and feel entitled to incestuously abuse their daughters. Instead of providing for the family, contributing to its foodways and construction through domestic practice, the fathers construct a patriarchal family which is based on the dehumanisation of its female members.

I look at *The Woman*, a novel (2011) by Jack Ketchum and Lucky McKee, who also directed the film version in 2011, as well as *Meat Grinder* (2009) directed by Tiwa Moeithaisong. I read the foodways in these texts to explore the anxieties of domestic life as well as the power that can be accessed through matrilineal knowledge and food rituals which help to define the family. The texts position the female cannibal ambiguously, on one hand opposing male

oppression through her cooking and feeding practices but on the other, the latest victim in a cycle of patriarchal abuse. The cannibalism is an ironic inversion of the abuses inflicted upon women in the texts. Therefore, although the cannibalism is empowering, it does not radically alter how power operates in these texts. Furthermore, the texts show that this is a cycle of abuse and resistance which demonstrates the limited power of reclaiming traditionally feminine gender roles.

The cannibalism in both texts is a tradition handed down from mother to daughter to enhance the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the family. Thus, while the cannibals enact revenge against particular men, we know that cannibalism is not *only* revenge. Instead, eating human flesh is given a ritualistic meaning connected to feminine care of the spiritual and physical health of the family/community. While there is a spiritual element to this consumption, the cannibalism is not supernatural but the preservation of culture through maternal cooking traditions whose power is demonstrated through the metaphorical violence of cannibalism. This tradition passing from mother to daughter demonstrates the ways in which women have learned to negotiate power within the spaces and roles expected of them, as well as illustrating the systemic nature of patriarchal oppression. The cannibalism is not a personal revenge but an appropriate response to the effects of patriarchy within these family traditions despite its limited success at eradicating patriarchal abuse.

In *Meat Grinder* cannibalism is shown at the beginning of the film and is continually presented in flashbacks which position it as part of a maternal tradition. At the same time, these flashbacks emphasise this act as an acceptable form of revenge and show patriarchal abuses including incestuous rape in order to position the female cannibal as victimised as well as a monstrous heroine. Like *301/302* (1995), which I explore in the next chapter, the flashbacks challenge our perception of the characters through temporal and spatial distortion. The film is set in Bangkok in the 1970s and tells the story of Buss (Mai Charoenpura) who opens a noodle shop in her home. Drawing on her mother's lessons, Buss uses human flesh, including that of her husband's creditors, to make her food. It is slowly revealed that her husband and his lover, Aoi, have killed Buss's daughter, Bua (Jiratchaya Jirarajagit), and in turn she has trapped and tortured them in her cellar. We discover that Bua was a product of incestuous rape by Buss's stepfather (Somchat Prachathai). In the midst of student riots Buss meets a young man, Attaphol (Rattanaballang Tohssawat), who helps out in her shop, unaware of the cannibalism. When Attaphol rejects her after finding Bua's dead body, and gets a new girlfriend, Buss attempts to kill her and is only stopped at the last minute. However, Buss gets away and the police are convinced that Attaphol is complicit in the cannibalism. Buss jumps off a bridge, and returns to her mother's house either literally or as an expression of the afterlife while Attaphol is held for her crimes.

The Woman is a sequel to two novels by Jack Ketchum, *Off Season* (1980) and *Offspring* (1991). *Offspring* was also produced as a film directed by Andrew van den Houten in 2009. The narratives of both novels and the film adaptation focus on the cannibals as villains in the manner of *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (dir. by Hooper, 1974), as part of a tribe of unsophisticated primitives on the margins of society. While the Woman features as a main character and the head of the cannibal family, none of the cannibals are particularly developed and the narrative impetus is driven by the normative families/friends who are assaulted. *The Woman* was commissioned by the producers of *Offspring* (2009) because of their admiration for Pollyanna McIntosh's portrayal of the Woman in *Offspring* (director's commentary on DVD of *The Woman* (2011)). *The Woman*, however, is a far different cannibal narrative that represents a shift away from the cannibal as monstrous tribe to an individual female protagonist.

Although both versions of *The Woman* present the cannibalism as part of a maternal tradition handed down from mother to daughter, I focus primarily on the novel in my analysis. However, the film has more critical literature related to it and consequently I mention the film throughout the chapter. Both novel and film were developed simultaneously which is why McKee has a writing credit for the novel. The plots and pacing of the texts are closely related with only minor modifications and additions in the novel. The cannibalism in the novel is situated more directly as part of a tradition handed down to the Woman from cannibal women before her. While this is made clear at the beginning of the novel, the emphasis in the film is far more on the Woman starting a new family and passing on her knowledge as a mother than on her exercising her knowledge of cannibalism gained from her mother. Despite the differing emphases, my argument that cannibalism makes visible the ways in which women, as mothers, access power through foodways to create, maintain and define the family, applies to both texts.

In *The Woman* Chris Cleek, a white, middle-class patriarch spots an injured wild woman while out hunting for sport. He decides to capture the Woman and force his family to help him 'civilise' her. He finds out she is a cannibal when she bites off his finger and eats it. His efforts to clean her up and break her primitive spirit amount to nothing short of torture and his family falls apart in the wake of this 'project' as secrets are revealed to the audience. Chris's villainy is suggested throughout by his control and misogyny which his son, Brian, has absorbed and copied. His tyrannised wife, Belle, is complaisant, eventually punished for being a 'bad mother'. Meanwhile Peggy, their oldest daughter, is revealed to be pregnant by her father and finally rebels against him by setting the Woman free when her father feeds her concerned teacher, Ms. Raton, to the dogs. Darlin' (Darleen), their youngest daughter, happily leaves with the Woman and Peggy, as well as their other sister, Socket, who was born without eyes and subsequently raised as a dog instead of a girl.

The novel also includes a short story called 'Cow' which is presented as the 'Journal of Donald Fischer', a man Peggy, the Woman, and Socket have captured a year later. It details how

the women attacked Donald and his friends, killing and butchering them, and taking Donald back to their cave. They starve him until he eats human flesh, and keep him prisoner, eventually piercing his nipples and scrotum. He soon realises that he is to be kept as a stud to help the Woman and Peggy expand their family. He is bred to Peggy and the Woman, and his narrative ends as Darleen begins menstruating, signalling her entry into childbearing years. Both versions are set around 2009 to 2010 in Dead River, Maine which locates it in a relatively contemporary American setting. As Kimber (2016: 137) points out about the film, *The Woman* uses horror surrounding food and eating as a strategy to ‘interrogat[e] the monstrous and patriarchal sadism lurking beneath the surface of an outwardly appearing normal, white, middle class, American family.’

In contrast to the almost generic North-East American setting of *The Woman*, *Meat Grinder* is more specifically situated in time and place than many of the other texts in this thesis, although the references are often oblique. The protests featured in *Meat Grinder*, in particular, offer the strongest suggestion of a specific date if one is familiar with Thai history. The riot in which Buss is caught is likely based on the October 6th 1976 protest during which students from Thammasat University demonstrated against attempts to return military leaders to political power. What followed was a massacre as the police, paramilitary groups and soldiers opened fire on the protestors using a variety of weapons including grenade launchers. (Jonathan Head and Miho Tanaka, 2016). Footage of the massacre is included in the film and adds formally to the blurring between past and present, “reality” and fantasy that is a central theme. Not only does this situate Buss and her mother’s violence within a wider context of militaristic violence, harsh economic conditions, and political disenfranchisement but it also reflects how female cannibalism stands alongside the neoliberal ideals of self-determination which is, as Harvey (2007: 5) points out, the common (neoliberal) principle of many student movements around the globe from 1968 onwards.

Despite the hints that *Meat Grinder* and *The Woman* make about their settings, both films play with temporal and spatial displacements and foreground isolation, using narrative tropes which are broadly gothic. Neither film clearly states a specific time or place. They challenge the border between past and present which connects women across generations, and they both exploit violent spectacles which are subsequently undermined to create darkly humorous tones, even while the excessive gore is abject and disturbing. These tones are used to critique consumption as a strategy for postfeminist empowerment as it is ambiguous to what extent cannibalism is maternal power handed down through feminine traditions or impotent revenge which is in some respects, like the previous chapter, a continuation of patriarchal objectification.

Both films were marketed and have been described as torture porn (Baron, Cohen and Bernard, 2014: 131; Jones, 2013). Although the term torture porn has been debated by many scholars including Jones (2013) and Aldana Reyes (2014a, 2014b), these texts do foreground people being captured, imprisoned, and tortured, and, in certain scenes, emphasise the violent

spectacle. Aldana Reyes (2014a, 2014b) argues that the body in torture porn is a site of gothic horror. I argue that both *Meat Grinder* and *The Woman* frame the body horror of torture porn as food horror through the cannibalism which draws attention to the connections between objectification and exploitation of people with consumerism and the domestic. However, this food horror is positioned as parodic and/or ironic in order to emphasise the gendered nature of the visible, excessive horror compared to the invisible abuses of patriarchal figures, and to encourage identification with, and sympathy for, the female cannibals.

Aldana Reyes (2014b: 398) argues that torture porn contains many gothic elements, and as such ‘need[s] to be acknowledged as distinctly and eminently Gothic’. The gothic elements of these texts, particularly in regard to Asian gothic conventions in *Meat Grinder*, contribute to establishing and challenging contextual markers. For example, Bua’s appearance, particularly her long, dark hair and white dress is similar to the typical Asian ghost known in Japan as *onryō* and in Thailand as *phii tai thang klom* (Ancuta 2014a: 212), as well as being similar to Buss’s own childhood appearance in flashbacks. This ghost is driven by vengeance to redress the wrongs it suffered in life. While this provides an explanation for Buss’s cannibalism for Asian audiences, this explanation is never fully invested in as her deteriorating sanity is also explained by her abuse of a white powder bought at an apothecary which is ‘not for long-term use’. The ambiguity of Buss’s sanity is deliberately positioned for a global audience, and, indeed, as the censorship system changed just before release, *Meat Grinder* was not released in its full cut in Thailand (Muck47, trans. Sakaro, 2010).



Figure 4.1 Images of a Japanese onryō from *Ringu* (Hideo Nakata, 1998) and *The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002).



Figure 4.2 Bua's long, dark hair hides her face, and her white dress positions her as an onryō. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

This hints that the Bua we are presented with is not real before we have certain knowledge of her death. Bua's ghostly presence, as well as the flashbacks, show the past recurring, haunting the present in what Colette Balmain (2014a: 253) calls 'temporal displacements and spatial convergences'. Similarly, the primitivism of the Woman, and the hints of family secrets in *The Woman* are gothic conventions which blend the past and present in disturbing ways. The preoccupation with the past bleeding into the present foregrounds the connections between women across generations in contrast to the previous chapter in which the young women were isolated from any sense of maternal tradition and feminist legacy. However, the continuity of cannibalistic consumption accompanies a continuity of abuse which renders the cannibalism ambiguously empowering and impotent.

Where torture porn is a film genre which relies upon the visual spectacle, the novel of *The Woman* relies upon gothic conventions to create the same sense of horror, spectacle and visceral disgust. The novel employs third person narration which is nonetheless heavily focalised through each family member, as well as the Woman. This creates a sense of unease and uncanny as events are repeated and reflected on through multiple perspectives. The focalisation also enables the narrative to reference the past while not elaborating on it, leaving gaps in the reader's knowledge and half-suggested memories. Like the torture porn of the film, the novel's body horror is described in terms of food horror with vivid imagery of flesh-eating used to create the visceral disgust and contrasting the horror of cannibalistic consumption with the hidden domestic abuses which are only alluded to until the end. However, like *Meat Grinder* and the film version, this horror is often undermined by elements of dark humour. Puns are employed during moments

of food horror as well as sardonic tones, especially in the 'Cow' addendum, which positions the cannibalism ambiguously as empowering but, like the previous Daughters chapter, no better than the patriarchal abuses it responds to.

I first discuss how each text presents patriarchal oppression as a disruption of the family's structure and foodways. The texts show how incest disrupts family structures because women are positioned as comestible or animal property. While this is consistent with patriarchal hierarchies that position women as chattel, it nonetheless interferes with the public expectation that fathers protect and provide for their families. This abuse is often invisible and it is only the food horror performed by women that renders this abuse visible by hyperbolically reflecting it. The cycles of abuse show that despite the power women can access through foodways, this is not always the case and the home can still be a threatening space for women.

In the final section I explore how the cannibalism is empowering but disturbing as it constructs the family at the expense of all others. It is rendered sympathetic through narrative tropes such as parody and irony; foregrounding the female cannibals' agency and thus undermining their victimisation; and presenting cannibalism as justified revenge. I argue that these texts uphold a neoliberal imperative in which women's reproduction and construction of the family is idealised. Furthermore, I conclude that these texts present homophobic ideas congruent with this even as they ultimately present female-led families that eschew heteronormative ideals. They also critique narratives which blame single mothers for the collapse of the nuclear family in order to appear empowering to women while simultaneously idealising a conservative mothering role.

4.1 Male Domination and the Disruption of the Family

In this section I discuss how the fathers' refusals to contribute to family foodways coincides with their spectrums of abusive behaviour. I argue that the texts render these invisible or hidden abuses visible through cannibalism which shows how horrific patriarchal abuse is. In *Meat Grinder* this abuse is cyclical with the past haunting the present in flashbacks and repetitions. In *The Woman* the past is an absent presence with hints at memories which are not explored until the consequences explode into the present. These repetitions and cycles not only create a sense of unease but also illustrate the ongoing patriarchal abuses which have thus far constructed/disrupted the family units in these texts. The texts seem to blame men for the destruction of the nuclear family which is in contrast to conservative narratives that blame single mothers or non-traditional relationships and male homosexuality for the 'breakdown' of the family. This bias towards women reifies them as mothers and protectors of the family, and reproduction as the highest moral imperative above even heteronormativity and patriarchal hierarchies.

The patriarchal family is based on the fundamental idea that women need protection from some men by other men. Iris Marion Young (2003: 4) describes how men in a family offer protection and in exchange the woman ‘concedes critical distance from decision-making autonomy’. In other words, she cannot argue with the steps deemed necessary to protect her. The woman essentially becomes property for her father or husband. However, as Herman and Herschman (1981) describe, when women are property of men the incest taboo governs their exchange. A daughter is protected by her father (in theory)⁸ until he gives her in marriage to another man who will protect her. However, because the father has rights over the daughter, he can choose to disregard the incest taboo and rape his daughter as long as he ultimately does give her away. Thus incestuous (child) sexual abuse can stand for the system of patriarchy as a whole in which women are treated as objects to be given, used or taken even by the men who are supposed to protect them. As Christine Grogan (2016: 18) points out ‘incest reflects and maintains the status quo: the order of the patriarchy. Perhaps an exaggeration, it is not a departure from patriarchal family norms but its inevitable by-product.’ However, it also disrupts the structures of the family as the father confuses the roles of the women around him and abuses his role as protector. The private reinforcement of patriarchal hierarchies contradicts the public expectation of paternalism.

Haaken (1999: 37) argues that incestuous abuse may also be a way of indicating the seriousness of other, less articulable, forms of neglect and abuse:

Since the more subtle or ambiguous forms of bad treatment that girls and women endure so readily fall below the threshold of cultural awareness – indeed, they hardly register – dramatizing abuse may be the strategy of resistance most readily available.

Haaken argues that because much of the neglect, micro-aggressions and misogyny women and girls face is taken for granted, ‘dramatizing’ incest narratives (in recovered memories as Haaken discusses, or, I argue, in fiction) can articulate a spectrum of patriarchal objectification and misogyny and thus resist it. It demonstrates women’s victimisation from a young age and situates this within the nuclear family.

As Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (2009) suggest, incest is a frequently recurring motif in the gothic. The gothic focuses on the family and home as a site of danger, and female sexuality as a point of exploitation and control. Incest is a family secret which disrupts the normative structures of the family even while it maintains a patriarchal hierarchy. Furthermore, incest in

⁸ This can mean a father-figure such as a stepfather, grandfather or uncle. However, as Herman and Herschman claim, a man’s rights become more diluted the more other men have claims on the same woman – a grandfather might be head of a household but if the father of the girl returns he could challenge the grandfather’s authority/ownership.

these texts is a form of sexual cannibalism in that it is an act of sexual consumption which takes place within groups of people who are the same. Incest objectifies women as comestible property, and cannibalism reflects this by hyperbolically rendering people as food.

The texts show male domination of the family foodways in conjunction with incest and objectification, all of which disrupts the family. *The Woman* concentrates on the Cleek women in order to position Chris as a villain, and to demonstrate the lack of power the women have because of Chris's domination of the family foodways. The Woman's cannibalism shows Peggy how to access the power which her own mother is denied. In *Meat Grinder*, Buss's stepfather and her husband refuse to contribute to the family foodways, denying the structures of the family which leads to incest, infanticide and further destruction of the family. This domestic abuse is juxtaposed to food horror elements which encourages comparisons between excessive food horror and the patriarchal abuses which are less visible.

Meat Grinder features a series of flashbacks to Buss's childhood and youth which vary between patriarchal abuses and her mother's cannibalism. These are in black and white which contrasts with the high saturation of the present. The monochromatic colour is reminiscent of old film and creates a subdued tone. The flashbacks link the past and present with the dialogue often bleeding from the flashbacks into a voiceover in the present which shows how the past haunts the present. The visual repetition of a water barrel also connects the past and present, linking Buss and Bua through traumatic, abusive situations which take place (and are recalled) near or in water barrels. The chronology of the narrative is disrupted by these flashbacks as it is unclear when they took place and if they are real memories or distorted. The repetition shows the ongoing abuse and resistance and, while the uncertainty of these memories creates a sense of veracity as traumatic memories are often unclear (Haaken, 1999), they also create a tone of unease which contrasts with the disgusting but humorous tones of the cannibal scenes. This contrast emphasises the seriousness and horror of patriarchal abuse.

In one such flashback, Buss slowly bends over a water barrel in the present, shot from within the water, the barrel framing her face and the ceiling.



Figure 4.3 Buss framed by the barrel and captured by her past with the dialogue bleeding into the present. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

Her trauma is emphasised by the high saturation and deep shadows, unusual framing and extreme slowness which illustrate the idea of being stuck in a moment, unable to move past it. The ceiling creates a sense of claustrophobia which adds to the effect of being trapped.

In this flashback scene, we see a young Buss sitting at a table with her half-brother eating a dish of rice and vegetables while her mother accuses Buss's stepfather of gambling away all of their money. Her mother admonishes her stepfather 'our children have almost nothing to eat! Have you ever thought of that?' The frequent cuts during this flashback give us a sense of Buss's preoccupation with the past, her mind racing in comparison to her slow movements in the present. We hear her stepfather claim, 'You are my wife. It's supposed to be your job.' His dialogue demonstrates his total lack of care over the state of his family and his expectation that feeding the children is his wife's job and nothing to do with him. As the flashback continues he tells his wife that Buss is her daughter and therefore not his problem. His rejection of a paternal role foreshadows his later incest and the destruction of the family that his incest symbolises. The camera cuts from the adults to young Buss pushing her rice around the plate. Her mother says 'you asshole!' swinging her arm just before the cut, and suddenly a dark, blood-like substance splashes Buss's face.

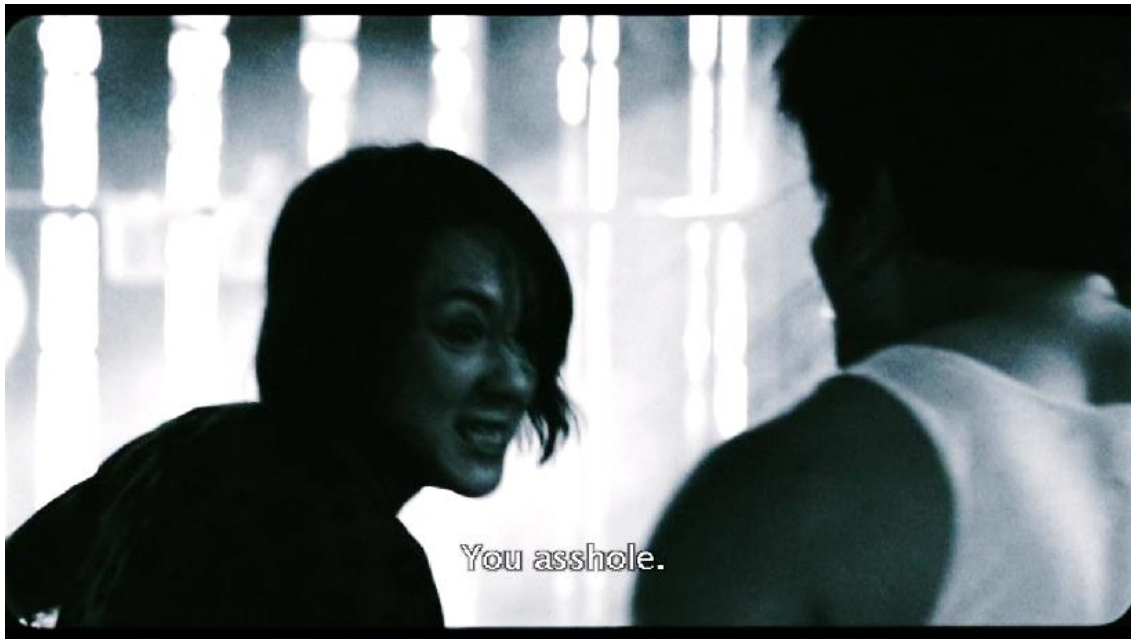


Figure 4.4 Buss's mother aggressively swipes at her husband. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 4.5 Young Buss is covered in a thick, blood-like substance. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

Because the opening sequence shows the mother preparing human flesh for food at some point in the past, we assume she has slashed her husband, protecting her children from this feckless father-figure. Buss does not react to this which seems to communicate a lack of surprise which is so out of the ordinary that it is amusing. However, as young Buss leans over a water barrel to wash her face in a mirror image of Buss in the present, we hear her stepfather say sorry to his wife and her telling him not to change the subject as he must stop gambling. His voice is relatively calm so we realise that the substance was not blood and no violence occurred. The black and white colouring creates a visual pun with Buss's mother doing nothing more than flick her ladle at him,

inadvertently splashing cooking sauce on Buss. The visual pun suggests how women might use foodways to access power to resist male oppression even though this is undermined in this scene with the emphasis on dark humour instead of real violence.



Figure 4.6 Buss's past reflects her present with the same sense of claustrophobia and entrapment. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

We later see Bua pushing the same vegetable and rice dish around her plate and complaining about not being allowed to eat meat. The implication is that they are too poor to afford meat. Unknown to the audience, Bua is a ghost or figment of Buss's imagination in this scene. When we re-evaluate this scene after we learn of Bua's death, we understand that Buss is talking to herself, and the complaints might well reflect Buss's own childhood complaints. This shows how her stepfather's wilful neglect affected the family foodways. The water barrel is a recurring motif that connects Bua and Buss showing the generational and systemic nature of patriarchal abuses. Another flashback shows Buss being drowned in a water barrel by her brother. We later discover Bua was drowned in a water barrel by Buss's husband and the babysitter (with whom he was having an affair) which again shows how the patriarchal abuse is a cycle which disrupts the structures of the family, this time through infanticide and adultery.

The flashbacks of abuse are subdued visually with the black and white colouring, and minimal sound although these are often rendered uncomfortable by jumpy camera movements. Compared to the extreme, brutal violence Buss perpetrates as an adult butchering men, these abuses leave no traces except in Buss's memory. Despite the violent intent of drowning, it is a much less visually visceral form of violence and is more realistically represented compared to Buss's torture scenes. When drowning stops short of death, it leaves no physical traces and as such is a form of invisible abuse, easily covered up. As I discuss in the next section, this contrasts with the tone created by the cannibalism which is at once humorous and disgusting with abject horror becoming so excessive as to be ridiculous. This more subdued representation of domestic abuse is more serious thus creating sympathy and identification with the cannibals, and justifying

their use of cannibalism as a way to build the family and community rather than disrupt it as these men do.

The film emphasises the links between physical abuse, financial neglect, and disruption of the family foodways. A series of flashbacks connects Buss's brother's physical cruelty with her stepfather's financial neglect. The drowning scene intercuts with young Buss watching her mother and step-father arguing about him 'hanging out' with a man called Koe instead of working. Their voiceover pervades the past and present as the mother asks why he wants to hang out with Koe anyway. There is an implication of impropriety in this question, as if 'hanging out' with another man instead of working is abnormal. The mother is implying that her husband is involved in a non-productive or, perhaps, non-*reproductive* lifestyle – he does not care to contribute to the finances/foodways or the formation of the family. The homophobic tone of the parents' argument suggests this type of disruption is as bad as the financial neglect. This emphasises how male neglect and homosexuality disrupts the family. Furthermore, the intercutting of the stepfather's financial neglect and the brother's attempt to drown Buss link these behaviours, suggesting that financial neglect could be tantamount to attempted murder.

Not only does the film link generations of women through cycles of abuse, it connects men through repeated behaviours as well which demonstrates that the patriarchal abuse and neglect is unchanging and incessant. While Buss's stepfather gambles, refuses to contribute to the family foodways and structures, Buss's husband repeats these behaviours. He also refuses to work and has gambled away the family home paralleling his lack of contribution to the family foodways with Buss's stepfather. They both rape her as well which reveals the insidious nature of patriarchal abuses. Where the stepfather has violated the incest taboo and devalued his stepdaughter as a 'gift', he then passes her to a man who similarly disrespects the patriarchal role as protector while nonetheless maintaining the patriarchal status quo by dehumanising his wife and stepdaughter. The repetitions in the film and the jumbled chronology emphasise patriarchal abuse as an ongoing problem which reveals the seriousness and increases the visibility of domestic abuse but also ambiguously undermines the maternal tradition which employs cannibalism not only as revenge but as a way of spiritually enhancing the community. Where the cannibalism is empowering and resists this abuse, it also fails to eradicate it as shown by the repetitions and the bleeding of the past into the present.

However violent Buss is in the film, as I explore in the next section, it is in contrast with the hidden but every day incest, rape and abuse of patriarchal culture. Her stepfather has violated the incest taboo, disrupted the structures of the family, and these are paralleled by Buss's husband's treatment of her and Bua. Unlike the maternal traditions of cannibalism and feeding which construct the family, as I argue in the next section, the men's actions disrupt it.

In *The Woman* Chris Cleek also disrupts the structures of the family. He usurps and blocks Belle's access to power by dominating the family foodways. He isolates his family from

the community both physically and socially, disrupts family mealtimes, and creates a precarious financial situation which traps Belle at home while also stripping her of authority in the home. By usurping Belle's domestic authority through this controlling of foodways, Chris disrupts the structures and dynamics of the family. He is positioned as a gothic villain attempting to be king-of-the-castle and exerting his control over the women in his domain. His treatment of women as animals varies between positioning them as meat or as livestock. This, again, disrupts the structures of the family as he denies the women their humanity treating them as property instead of people.

Not only does Chris expect Belle to service his needs, he engineers financial dependence and isolation for her. Although Chris works as a lawyer, holding a position of authority in his community, he often leaves his paralegal, Betty, to deal with his clients and cancels appointments throughout the novel showing his unwillingness to contribute. When Chris buys property for a 'ridiculously low' (82) price from a desperate neighbour, Betty begins to question whether it is a good idea but Chris brushes her off. Chris keeps the family finances private from Belle but in a section of the novel focalised through Belle (but still written in third person) we discover she has had a chance to look at his accounts: 'The picture isn't good. They owe money on nearly everything. The second mortgage, the Escalade, the office. The interest on their credit cards is ridiculous. And now he's buying the Bluejacket properties. With what?' (117-118). This financial control limits Belle's options. Chris will not allow her to hire a babysitter for Darleen, essentially trapping Belle in a stay-at-home role creating financial dependence on Chris. By purchasing the neighbouring property Chris isolates his family from any neighbours. He announces that there is "Not another resident within three miles now". Belle responds with uncommon sarcasm by saying "Well, you finally have your own little country now, don't you?" (89). When Peggy phones the police at the end of the novel she notes that their home is 'out in the middle of nowhere though. It would take [the police] half an hour to get from town to her house if she was lucky.' (157)

The physical isolation of the home creates a modern version of a gothic castle with Chris as ruler. The family, in gothic texts, is a constant site of danger for women, and the home can be a place of entrapment. That this is still an issue for women critiques the ideology of a postfeminist era which celebrates the 'return home' as a positive and empowered choice for some women. Instead, the home is a site of danger, isolation, and helplessness. The isolation Chris engineers is social as well as physical. Chris expects Belle to do all of the procurement for the family meals and when she is in the supermarket she bumps into an acquaintance who passive-aggressively suggests that it is her turn to host a community barbeque:

"Your place this time, maybe?"

Her voice said, *finally?* (81)

Belle has to make up excuses to avoid hosting an event, thus making her seem like an ungracious host. Her refusal, however, prevents her from forming any support networks with friends. Chris's control and the family secrets prevent the family participating in the social food networks and systems of the community.

Chris also attempts to control the family foodways by determining when the family can eat, disrupting meals on a whim. In the process he undermines Belle's authority over the formation of the family through its foodways. After seeing the Woman on a hunting trip (which is unsuccessful in terms of getting meat for the family), he disrupts the family meal in order to have Belle and his kids clear out the fruit cellar. The narrative is briefly focalised through Belle who is concerned that her ham needs basting every twenty minutes or it might burn. She nevertheless agrees to Chris's whims over the demands of the recipe despite her annoyance: 'What the hell's he want down there this time of the evening? Belle thought. *I'm cooking his dinner*. There wasn't any point in asking though.' (35). Although Belle does ask Chris to baste the ham, it is clear that she does not try to assert the authority of the recipe as a way of resisting his demands or expressing her irritation at his lack of acknowledgement of her cooking. Later, he comes in late to dinner, disrupting Belle's own meal when she must get up to re-heat his. Chris's surprised tone when he remarks at the temperature also removes the blame from his tardiness and implies that it is Belle's lack of skill that has caused her to serve cold food. The next night, Chris again disrupts the family meal, this time to show them the Woman.

"Everybody want to come on down to the cellar with me?"

"Again?" Peggy says.

"Again at *dinnertime*?" says his wife.

"It's pot roast, Belle. Put it on simmer. You need to see this." (64)

Chris undermines any authority Belle might have over when dinnertime is by insisting that this recipe can wait on his whims. His authority when it comes to food outweighs her own. Despite their collective shock and horror at this new project, Chris dismisses them all by saying he is hungry, carrying on as normal. His needs supersede any explanation of his behaviour.

Chris's acts of incestuous abuse and objectification are a continuation of his attempt to disrupt and control the family through consumption. At the beginning of the novel, Chris sees Darleen trying to kiss a boy at the barbeque. He thinks that '*a kiss is a concealed bite*' (15). Chris views sexual behaviour as duplicitous, aggressive, and consuming. 'He liked the idea. He guessed his little daughter was a biter' (15). This shows how Chris links sexuality with consumption and implies that his domestic control and dominance is also a sexual dominance. Chris sees women as livestock which he can own and consume. This extends to his capture of the Woman, his incestuous rape of Peggy, and possibly Darleen, and the animalisation of his other daughter, Socket.

Upon capturing the Woman Chris considers her his property: '*His* rag doll' (emphasis in original, 48). He inspects her body as she hangs unconscious, objectifying her and consuming her with his gaze: 'He lifts the left side of her upper lip as though checking out a dog's mouth or a cat's' (49). Although the Woman is characterised in animalistic terms such as 'simian' (7), Chris's treatment is not that of a wild animal but first as a doll, and then as a pet or livestock – he thinks he can own her. He realises too late that she has fanged teeth for a reason and she bites the tip of his finger off and eats it. Although she is a temporary victim, the Woman negotiates her position, sometimes resisting and occasionally submitting as she does when Chris later rapes her. Calculating when and how to react to each development shows how the Woman retains her agency despite her circumstances and helps to frame her cannibalism in disturbingly positive ways.

In many ways, the Woman is not very different from Chris, as she uses people as meat. However, the Woman uses people as meat precisely because they are human and aware of themselves/being alive. Peggy explains to Donald in 'The Cow' that 'the best food understands its own death, its sacrifice. And the deeper the understanding the more it supports the living. She [the Woman] said that all life understands the passing of life, down to the smallest insect, the smallest flower. That it's only a matter of degree. And that's why we eat the flesh of our own. More than any other creature, we have understanding' (212). On one hand, her cannibalism parallels Chris's objectification because it literally renders people into flesh. However, on the other hand, her choice to kill and cannibalise them is precisely because they are not objects/animals. By respecting her victims as human, the Woman's cannibalism is spiritual whereas Chris is positioned as villain because he views his victims as subhuman. This tension makes absolutely no difference in effect but it does position their behaviour differently with the Woman being a much more sympathetic and even admirable character. Furthermore, the excessive and unbelievable nature of cannibalism, which I discuss further in the next section, contrasts with Chris's misogynistic manipulation and objectification of his family which is all too realistic.

The novel further illustrates how Chris positions women as animals and/or meat when Peggy's teacher, Ms Raton, arrives at the house, just after Chris has knocked Belle unconscious, in order to talk to them about her suspicions that Peggy is pregnant. Ms. Raton is a lesbian of French-Cajun descent who lost her first love when she committed suicide over an unwanted pregnancy. In a homophobic note, Ms Raton's sexuality and her need to redeem her lost love is punished with her death. Although the novel displays the power of a female-led family and emphasises women's construction of the family and motherhood as imperative over heteronormative, patriarchal families, it nonetheless has several moments of homophobia against lesbians. This demonstrates how the novel straddles a line between positioning the family as the domain of women and simultaneously emphasising reproduction as the primary aim of the family.

Ms Raton's name is significant as the word *raton* in French means 'young rat'. This chimes with the English meaning of 'rat on' meaning to tell tales which suggests that the teacher's interference is somehow duplicitous or self-serving. On the other hand, however, the French for racoon is *raton laveur* which foreshadows her demise when Chris feeds her to his 'coonhounds' (38), literally, dogs used for hunting racoons.

Among the dogs is Socket. Belle and Chris's secret daughter was born without eyes and relegated by Chris to be raised by the dogs. He has created an animal-woman, objectifying her and forcing her to be less-than-human. Socket helps to eat Ms. Raton who has been reduced from human to flesh through Chris's literal and brutal objectification. Ms. Raton's determination to help Peggy when no-one else notices her withdrawing emotionally positions Chris's actions as even more unfeeling. The excessive horror of this scene is compounded by Chris and Brian's enjoyment and fascination with it.

Cleek is rapt.

[...]

"Doesn't even look real anymore," Brian says, "does it, dad."

He's every bit as engaged as Cleek is.

"Does to me," he says. (168)

Both Chris and Brian view Ms Raton as an 'it', less than human. However, Chris still views the carnage as 'real' which suggests he always already views women as meat. The emphasis on spectating, here represented through words such as 'rapt' and 'engaged', is a regular motif in the novel. Along with the multiple focalisation in the narrative, the emphasis on looking and watching creates an uncanny tone. Sight is used to represent passivity in Belle, short-sightedness in both Ms. Raton and Chris, and it suggests that anything hidden or observed in secret can eventually be revealed. Chris's misogyny has been fairly invisible to the community throughout – the Woman and Socket were hidden away, Peggy's pregnancy was (initially) covered up and any previous incest has gone unnoticed, as well as his financial and psychological abuse of Belle. The spectacular nature of this crime with its vivid descriptions make clear the horror and suggest that Chris's literal objectification has become visible.

Within the patriarchal family, Chris believes he is entitled to his dominance and objectification – the women are his property within this system – however, the real taboo is in being caught. As soon as Ms. Raton forces him to publicly acknowledge the pregnancy, Chris's cover as protector of his family is blown. Rather than pretend he has failed to protect his women from outside men, he admits his incestuous abuse and, by his actions, dares any woman to challenge his right to do it. As Herman and Herschman (1981, 62) argue 'The man who has the power to give a woman away also has the power to take her for himself. That power can be contested only by other men'.

In contrast with Chris's mostly hidden crimes, the cannibalism is consistently overt with vivid descriptions of the flesh and blood which create a visceral food horror. On the other hand, however, the horror is often undermined by humour. When Peggy sets the Woman free she kills Belle, punishing her for her passivity, and eats some of her face including her eyes. This plays with the name Belle which means 'beautiful' illustrating the passivity and weakness of feminine beauty and critiquing the postfeminist reclamation of beauty as a strategy for empowerment. The Woman then kills Brian by chopping him in half. This mirrors Brian chopping a man-shaped cookie in half before he abuses the Woman earlier in the novel. The Woman plucks out Brian's eye, the one he has pressed against a hole in the cellar door to watch her, and eats that but leaves the rest for the dogs. She causes Chris to shoot buckshot through his skull (this is not fatal), cuts his hands off and cuts his body open. She places her head inside his body while he is still alive and screaming, and uses her teeth to pull out his intestines which she spits out. This is a particularly literal representation of hating his guts. She finds the liver similarly 'foul' (172) which might suggest he is 'yellow livered' or cowardly for abusing those less physically strong than he is. Reaching inside him she finds his heart and eats that instead, then offers it to Socket. This is another pun, suggesting 'eating your heart out' – an expression which suggests triumph, and aligns the readers with the Woman. This violence is unbelievable as it is so out of the ordinary and the puns make it darkly humorous. The ease and swiftness of the Woman's retribution, and the dark poetry of each action is very much like wish-fulfilment.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, this strategy of positioning women as animals can be precarious and even while the women are victimised as animals, this can enable them to access monstrous power. Indeed, when the Woman is encouraged to eat out of a bowl like a dog we are told: '*She is not a dog. But she can show them what a dog can do.*' (70) The assertiveness of her actions, breaking the bowl with her head, taking control over her consumption, and 'astonish[ing]' (70) Chris, demonstrates how empowering it can be to embrace the subhuman position ironically in order to reject it. Chris has treated women as meat and as animals, but in the end he is unable to domesticate them. The surreal and brutal violence of the Woman's cannibalism exaggerates and illustrates the consequences of objectifying women as animals – some women will inevitably succumb to being meat, while others might just bite back.

Male domination of the family foodways and the disruption this causes allows a spectrum of abuse to occur including incest and objectification. These are presented as insidious crimes which are largely invisible to the community. While these position Chris as a villain who deserves punishment, they position the Woman ambiguously. She is victimised and her actions seem to avenge this as well as the abuse faced by the other women. However, her actions are monstrous and reflect the horror of objectifying others and illustrates the horror of Chris's crimes further as the Woman's actions become comparable to his.

In the extra chapter in the novel, we are presented with ‘The Journal of Donald Fischer’. Donald is an actor-director in the theatre and is captured by the Woman and Peggy while out rehearsing with his troupe on the beach. He is a broadly sympathetic character who is positioned un-ambivalently as a victim although the sardonic tone his narration employs seems oddly upbeat as he displays grudging respect and even admiration for the cannibals. The Woman has created a new cannibal family, as I discuss in the following section, and they need a man to help expand it. The diary describes how Donald and his friends are attacked, killed and butchered by the Woman and Peggy. There are extremely graphic descriptions of the processes of the attack. Socket attacks one man, Arthur: ‘I’ve told you how she tore at his genitals, bit at his extremities, his cheek. [...] His cheeks were gone. His nose was gone. And Socket was gnawing on a long loop of intestine’ (192). The viciousness of the attack reflects the brutalities of hunting with animals like dogs.

Another friend, Linda, is stabbed by Peggy and the Woman, then strung upside down and drained of blood, her head twisted off like a chicken’s might be. Her skin is scored into areas and peeled. Donald writes ‘I’ll spare you the gutting, the removal of arms, the removal of the backbone, the halving and quartering, the removal of ribs. The deep cuts along the calves and thighs and rump’ (194). These details are food horror which replaces the animal with the human. This not only illustrates the horror of all butchery, it illustrates the extremes of human objectification. However, by listing what he will not mention, Donald creates a sardonic tone; he glibly subjects the reader to the horror anyway making it seem banal. This connects the literal butchery of Linda with the everyday acceptance of both meat-eating and the objectification of women whose bodies are modified surgically and digitally to be visually consumed.

At first Donald fears he is being kept as stockpile but he soon discovers he is instead being kept to stud. First Peggy uses him at the behest of the Woman as she is ovulating and they ‘need males’ (208). Peggy does not want to have sex because it reminds her of her father. Nevertheless, the Woman commands it and both Donald and Peggy are reduced to breeders lacking real consent. This relative equality between Peggy and Donald allows Donald to persuade Peggy to free his hands and take his clothes off so that he can treat her differently than her father did. However, when the Woman is ovulating Donald begins to understand his lack of control. He is raped by the Woman, made to ejaculate inside her.

I was coming and angry at being made to come so that I pounded her, trying to hurt her, tear her open – but she matched my every stroke with a force equal to my own so that I was the one hurting, my hips, my thighs, my ass chafing against the browse-bed.

I was trying to rape but I was being raped myself. (214)

Donald is forced to have sex with the Woman several times while she is ovulating. His lack of agency is emphasised through his self-conception as a ‘cow’ instead of a ‘bull’:

It came to me that this was what I was. This was what I descended to. I was owned. Property. Livestock.

A cow. I was a cow.

To be milked and milked again. (215)

This feminisation demonstrates how the food systems of the cannibal family invert the usual processes involved in our foodways. We breed cows, goats and ewes to induce their milk production, in order to make dairy products. By making ‘the Cow’ human and male it demonstrates the ethical and moral issues of this foodways system in terms which amplify and emphasise the gendered nature of this exploitation. When Donald is pierced through his breast tissue as a way of tying him up and leading him, it reflects cows being pierced through the nose – ‘*livestock* remember?’ (221). He is also pierced under the scrotum to stimulate his genitals, making him ‘a more efficient cow’ (221).

The Woman’s actions, creating the Cow, are not dissimilar to Chris raising Socket as a dog. They both reduce human beings to animals, exploiting them as hunter or breeder. They both rape. They both reduce humans to meat. The Woman might seem to be a heroine when she revenges herself on Chris and Brian, and indeed she does access power through maternal foodways, as I discuss below. Her cannibalism, and the family systems she re-initiates to continue her cannibalism, make this ambivalent, however. The cannibalism creates an excessive and highly visual mirror to Chris’s more realistic and insidious oppression.

4.2 Maternal Traditions

These texts position the cannibals as mothers who participate in cannibalism as part of a tradition they have learned from their mothers. The cannibalism is thus a systemic rather than strictly personal reaction to patriarchal attacks although it is ambivalent whether the cannibalism is effective or, indeed, structurally different from patriarchy. Women often pass on cultural and religious knowledge and traditions through recipes, cooking lessons and cook books. As Atkins and Bowler (2001: 273-274) have pointed out, food palates and ethnic cuisines are aspects of culture most resistant to change in migrants. These texts imply this aspect of the foodways system by showing or hinting towards cannibalism as a tradition linked to femininity and motherhood. This illustrates pockets of feminine resistance to patriarchal cultures which can be both challenging to the status quo but nevertheless complicit with maintaining feminine authority as purely domestic. The cannibalism allows us to see the centrality of maternal foodways to the construction of the family in both positive and negative ways. The texts render the cannibalism sympathetic and empowering because it is positioned as justified revenge which punishes patriarchal abuses; as a spiritual act that mothers use to boost the health of the family and community; and as ironic or parodic ways of illustrating the destructiveness of patriarchy. This

humour lessens the impact of the female cannibals' crimes by making it funny but it also mocks the idea that female consumption is fundamentally threatening.

The texts promote the ideal of the family, specifically motherhood, and they show how women can form families without men, or outside the patriarchy, which nonetheless encourages the reproduction of consumption and future labour. However, as I mentioned briefly, even while this challenges patriarchal structures of the family, it does make homophobic references which again enhance the ideal of motherhood as a moral and social imperative. Part of the ambivalence of these texts is that despite the horror of cannibalism, its function as a method of defining and enhancing the family is admirable when contrasted with the patriarchal abuses and failures which are destructive to the family. Indeed, the cannibalism is framed as a spiritually revitalising force while it simultaneously evokes food horror and a sense of the abject. I argue that this offers an ambivalence about neoliberal motherhood in that it glorifies women as the main (re)producers of the family and its construction through consumption but this does not fundamentally challenge patriarchal structures and even contributes to them. This tension challenges postfeminist media culture's insistence that feminine consumption and the professionalisation of mothering has negated a need for structural change and continued feminist interventions.

The maternal tradition in *Meat Grinder* is clear from the beginning. In the opening credits we see a woman cutting and seasoning human flesh. It is shot like old home video footage as it is grainy, jerky, and black and white. There are flashes and flares on the film, and it blurs in several places which suggests it is old film. An arm dripping blood is one of the more clear images which makes obvious that the meat is human – hands are, arguably, some of the most obviously human features. This home-movie style shows that this was meant to be recorded for posterity. The woman is later revealed to be Buss's mother. This immediately places Buss's actions within a tradition. Despite Buss's insanity and unreliability, her mother's cannibalism seems to be real within the diegesis of the film because of this home-movie style footage which creates the impression that this is documented reality instead of memory or flashback. Like *The Woman*, this cannibalism helps to construct the family through the feminine foodways of cannibalism.

While butchering, preparing/torturing and cooking her victims, Buss has several flashbacks of her mother giving advice. Like the flashbacks of abuse these are in black and white with the voiceover often continuing into the present. Often, the mother's actions are the same as Buss's as when they prepare poultices of spices which we see Buss place on the leg stump of a living victim. This mirroring of the past and present, as well as the voiceovers demonstrates the tradition being handed down from mother to daughter but also creates a sense of uncanny which permeates this film. During the course of the film, the mother's voiceover explains how their cannibalism is a family recipe which enhances the spiritual health of the community.

In one flashback, the mother stands cooking in the back of a room, her son and husband sitting eating at the table in the foreground. As the camera moves back we see them choke. They

have been poisoned by the mother illustrating her access to power through the family foodways and how this power can be exercised for revenge. The camera is positioned on the table watching the men twitch as they die while the mother nonchalantly collects their glasses. This nonchalance is both disturbing, as it suggests a lack of feeling, and light-hearted. Her voiceover tells us to remember that a dish of revenge tastes as good as 'dainty dishes'. We see her pulling her husband's body out of the river where she has stored it, then we see her son hanging from a meat hook in the foreground while she chops the father in the background. The voiceover again continues telling us that 'everything is about karma'. 'Food for atonement,' she tells us, 'is not guilt.' We see her dismembering her husband in close-up copying the actions in the opening sequence. The invoking of karma suggests that her mother's victims deserve their fate, while the repetition of the sequence suggests a sense of inevitability or cyclicity. While this connection between past and present demonstrates how women have negotiated power within the home – a central argument in postfeminist media culture which claims that women's domestic labour is valuable, skilled and encourages women to embrace this feminine power – it also shows how this domestic power and consumption has not prevented patriarchal abuse.

Indeed, the humour in this film creates an ambivalent tone, on the one hand rendering the female cannibal less horrific and more sympathetic, while on the other hand mocking her actions and the idea that her power has an impact. In several scenes, the body horror of butchery and torture becomes food horror as the body is rendered into food. However, this food horror is exaggerated and rendered ridiculous. For example, a loan shark who has previously made inappropriate advances at Buss comes to collect the money her husband gambled away. We see Buss in the foreground trapped as the man and his cronies fill the gaps in the background. This atmosphere of threat is enhanced by the dark shadows and blue light as the man sits and stares at Buss's backside and makes suggestive comments which Buss rejects. He then tells her that if she does not want to pay then she must 'get [her] husband up here'. Despite the threat of the scene, Buss is equally threatening as she has been empowered by her cannibalism. In the foreground she chops her meat cleaver into the chopping block, the thud punctuating her lack of verbal response at that moment.



Figure 4.7 Buss is trapped by the mise-en-scene as the Boss and his cronies fill the background. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 4.8 Buss asserts herself through her cannibalism. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The scene cuts to Buss coming out of her cellar with a cut of meat before the scene again cuts to show her serving the men food. This implies that Buss has literally brought her husband to them but not in the way they expect. This is both horrifying with the close ups of meat emphasising the violence of meat, and it is an example of dramatic irony which is darkly humorous. As the scene plays out, the men rave over Buss's cooking, again evoking food horror as we watch close-ups of them chewing and listen to them slurping what we know is human flesh. Their enthusiasm contrasts with our disgust which adds to the dramatic irony of this food horror. When Buss does start killing them, objectifying them excessively in comparison to their lewd sexual objectification, the scene becomes almost slapstick even while the blood and screams, the editing and lighting evoke a sense of horror.



Figure 4.9 Buss brings her husband up. The food horror is caused by the high saturation of the red blood and the dark humour of the dramatic irony. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The boss pulls a cleaver out of his neck, spurting blood everywhere and dying as a result. His head later pulls off when Buss drags his body to her cellar. The hammy acting is deliberate and lightens what is otherwise a violently monstrous act.

The use of dark humour renders this food horror and body horror ridiculous and far out of the ordinary. If we compare this to flashbacks of Buss's past we begin to see how the cannibalism contrasts with incest. The incest, as I discussed before, is shot in black and white which looks more subdued, the acting is fairly subtle with minimal exaggeration of movements. Buss's distress is shown on her face and demonstrated in the jumpy camera movements and the overall effect is the sense of gravity. In comparison, this food horror contains elements of dark humour, exaggeration and produces an effect of being gross and unreal. This renders Buss sympathetic even while she commits the more obviously violent and physically disgusting acts. Furthermore, the food horror of cannibalism demonstrates the brutality of objectification which, again, illuminates the sexual objectification that is less visible.

The film also uses beautiful cinematography, a loving sex scene, and shots of Buss's abattoir to create a jarring tone. A love song starts as we Buss butchering the creditors. Close ups of vats and long shots of her abattoir intersperse contrasting moments of horror with the beauty of the scene. The blueish light of the dark basement contrasts with the highly saturated reds of the blood and bowls of human offal lying in the middle of the floor which is surprisingly aesthetically pleasing. This is intercut with shots of Attaphol and Buss as he pledges to protect her and love her, giving massages and having sex. The love song is about obsessive love and lines such as 'Don't nourish my heart then tear it apart' or 'my first love is a torture', play while Buss manually pumps a human heart. Shots of her caressing and cutting human flesh are intercut with shots of her body being caressed. The juxtaposition of the images and music, the mix of the grotesque and the beautiful, are ironic and jarring.



Figure 4.10 Close ups of butchery contrast with the sex scene. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 4.11 Close ups of Buss dismember her visually in the sex scene. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 4.12 Buss plays with a heart while a love song ironically describes the pain of love. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The basement abattoir is a vision of a gothic-horror space with offal, deep shadows and a gleam of condensation on the surfaces making it look dingy and cold. Despite the gory and gothic nature of the room, the blue lighting and colour, light music and mise-en-scene present it as beautiful. The high quality cinematography contrasts with the visceral content of this sequence is unexpectedly positive but disorienting. The beauty of the scene creates a tone of sympathy with the cannibal, the visual enjoyment allowing the audience to overlook the gore even while the gothic and horror elements of the dank basement and human offal emphasise the disgust one might expect to feel. The food horror of cannibalism and torture, and the gothic space of this abattoir dungeon contrasts with the light music, the beautiful cinematography and the desire to protect the family. This creates a sense that the maternal tradition of cannibalism is ambivalent. It is undoubtedly monstrous but it allows women to access the power of foodways to help protect and define the family.



Figure 4.13 The beautiful colours contrast with the gothic shadows and abject gore in this shot. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The ambivalence of the cannibalism is enhanced when the mother's voiceover explains that 'whenever your life gets you down, do as I told you. It will revive everyone in the family'. The spiritual value of cannibalism is invoked as a tradition, and positions the violence of it as of greater benefit to others despite the harm to whoever 'gets you down'. The prioritisation of feminine care of the family over the exploitation and objectification of humans echoes the neoliberal and postfeminist consumerism which positions consumption as a strategy for constructing the family and the self despite the environmental and human exploitation which is often at the core of consumerist culture. The contrasting tones help to challenge whether the exploitation of consumption can (or should) be overlooked, while the haunting of the past challenges whether this consumption strategy is even effective.

The horror of using people as food is compared in flashbacks to the horror of rape and bartering women as property. The cannibalism allows the film to discuss incest, rape and the breakdown of the family. Rather than blaming women for being single mothers or arguing for submission to their husbands, it instead warns that oppressive male behaviour is the cause of the breakdown of the nuclear family. The food horror – poisoning, cannibalism and domestic violence using kitchen implements – both empowers women as able to fight back through shared domestic knowledge but also figures them as monsters. These women embody their femininity, lulling their menfolk into a false sense of security because the men deem them inferior and controllable, and in the process of embodying femininity are made monstrous. This is part of the postfeminist gothic which suggests that women are not victims but negotiate their position using their femininity to access power. As Genz (2007: 69-70) claims 'It is only by "inhabiting"

femininity that the postfeminist Gothic heroine can go about her monstrous business and achieve a position of power and subjectivity.’

In *The Woman*, the Woman and Belle are contrasted with Belle being blamed for her complaisance and passivity. Belle had the tools to create pockets of resistance in her family through cooking. The novel tells us ‘Belle hasn’t inherited much [...] but she’s inherited her mother’s talent for baking. Corn bread. Banana bread. Cakes and pies’ (63). Instead of teaching her girls to bake, asserting the kitchen as a feminine space where they can talk and/or build skills and confidence, Belle has instead watched Chris pass on his misogyny to Brian and taught the girls to be passive. Belle is not to blame for Chris’s misogyny but she is punished for her complicity and failure to assert a maternal, feminine alternative to Chris’s patriarchal oppression.

In cases of father-daughter incest, Herman and Hershman (1981) argue, the mother is often blamed for being unable or unwilling to service the father, thus pushing him towards the eldest daughter. This myth removes the responsibility from the criminal and highlights how male entitlement to sex is assumed in a patriarchal society. It is easy to blame the mother for the father’s abuses even though she is likely abused and/or in ignorance of the situation. In *The Woman*, Belle does know about Chris’s incestuous rapes of Peggy, as well as his rape of the Woman, and what he did to Socket. In one scene, Chris enters Peggy and Darleen’s bedroom and talks to Peggy. Belle stands in the doorway watching:

He got off the bed and turned and she saw that her mother was standing in the hallway behind him. Watching.

All her mother seemed to do these days was watch. (72)

The emphasis on Belle watching implies her passivity. She is prepared to bear witness to Chris’s crimes but not interfere in them. Although she is clearly afraid and victimised by Chris, her lack of action is unforgivable in the text as she is deemed complicit and punished. This shows that the myth of the mother being at fault is still an active part of Western culture. This perhaps shows some of the tensions inherent in the idea that women’s empowerment and individual agency negates the need for structural feminist change. If we reject the idea that women are powerless or weak then it suggests that all women therefore have the capacity to protect themselves and their children. While this text seems to agree with the idea that Belle and other women can access power against men like Chris, ultimately, the Woman (and later Peggy and Darleen) are able to resist because they end up outside of not only patriarchal systems but modern life in general. The return to a primitive past links women’s family foodways to fundamental survival, idealising the mothering role as the power of life and death but not radically challenging existing culture.

Belle is positioned as a failure in this regard. As Chris has usurped the family foodways, he has also usurped Belle’s power. Belle is blamed for her failure to stand up for other women. When Chris tortures the Woman, the Woman appeals to Belle as a mother but is ignored. During

a torture scene in which the Woman is washed with a pressure washer, the Woman begs Belle and Peggy, ‘“*Will you help me, mothers?*”’ (112). She defines Belle and Peggy by their shared experience and ability to be mothers. There is an implication that she has failed as a woman when she sided with Chris over the Woman, and the Woman punishes this, attacking Belle and eating the eyes that watched her suffering and did nothing. This hints towards the postfeminist notion that the individual power and agency is more important than a collective feminist movement in which women identify with and help each other. Madeleine Albright coined the phrase ‘there’s a special place in hell for women who don’t help other women’ in a 2006 keynote address and has repeated this, and been quoted by others, ever since. While postfeminist media culture emphasises the individual over women as a group, aspects of neoliberal feminism encourage women to share their experiences as women – for example through hashtags ‘campaigns’, food, lifestyle or mom blogging, and self-help groups and forums. Belle is punished because she chooses not to help her daughters or the Woman but this ignores the difficulty she faces in standing up to Chris whose actions (particularly raising Socket as a dog) are already well beyond what might be considered average abuse.

In contrast to Belle, the Woman is a role model for Peggy and Darleen. She is preoccupied with family and knows how to create a new one for herself. The matriarchal possibilities which cooking spaces open up have broken down in Belle’s hands and as a consequence Belle’s family is controlled and defined by Chris’s misogynistic patriarchal system. The Woman, on the other hand, is used to a matriarchy based on the shared eating of human flesh, a spiritual tradition which both produces and maintains the family as a unit under feminine leadership. However, her family are not all blood relatives. Her late daughter, Second Stolen, was abducted by her as an infant but this lack of blood relation is overcome by the domestic practices which define her family as those who eat together. The Woman dreams of Second Stolen hunting with her and ‘feels a flush of pride. Second Stolen has the makings of a leader’ (25). Her maternal pride comes from passing on hunting skills to her daughter. However, this non-reproductive way of building family does not prohibit homophobia as we are told that the Woman beat Second Stolen for showing lesbian interest, and she similarly notes Belle’s curiosity when forced by Chris to dry the Woman. The text implies that a certain lesbian or bisexual interest is common in women but must not be allowed. This shows that even though the Woman’s consumption is empowering because she avoids male domination, this serves a similar agenda to patriarchal ideals in that the mothering role is a cultural imperative. After losing her family, the Woman takes the opportunity to build a new one.

When she is freed the Woman first gives Socket Chris’s heart to eat, as I have mentioned previously. She then offers Darleen her bloody finger to suck. Instead of sucking it, Darleen kisses her and this lack of fear inspires the Woman to start a new family. Peggy is offered a chance to suck the blood off her finger as well but refuses. However, she nonetheless follows them away

into the woods instead of waiting for the police as, in the novel, the Woman creates a 'sense of *safety* which is also a sense of being known, of being recognised, of simple acceptance that seems to emanate from this wild woman who kills and undoubtedly will kill again' (178). The sentiments of this are reminiscent of the ideas of unconditional love within a family. Peggy feels a bond of recognition with the Woman suggesting that they belong together. In The Cow chapter at the end of the novel we are given an account of why Peggy chose the Woman and her lifestyle:

“She’s magnificent. She’s one of a kind. She’s free. Free to be her own self by her own lights. Free of all restraint. You won’t believe this now but she can be very kind. When she wants to be. And that’s the key. *When she wants to*. There’s no false *civilised* code of rules to follow. No phony politeness, no evasions. No lies. I don’t think she even knows how to lie. She has courage, loyalty, generosity and power. She’s the woman I want to be.” (197)

The implication, of course, is that her mother did not have those qualities and freedoms because she was trapped in a polite, civilised code of conduct which demands women be submissive to their husbands. Peggy’s assertion that she wants to be a woman who is monstrously free echoes the postfeminist sensibility in which women are empowered by femininity, who can *choose* to be kind rather than just be kind because that is how women are supposed to behave. However, to be a real choice there has to be the option not to be kind. The Woman’s cannibalism illustrates this tension as she both feeds her family and destroys others. She chooses to nurture her family on the suffering of others. This fits with the postfeminist idea that the individual and the individual family is more important than the collective. It also emphasises the idea hidden by modern consumerist practises that meat-eating and consumerism are legitimate choices no matter the damage to, or oppression of, others.

This section has explored how the texts position female cannibalism as empowering by framing it as an appropriate response to patriarchy, employing dark humour and irony, and emphasising how women access power and construct the family through foodways. The women are able to construct women-centred, matriarchal families without men, protecting their daughters from spectrums of abuse. This valorised motherhood as a moral imperative and a force for positive progress. However, this is ambivalent as the homophobia in the texts suggests that while the women may construct families of their choosing, reproduction must still be prioritised. This performs cultural work relating to the perpetuation of capitalism through reproductive labour.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter has considered how the female cannibals are part of a maternal tradition in which cannibalism is both a convenient act of revenge against patriarchal oppression, and has a spiritual meaning beyond this which helps to construct the family and community. The texts play

with the food horror of cannibalism, rendering it parodic and darkly comic in contrast to the insidious but more every day abuses that women face. This spectrum of abuse is illustrated by the incest and animalisation of women which destroys the structures of the family. This engages with debates which hold single mothers responsible for the breakdown of the family, as well as revealing the continuing abuse that women face from a young age.

Unlike the previous chapter which positioned the female cannibals as isolated from a legacy of feminist progress and strategy, these texts demonstrate a continuity between past and present which illustrates both the persistence of patriarchy and the ways women have accessed power to try to resist this. This is rendered disturbing through the use of flashbacks, found footage, and repetitions which contribute to the gothic atmosphere in these texts. The temporal disturbances critique whether embracing traditional feminine roles in the home as a postfeminist strategy for empowerment would be effective as the home is still unsafe for women despite the power women have accessed in these roles.

While these texts have a more specific temporal and spatial setting than most other texts in this thesis, they nevertheless emphasise isolation of the individual whether in urban or rural settings and focus on the past haunting the present. Like many other texts in this thesis, the decontextualisation places an emphasis on the gender roles and challenges the postfeminist media narrative that feminism is complete and no longer required.

The texts perform cultural work showing how women can access power through the family, and they valorise motherhood by framing the mothers as attempting to protect their daughters. This contributes to a neoliberal ideal which emphasises women's ability to reproduce and to be independent/empowered so they will also perform economic labour. The texts illustrate a fantasy of matriarchal, or women-centred, family units but also imply that the achievement of this does not materially change structures of power which often exploit others. This ambivalent position of the female cannibal illustrates the ambivalent attitude to families without male authority. On one hand, these reproduce consumption and future labour within a neoliberal culture. However, on the other hand, these non-traditional families are outside mainstream culture and potentially threaten it. The food and body horror challenges the ethics of meat-eating/consumption through the objectification of people as meat, but ultimately uses this evocative metaphor to illustrate the horror of a spectrum of abuse which ranges from objectification to murder.

Chapter Five: Food Lovers

In this chapter I explore texts in which the female cannibals are positioned in relation to sexual relationships. Food becomes a way to communicate desire which is accepted or rejected. The rejection or unfulfilled desire leads to violence in these texts which represents fears about women as desiring subjects. Women's bodies are positioned as consumable through connections with incest in these texts. Despite these patriarchal abuses, the acts of cannibalism are not revenge; instead they are presented as acts of love. They especially draw on elements of the sacred to frame cannibalism as a holy act. Nevertheless, anticipation of discovery demonstrates a practical awareness of the illegality of the act, and each cannibal draws on her femininity, particularly her domestic skills, to avoid detection. Furthermore, the texts position consumption in relation to globalisation and late capitalism. Like previous chapters there is a certain amount of decontextualisation which is achieved through disorienting, achronological storytelling and the relative anonymity of the places and characters. These challenges to time and space create a sense of unease which positions them within the globalgothic and reveals how family foodways have been effected by globalisation and late capitalism.

The two main texts I discuss are *301/302* (Park, 1995), and *The Taste of a Man* (Draculic, 1998). As the earliest texts I examine, they illustrate how the female cannibal departs from a family or tribal situation as they are distinctly independent and isolated in urban environments. The texts use narrative tropes to explore the intersections between postfeminist media culture, globalisation and neoliberal consumerism. I argue that these texts engage with globalisation, postfeminist media culture and debates around gender, ultimately performing cultural work which critiques postfeminist consumption and the prioritisation of the self over family.

Park Chul-Soo's *301/302* (1995) examines the lives of two women living across the hall from each other. 302 (Sin-Hye Hwang) has suffered childhood sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather, a butcher. This has caused her to become anorexic in an attempt to disappear. The woman in 301 (Eun-Jin Bang), on the other hand, consumes excessively. Her husband has divorced her because of her obsession with food and, on moving into her new apartment, she quickly tries to feed her anorexic neighbour. When 301 fails to find food that 302 can digest, 302 offers herself to 301 so that 301 can consume and incorporate her into her own body. The women are identified mostly by their apartment numbers with their names mentioned only once, anonymising them and showing their similarities to each other, casting them as doppelgangers and 'everywoman' figures.

The plot is told in a non-chronological series of flashbacks and flashbacks-within-flashbacks, as a detective investigates the disappearance of 302. The detective may or may not exist as the film leaves several threads unresolved including whether the investigation into 302's disappearance is successful. Indeed, the final scene shows 301 sleeping, watched by the ghost of

302, suggesting that the whole film is a dream with an unknown degree of relation to an objective 'reality'. If the detective is unreal this might suggest that 301 ultimately feels guilt over what happened or else it expresses a need to communicate the story – a theme which recurs in *Taste of a Man* and also in the next chapter. This dreamlike structure is disorienting, complemented by the unusual camerawork and editing. Bird's eye shots, extreme close-ups and fish-eye lenses are used throughout, emphasising the distorted perspectives and relationships that these characters have with food and each other. Quick cuts create a fast pace while jump cuts and a frequently moving camera add to the sense of unease, unreliability and disorientation.

The settings add claustrophobia to complete the gothic atmosphere of the film. Most of the film is set indoors, usually within the domestic spaces of 301 and 302's past and present. This creates a sense of entrapment and isolation broken only by 301's brief visits to the equally closed-in space of the supermarket, and 302's surreal outing to a chemist. The claustrophobia of these indoor settings emphasises a gothic atmosphere of entrapment within the domestic space similar to the labyrinthine spaces of the gothic castle in classic British examples of the gothic. As Wasson (2014: 132) has noted 'Gothic often hinges on representing the experience of a space as claustrophobic and imprisoning'.

The Taste of a Man tells the story of Tereza, a Polish doctoral student who has come to New York City on an exchange trip in the 1980s or 1990s. She meets José, a married Brazilian man on research leave who is writing a book about the 1979 Andes plane crash in which the Uruguayan rugby team ate dead members of their team to survive in the mountains over winter. Tereza and José begin a passionate affair over the three months they are in New York together. As the time draws nearer for each to depart, Tereza decides to kill and eat José in order to create a perfect union between them. It takes her three days to clean the flat and dispose of José's remains. The novel is a first person narration by Tereza on the final day of cleaning before she leaves on a flight back to Poland.

The narration blends the near and distant past, as well as Tereza's present. This creates both a sense of harmony and confusion, as I demonstrate throughout this analysis. Memories of Tereza's childhood, stories of José's childhood, the recounting of their relationship, and Tereza's present are juxtaposed, connected by memory-triggers such as foods, the weather, actions, and so on. Each memory apparently recalls another one, carefully building up Tereza's account to a stream-of-consciousness narration. The organic seamlessness of these episodes, like the match cuts in *301/302*, creates a harmonious cycle as the past leads to the present and the present – linguistically and in memory – leads back to the past. Despite this sense of harmony, however, the jumps in both space and time also create a sense of disorganisation and confusion. The plot of Tereza's life has a jumbled chronology which hides and reveals different aspects of her subjectivity even as the first person narration encourages the reader to find the cause of her actions in her memories which is also complicated by her distrust of language. She draws attention to

language and translation throughout which emphasises the fact we are reading in translation – whether in the original Czech or in English, as Tereza is meant to be Polish. Like the changing perspectives of the characters in *301/302*, the key episodes which connect food and sex in the narrative are revealed in an order which begs constant re-evaluation of Tereza's subjectivity and contributes to the unsettling atmosphere which grows as the novel progresses.

Like *301/302*, Tereza's name is mentioned only once in the middle of the novel which anonymises her. Also like *301/302*, the time period of the novel is ambiguous; references to Issei Sagawa's crime in an old newspaper clipping place it a while after that event in 1981 but a specific date is not given.⁹ Although the uncertainty of the date contributes to the disorientation achieved in the novel, it is also firmly contemporary, with a preoccupation (shared in the foodways of *301/302*) with globalisation.

The novel is set in New York City but most of the characters Tereza mentions are foreign; no-one is 'home'. There is a fear of being misunderstood and a distrust of language throughout the novel, and a sense of displacement as Tereza recounts the unfamiliarity of the city and the sense of being adrift and anonymous in a massive urban sprawl. The novel is set almost entirely in their apartment and the claustrophobia of this setting reflects the isolation of the domestic space, in this case, compared to the alienation of the city outside and its potential dangers. Similarly, the plane in the final scene is a liminal space, neither here nor there, so to speak, but equally claustrophobic. Tereza mentions cases of cannibalism from other cities where unnamed homeless men have killed women who invited them in from the streets; she describes the anonymity of those passing in the streets, and demonstrates the ease of lying when one is unknown locally. The domestic space is familiar and empowers Tereza by her mastery of it but the apartment is not 'home', it is a rented space with the sounds of people living above and below. Although these comfort her as they show how life goes on, they force her to notice the relative silence of her apartment and her isolation from the community.

This chapter draws on many of the same themes as previous chapters in this thesis, especially incest, spirituality and the return home. This chapter particularly speaks to the following chapter on neoliberal cannibals as these texts also feature women in heterosexual relationships (that have failed/ended in some way) and who have not reproduced, and have a preoccupation with the female subject in globalised, neoliberal times. However, the texts in this chapter differ in their attitude towards cannibalism. These texts romanticise the cannibalism as a self-sacrificing act on the part of the eaten, and a sacred, loving act on the part of the cannibal. This is contrasted with the frustrations of desire which become violent. This chapter also relates to Chapter Four: Mothers and Daughters as the mother features, especially in *301/302*, as a way

⁹ Issei Sagawa killed his Dutch classmate, Renee Hartevelt, in Paris in 1981 and ate parts of her. He was caught disposing of the rest of her body. I discuss this case in detail later in the chapter.

of exploring family foodways in a late capitalist era, and a figure which is blamed for all manner of problems.

I discuss how these texts explore women's subjectivity through their performance of femininity and consumption, and I argue that the texts explore concerns related to women's position in a globalised setting. I first discuss how the texts position the women as a result of childhood experiences, especially relating to their mothers and childhood sexual abuse. The texts link the past with the present using a variety of techniques which also call attention to globalisation and the elision of the local with the global. I then explore how the texts link food and sexuality and frame frustrated or insatiable female desire as violent. This engages with ideas around subjectivity and I argue that the concerns raised about female desire reflect fears about women as active rather than passive subjects. Finally, I examine how the texts use cannibalism to demonstrate how women's consumption can be caring and spiritual but how this also comes at the expense of stable heterosexual relationships.

5.1 Childhood Foodways and Their Consequences

In this section I discuss how the texts present the protagonists' childhood relationships to foodways and family, and how this affects them as adults. The texts present local and global foodways and link the past and present using disorienting narrative tropes and decontextualizing the texts. This makes them uncanny and emphasises the globalgothic nature of the texts wherein the blurring of spatial boundaries becomes a site of anxiety. *301/302* blames the mothers for how the girls relate to their femininity through foodways. For 301 her mother's absence and lack of affection leads to her obsession with femininity and the expression of this through cooking. 302, on the other hand, is anorexic, rejecting the consumerism of her mother which distracted her from the incestuous abuse that the stepfather committed against 302. In *Taste*, Tereza and José's pasts reveal their obsession with food as stemming from childhood foodways in which food is a gift of love. Tereza also experiences childhood sexual abuse which is not framed as traumatic – indeed, apparently the opposite – which nonetheless encourages her belief that love and sex are related to consumption of the love/sex object. The texts thus engage with debates around gender regarding women's objectification and animalisation, the performance of femininity and active subjectivity, and discourses about motherhood and incest.

301/302 begins by revealing the contents of two fridges while voiceovers of two young girls (understood to be a young 301 and 302) seemingly answer a documentary question about the contents. 301's fridge is full of convenience foods as we hear her describe how the food will be cooked when her mother comes home – but her mother 'did not come home'. As she says this the camera pans up her young body, showing her standing on piles of cookery books to reach the counter-top as she chops fresh vegetables, her adult-sized apron hanging past her feet. The camera lingers on her bare legs and bum which is disturbing, emphasising her youth and vulnerability.



Figure 5.1 301's vulnerability is emphasised by her lack of dress, adult apron and the seeming lack of adult supervision while using a knife.

A shot of her clumsily holding a big knife in adult-sized rubber gloves again presents her as vulnerable. The fridge has a variety of foods in it, including various American importations like Gatorade, sliced cheese, and hot dogs. This scene suggests that 301's mother is a working woman, affluent enough to keep a full fridge, and buy imported goods, but not at home to cook them. This situates the film in a globalised, consumer-driven society.



Figure 5.213 The convenience foods and child's voiceover show evidence of a working mother.



Figure 5.3 Foods including hot dogs and Gatorade suggest a globalised consumerism.

While the film appears to be set in Korea because of the writing on packaging and buildings as well as the spoken language, it is never clearly identified as anywhere in particular and, indeed, the indoor claustrophobic settings which I explore later, could be in any urban environment. As Kee (2001: 451) points out, these characters ‘operate in an environment that cannot be read as strictly “Korean” nor “Western” for the women are located in an ambiguous site of dualities and conflicting cultural codes.’ However, the mother’s absence, and absence of any adult carer, may be explained by the economic and social system in Korea in the late 20th century. According to Park (1993) women made up a huge percentage of the workforce in Korea, increasing by up to 14% each year from 1953 to 1991 and enabling Korea’s massive economic growth. During this period, women worked longer hours than men but despite this, women earned roughly half of what men earned with very low numbers in managerial positions. On top of this, Confucian ideology about family structures encouraged women to stop working after marriage in order to look after children. As a result, it was not until 1988 that day care centres began to open to provide childcare for working mothers (Park, 1993: 141).

Because her mother is not there to feed her, 301 cooks for herself, later associating the missing love and care with food. This explains her adult obsession with traditional femininity as she rejects her mother’s career in favour of a ‘return home’. This implies a critique of rapid economic expansion and the dissonance between global capital demands and local ideologies. 301’s cooking is supposed to express love and affection for her husband but the intensity with which she needs the food to be accepted and admired reveals that she is seeking to feel loved herself. Her need for approval reflects how the professionalisation of domestic labour has become central to the construction of middle class femininity – by rejecting her food, her husband

critiques her femininity. I explore the consequences of 301's frustrated desire in the following section but here the text positions her aggressive femininity in relation to the economics which deprive her of her mother's affection in childhood and frame domestic skills as central to her subjectivity.

The film continues to set up 'the mother' as in some ways to blame for the daughters' trajectories when we see 302 talking about her fridge. In this scene, she describes how their fridge is always full of meat but she would prefer apples and orange juice. Extreme close-ups of her mouth are intercut with shots of someone butchering meat, a red filter deepening, but also hiding, any blood. She describes how her mother is good at cutting meat off the bone. This particular skill perhaps refers to a time when her mother had to learn to use every last resource, hinting at poverty in the past. We learn from this that her parents are butchers and so their fridge is actually an industrial commercial fridge, not a domestic one. This slippage between the commercial and the domestic suggests that the domestic space does not exist for 302 – it is always a workspace. Neoliberal ideology does encourage moulding oneself and one's home to fulfil market needs and while home businesses are not necessarily a new thing, the film draws attention to the economic overtaking the care in 302's home throughout the narrative.

The commercialisation of the home is critiqued by the mother's consuming greed for the accumulation of money to the detriment of her daughter. However, the home as site of work is also true for many women who labour in the home, as feminists, including Betty Friedan (1963) and Hochschild (1989) have pointed out that the home is a site of labour for women and leisure for men, creating fundamental inequality in heterosexual relationships. Postfeminist media culture challenges this, framing work in the home as empowering and flexible. This tension is explored by the different attitudes that 301 and 302 have. 301's relationship with her husband illustrates the inequality of their relationship in which he devalues her contribution, as we shall see in the next section, but at the same time, 301 still values hyperfemininity and domestic skills constructing her self-esteem around her culinary expertise. 302, on the other hand, rejects the domestic in favour of a career. Although she rejects her mother's consumerism along with food, she ironically also turns her home into a commercial space using it as an office for writing. This shows how the home can have value for women while at the same time being a space of entrapment.

While 301's mother is absent because she works, the film implies that 302's mother is preoccupied with money and material comfort to the exclusion of her mothering role as she is always shown throughout counting money, going to the bank or worrying and talking about money while ignoring her daughter. This is costly as it is during her trips to the bank that the stepfather incestuously rapes 302. Similarly, when 302 tries to communicate suicidal thoughts to her mother in a later scene, her mother tells her not to be ungrateful. The opening fridge scene begins to communicate this as we see the mother walking past 302 into what is presumably the

walk-in fridge. The camera is at the height of the young 302 sitting on the floor and so we only get an anonymised view of the mother's legs. 302 follows her, and then the mother comes out carrying a large leg of meat. 302 does not re-emerge despite the camera lingering for some time before the fade to black and the title sequence. This fridge sequence subtly illustrates the disconnection between mother and daughter, suggesting that the mother ignores the needs and existence of her daughter, perhaps even objectifying her as meat or dead-weight. Certainly, when she later tells 302 not to be ungrateful she tells her not to be a 'step-daughter' implying that she must act like the step-father's own blood relation or he will not have a use or care for her (and perhaps, therefore, grow tired of the mother, again reducing them both to poverty). This shows the catch-22 of being dependant on men for economic security in that she needs the man to help her provide for her child even when that man is also a danger to her child.

The past is constantly being recalled and repeated in *301/302*. In flashbacks and flashbacks-within-flashbacks parallels are drawn between 301 and 302's incestuous father. When 302 attempts to dispose of food which 301 has made her, 301 pushes her back inside her apartment and tries to force feed her the turning food. 301 eats some of the meat first showing 302 how to eat which evokes images of mothers using mimicking behaviours to feed their children. She then tries to stuff food into 302's mouth in a scene of abject oral rape as 302 attempts to resist. This triggers a flashback to memories of 302 being raped by her stepfather, similarly attempting to resist, and memories of him feeding her meat. These repetitions show both 301's monstrously twisted attempts to give and receive love, as well as the ways in which 302 is associated with meat.

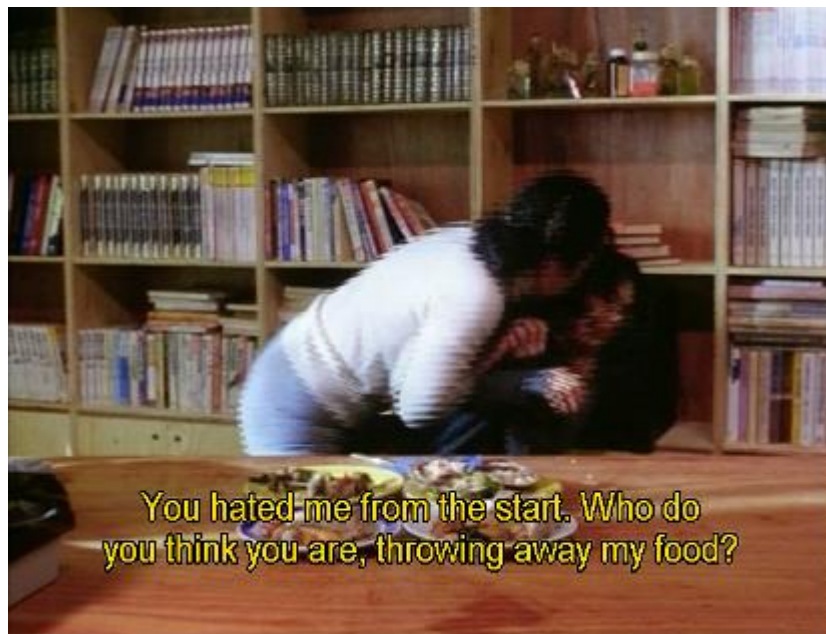


Figure 5.4 301 stands over 302, forcing food into her mouth. Compare to images of 302's stepfather also standing over her during attempted rapes.



Figure 5.6 302's pain is foregrounded while the red filter connects her to meat and butchery. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The rape itself is filmed with a red filter reminding us of blood and violence, presenting 302's body as meat. The scene jumps to meat being butchered, again with a red filter, making the connection visually explicit. It is 302's mother cutting the meat but when the stepfather comes home 302's mother goes to the bank and the stepfather attempts to rape 302 again. This is again filmed with a red filter, and Dutch angles illustrate the chaos, slowing the action as she resists his attempt. 302 gets away from him and hides in the walk-in freezer. The camera pans down meat hanging up through the same red filter. When a customer asks the stepfather for a particular cut he comes into the freezer with a large knife. We take 302's perspective looking up at him through meat, watching as he slices into the dead flesh.



Figure 5.6 The stepfather dominates the frame, choosing which meat to cut as we view him from 302's perspective.

302 manages to sneak past him but unfortunately, a younger girl who has asked her previously to play hide-and-seek sees her and decides to hide in the freezer, locking herself in. 302 later finds her dead amongst the meat. In the butchershop, female flesh is meat for consumption, and 302 has very little bodily control which she carries into adulthood.

In *Taste of a Man*, Tereza is also subject to child sexual abuse which is framed in relation to women's bodies as comestible. This is raised early in the novel connecting sexual objectification and exploitation with the (female) body as food. The episode is told from the present as Tereza relates having a bath scented with rosemary. This sense-memory takes her back to her childhood, aged six or seven, when staying with family friends in Croatia. When having a rosemary scented bath, the son of her parents' friend comes into the bathroom. His age is not made explicit but he is trusted to look after her on the cliffs beside the sea and is studying seamanship so he must be a young man at least. He calls himself her 'Uncle Tonci' (51) creating an impression of familiarity, incest and unequal power relations. She first tells how he threatens to throw her in the well if she tells anyone but then takes it back: 'But no, no, you won't tell anybody – you like it' (51). Although Tereza describes his hand as a 'sea animal' and admits thinking of 'the well with its rusty lid' (51), she also describes being 'overcome with heat, and then with pleasant cramps' (51) and, in hindsight, generously admits Tonci was 'probably shy' (51). Although this is clearly child sexual abuse, Tereza seems to remember this fondly. She goes on to describe how when Tonci took her out swimming in the sea, she would dry off by lying in the sun and he would lick her:

Tonci would lick the salt off my shoulders, stomach and legs. I'm going to eat you all up, eat you all up, he would say, and I would giggle because his tongue tickled me. I'm going to start with these little toes, then for my main course I'll have this leg, and last of all there's dessert, he would say, sliding his tongue into the cleft between my legs. I remember the soft pressure of his tongue and the taste of sweat on my upper lip, I remember the rush of the sea which was soon drowned out by the rush of my breathing (52).

This episode reflects how we often figure children's bodies, as well as female bodies, as food. The power adults have over children, and men have over women, can be expressed in this type of objectification in which the person becomes consumable – whether for sexual purposes or otherwise. The repetition of 'eat you all up' has obvious significance for the connections between sex and food. Tereza's narrative draws us back to the present when she recalls how 'The first time José's tongue touched me in that same spot [...], I suddenly thought I could hear the sea again' (52). José becomes connected to Tonci through this memory. She describes how after

eating José she now feels him inside her, and how, like the sudden memory of Tonci during oral sex, memories of José surface in her:

It must be José reminding me that I am still completely in his power. My memory, my feelings, my flesh, me, that is all his now, all his. He decides everything, he controls everything. Never again will I be my own master (52).

Rubbing oil on herself after her rosemary bath, she claims it was José's hands that touched her. Her memory of Tonci's sexual abuse mix with her memories of José. 'I slid my hand between my legs, as Tonci once used to do' (53). Her masturbation is driven by memories:

What I remember and cannot forget, because it is not up to me, what keeps coming back, is the feeling of desire: that inner hotness of the being, that total focus, the blood throbbing at José's every real or imaginary touch (53).

Her memories mix Tonci's touch with José's, and she refers to José being inside her, 'decid[ing]' about her memories. The implication is that Tonci's consumption of her, while not represented as a traumatic event, has nonetheless influenced her, contributing to her connection of sex with food, and with total power and possession of the other. José, in triggering those memories with his similar preoccupation with food and sex, becomes her victim, perhaps as a substitute for Tonci. However, this act is not framed as direct revenge for child sexual abuse, and it is framed as an act of love which has disturbing connotations. In a way, it transfers the classic male rationale that love/lust overcame reason to Tereza, allowing her to claim that José is inside her, controlling her body and mind through their everlasting love. She has taken the lessons of childhood – that people in your power are consumable – and has acted on them.

Tereza continues to link food with sexuality throughout the novel, her associations between memories again connecting her present with her childhood and José's childhood. Tereza recalls how full her and José's pantry was in the run-up to their departure date and how this made her remember her own mother's pantry which was always kept full. During her childhood there were food shortages and this memory of scarcity still bothers Tereza which shows, like 301, how central food is to her sense of self. However, despite the national shortages, her family was very privileged and she remembers that her parents paid for two pigs to be reared and slaughtered every year as meat was so hard to find in the market. As a concert pianist, her father would also bring home luxury items like chocolate, English marmalade, Twinings teas, cheeses, and so on. This demonstrates how globalisation benefits those who are already privileged. Indeed, Tereza notes how easy these things are to source in New York City.

The seamless connections in the memories are nonetheless disturbing because they illustrate how time and space are reduced and contained in a globalised world. Each location Tereza remembers connects to another space and time, creating both harmony and an atmosphere

of inescapability and claustrophobia. This is heightened by the ways that communication is reduced to connections between food and sex.

Cooking is described as 'a ritual, like making love, and no less important' (68). Cooking becomes a way for them to communicate and find out about each other. José's cooking style included describing everything he is doing, much like the woman, Antonia, who taught him to cook. Tereza describes José's memory of Antonia, a black servant who was also reputedly his grandfather's last mistress; linking, again, food with sex. When no-one was home, José would pull out Antonia's breasts and suckle on her which she apparently encouraged, even though he was 15 years old, as she had 'fed so many children already' (69). José reportedly told Tereza he 'felt as if [he] could drown in [his] own voraciousness' (69), connecting his teenage desire to consume with a fear of being consumed (by water). This calls attention to the ways poor women are exploited for reproductive and care work, and reminds us that globalisation is not necessarily a modern phenomenon with global histories of slavery and colonisation illustrating the inequalities it perpetuates. After leaving home José dreamed of choking to death on Antonia's nipples. This foregrounds the representation of women as consumable but also devouring in that it is José who is overcome by her large breasts, and shows a fear of women's bodies.

This memory of breasts connects back to Tereza as she remembers how José would bare her breasts: 'He did it because it excited him to make love quickly and suddenly in the kitchen, near the food, next to the stove or on the table. For him there was a strong, direct connection between sex and food, as if one reminded him of the other' (69). Her body, she says, became food for him: 'My fingers dissolved in his mouth and themselves became food, sliding down the throat which hungrily swallowed them' (70). She also nibbles on his body, their shared need to penetrate and absorb each other taking the place of communication:

The words I uttered were no longer enough. I spoke to him through my fingers; [...] And then he would respond, with his whole body he would say the same thing: I love you, I love you, I love you' (70).

The links between food and sex build throughout this episode becoming explicit as Tereza's narration gets closer to her recent past. Their lack of verbal communication is replaced with embodied, sexual communication, and with the shared experiences of cooking and eating which then become blended and confused.

During the day, in the kitchen, words would turn into juicy bites of roast leg of lamb, potatoes, crab soup, fish in dill sauce and chocolate cake. It was as if through food we were slowly shedding the fear of misunderstanding. But we simply could not, could not get enough of each other. (71).

Their lack of language is presented as contributing to this bodily insatiability, and is the reason for their reliance on the body and the physical instead. Tereza feels consumed by love, unable to distinguish her body's limits. By killing and consuming José Tereza is able to take him into her body, but as we saw above, she still feels him inside her, controlling her body. The lack of communication between them contrasts sharply with the fact that Tereza is narrating the entire account to the reader. Her need to tell the story could be seen as an attempt to re-establish her identity as a coherent subject. José may be inside her but it is her experiences which are communicated, not his. This implies fears about women constructing identity through consumption as her subjectivity is established at the cost of others - perhaps especially, at the cost of people of colour as Tereza with her white Polish heritage dominates José who is of mixed heritage including native Brazilians and the Portuguese colonists who, in turn, dominated them.

The texts show how childhood pasts are carried into adulthood, creating attitudes towards the self and others as comestible objects. The narrative tropes which blend the past and present also blend places and spaces showing how disturbing globalisation can be. The lack of dialogue in both texts – *301/302* using primarily flashbacks, and *Taste* foregrounding food over language – also contributes to a sense of claustrophobia and the objectification of others. Tensions about domestic work, particularly feeding and care work, are illustrated by the ambivalent attitudes towards its value and those undertaking it. While 301 bases her self-esteem on her domestic skills, and is rejected by those around her, she nonetheless continues to insist on its value which makes her aggressive as I explore in the next section. Tereza's experience of food shortages gives her an appreciation of the value of the work undertaken by her family's domestic servant. She is, nonetheless, a consumer instead of a provider of food, asserting her subjectivity through violent consumption which I explore in the next section. I argue that the dissonance between desire and fulfilment leads to violence which is linked to femininity and domestic skills.

5.2 Frustration and Desire

The cannibals use food as a way to communicate love, desire and sexual appetite. 301 bases her sense of self and her value on her feeding skills as well which means when her food is rejected or devalued it is not only her desire and emotions that are attacked but her sense of subjectivity. Tereza threatens to be consumed by her desire which leads her to become violent as she reasserts her subjectivity while still admitting the strength of her desire. Constructing the self through consumption is a postfeminist strategy in a world which positions women as ideal neoliberal consumers, according to Gill (2007: 249). In *301/302*, undertaking correct consumption is achieved by embodying ideal femininity and vice versa. Where 301 fails in her desire to perform femininity she becomes aggressive, performing a hyperfeminine role and reconstructs femininity as violent, as I discuss below. Tereza's violence in *Taste* similarly links

feminine consumption to violence as she embodies a monstrous, animalistic femininity while nonetheless objectifying José, and asserting herself.

301 has bought into an idealised, postfeminist femininity which is domestic but valuable and empowered. Her resentment at 302 is framed as jealousy at her embodiment of femininity – that is, her thinness – despite 302's apparent lack of appreciation of, or effort to perform, femininity. 301 perceives 302's apparent success as reflecting back her own failures and this makes her violent. When 302 initially rejects her food 301, like Krendler in Chapter Three, has fantasies which degrade 302 by attacking her ideal femininity. She calls 302 a 'snobby bitch' and fantasises about feeding her until she is 'fat' and thus, undesirable. The vision of 302 as fat shows 302 eating meat kebabs and wearing loungewear instead of normal clothes. Her body is presented as grotesque as she struggles to move and yet keeps stuffing food in her mouth. This is somewhat at odds with the fact that while she is chubbier, she is not massively obese. In 301's flashbacks of herself during her marriage her weight fluctuates surreally, suggesting a distorted image of herself which reveals her obsession with her body but at no time is she particularly obese. This shows how perceptions of the self are distorted through cultural codes which link weight gain to unhappiness. The competitiveness 301 feels becomes violent as she literally force feeds 302 as I explored in the previous section.

In order to feel successful as a woman, 301 must embody the feminine ideal which is slim, but ironically must consume products to achieve this. Kim (2003: 98) discusses how the woman's body in Korea 'becomes a site of global culture, signifying her elite status as a member of the cosmopolitan – and overwhelmingly Western – global community by participating in the main activity of global culture: consumption of global products.' Thus her femininity is constructed through consumption but it must be the correct consumption. Indeed, when her mother calls 301 on her anniversary to recommend an imported diet product, her mother sounds appalled when she points out that 301 has not even had children yet, implying that she should be taking care of her body at least until she has fulfilled her social and sexual role in motherhood.

301's weight gain is a result of her "eating her feelings" when she is rejected. However, when she catches her husband cheating on her, her frustration becomes violent and reconstructs femininity in its extremes as monstrous by killing and cooking her husband's dog, Chong Chong. The dog is her husband's baby; at several points he orders her to bathe the dog and accuses her of being incapable of looking after it, which is a jibe at her care-giving skills and therefore her potential as a mother. Becoming a mother, particularly to a son, is central to a Confucian idea of the feminine role which still has valence in Korea so this is a great insult, particularly in view of 301's commitment to performing femininity (Kee, 2001; Kim, 2003). Diane Carson (2007: 269) argues that this is a form of communication, 'killing Chong Chong, making him part of her culinary creations, is 301's way of communicating. Cooking becomes her voice, killing and preparing a taboo dish her protest.' If we interpret the dog as his baby, we can see a similarity to

Procne of Ancient Greece who fed her rapist husband their son. Procne's action, Warner (1998) suggests, shows a judgement that the man is unworthy of having his bloodline continued through fatherhood. 301, therefore, uses food and her skill at cooking to communicate a challenge to his masculinity just as he challenges her femininity. No on-screen violence takes place, rendering the act invisible. Although 301 later describes the monstrous process of plucking, skinning and dismembering the body to 302, the lack of on-screen violence illustrates how 301 hides her monstrosity through her feminine domestic skills. As with many domestic tasks, the audience, like the husband, only sees the result not the process. The abject shot of the dog's skinned head simmering in the pot illustrates how 301 has turned her home into an abattoir, using her power as care-taker and cook to get revenge for her husband's callousness, communicating her anger and frustration at being sexually rejected. Her obsession with femininity makes her monstrous, the excess of her desire and her reaction to its frustration creates an ambiguous subjectivity which illustrates the tensions in postfeminist constructions of femininity. At the same time, 301's femininity hides her violence from the public, as I discuss below. This tension illustrates how 301 'inhabit[s]' (Genz, 2007: 69-70) femininity while also challenging its construction as passive.

Her violent challenge to his masculinity is read by the husband as unfeminine but, perhaps surprisingly, the divorce judge and the detective disagree. Her husband understands that her investment in the feminine role is not passively accepted but driven by her desires and needs for affection which he finds 'unfeminine' as it makes demands on his masculinity. His reaction is to degrade 301 in the divorce court by accusing her of being good for nothing except cooking, eating and thinking about sex. The husband's complaints sound ridiculous as he explains what a trial it was to eat her food every day and praise it. He sounds hysterical as he further accuses her of being a potential cannibal following on from the death and consumption of his dog. His disgust at her passion, (excessive) consumption and hyperfemininity are obvious as he casts her difference as monstrous. What he is identifying is that, in a patriarchal society, her passions both for cooking and sex are unseemly for a woman; women must be there to satisfy male desires, not to present desires of their own (through food). However, the judge thinks he is being unreasonable and orders him to pay not only alimony but compensation for her cooking. The camera takes the judge's point-of view, casting the audience as judge and suggesting that we are similarly meant to take 301's side. The detective later hears about the incident over the phone from a colleague and questions how it was grounds for divorce. These institutional figures do not see her femininity as excessive or monstrous but value it, showing how her femininity hides her violence. Although 301's actions question the meaning of femininity, they do not turn it inside-out, so to speak. This performance of a traditional feminine subjectivity is able to be read by the judge as sincere even while the husband interprets it as excessive (and therefore fundamentally unfeminine). The process of inhabiting this femininity, as Genz (2007) argues, gives her power. This is achieved through what Judith Butler (1990: 30) calls reiteration:

to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination. It offers the possibility of a repetition of the law which is not its consolidation, but its displacement.

Every time one engages with discourses and practices which construct an identity, one exposes those discourses and practices to change. This is similar to Stone's (2004) genealogy of femininity in which she discusses how living femininity allows women to identify as a group across cultures and times as the practices and meanings of femininity are reiterated differently but with common elements. 301's hyperfemininity is one iteration whose excess becomes parodic. As Chris Holmlund (1993) outlines about masculinity in her article 'Masculinity as Multiple Masquerade', hyper-masculine performances can easily be interpreted as parodies of the masculine, even as homoerotic and feminized. When gender is a performance, its interpretation can change depending on who is looking. The judge interprets 301's hyperfemininity as a reasonable performance of femininity while the husband views her performance as an excessive, dangerous reiteration of femininity – 301 is in danger of reiterating femininity as violently passionate.

Where 301 incorporates violence into her femininity to express her frustration at her husband, simultaneously destabilising the meaning of femininity, Tereza in *Taste* uses violence to express a different kind of sexual frustration and assertion of the self. Her femininity and sexuality are linked to the strategies which position women as bestial and inferior but, as we shall see, these strategies can be ironically empowering. Tereza's assertion of herself marks out the animalistic position as a site of aggression instead of property.

Female sexuality has been seen as violent and dangerous, especially in psychoanalysis, as the woman is seen as castrated/castrating. Her vagina is either a bleeding wound reminding men of the potential for castration or it is a vagina dentata – a hungry toothed mouth waiting to devour/castrate men. The myth of the vagina dentata is ancient and not just a psychoanalytical concept. This myth has been used to oppress and control female sexuality. Angela Carter (1978, 23) claims that 'female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitudes towards women and our attitude towards ourselves, that transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed.' A number of writers have argued that it is a displacement of the vagina dentata which has given us vampires, Gorgons, and many other female monsters/monstrous-feminine (Haste, 1993; Creed, 1993; Gohr, 2013). This representation of women as subhuman also pervades mainstream culture in the form of adverts which depict women as animalistic. Carol J. Adams (2003) has argued that pornography, and media drawing on pornographic conventions – namely adverts – compares women to animals using a number of visual strategies. This disempowers women, casting them as subhuman. However, the vagina dentata myth (and related animalism, and monstrosity) blends sexual desire and sexual danger, and is thus a precarious concept.

Tereza's violent sexuality in *Taste* is a source of the abject as her descriptions of her and José's voraciousness take love to the extremes of violence, revealing the instability of passion. The first time José and Tereza kiss, Tereza describes how her need for him becomes so completely embodied as to become body-less: 'All of me is in his mouth, like a morsel of food. [...] I enter a dark chamber where nothing but the senses exist' (34). She figures herself as eaten by him, but when they then have sexual relations, she partakes equally in eating him:

I melted a ball of butter between the palms of my hands and rubbed it over the smooth, long muscles of his legs, and then nibbled him, my sharp bites exciting him. There was no resistance from his body. He surrendered to my bites as if he found it impossible to fight off my insatiable hunger. At one point I imagined a roast joint and took a bite. I bit into his shoulder, and droplets of blood broke out on his skin. His blood was light pink, almost transparent. Slowly I let it stain his whole arm and then I licked the wound, like a dog. (35).

The voraciousness of her sexuality is mitigated by his participation in eating her as well, and by his apparent acquiescence to her bites. However, their intimacy is voracious, bordering on violent. The representation of her passion as 'exciting' becomes more sinister as she presents herself in more animalistic terms – 'like a dog' – actually licking at his blood after objectifying him mentally as meat. By occupying the position of animal, Tereza plays into the myths of female sexual danger and *vagina dentata* but her subjectivity as an active partner then requires José to become even less than a non-human animal; he must become meat. The irony of taking up an animalistic subject position is that animals can be more dangerous than women.

Barbara Creed (1993: 7) argues that the monstrous-feminine (in film, but I believe her arguments can apply more generally) is a figure which directly comes from these myths of female castration and *vagina dentata*. However, she warns us that:

I am not arguing that simply because the monstrous-feminine is constructed as an active rather than passive figure that this image is 'feminist' or 'liberated'. The presence of the monstrous-feminine in the popular horror film speaks to us more about male fears than about female desire or feminine subjectivity.

For Creed, representations of monstrous women cannot necessarily be seen as empowering because they stem from male fears of female sexuality which have traditionally been used to subjugate women. While there is much that can be said for irony as a (post)feminist strategy (see Horner and Zlosnik, 2005; 2012, Becker, 1999; Bronfen, 1992), Creed's arguments resonate with Coulthard's claims that very rarely do acts of (fictional) female violence represent any kind of effective political protest. Indeed, Tereza's violence here destabilises the subject/object positions that both she and José occupy but not by raising her from the subhuman. However, by embracing

a monstrous femininity, Tereza asserts herself, accessing power as a woman, and saving her subjectivity from effacement in her sexual desire. This kind of revelling in subhumanity and monstrosity is what Genz argues destabilises the meaning of femininity. By submitting to the practices (and discourses) which define what a subject is one can also change those practices, and reiterate a new meaning of femininity.

These texts emphasise how women's desire for food, love and sex can be empowering but also monstrous. As active rather than passive figures the female cannibals play into postfeminist ideals of women as consumers, and as asserting their rights to desire. The female cannibals use violence to assert their subjectivities which reveals a fear of women as desiring subjects. However, as the next section illustrates, consumption which is figured as spiritual and caring/healing repositions women as caring subjects which contains women's consumerism within the bounds of traditional femininity.

5.3 Cannibalism as spiritual sustenance

Food is a key part of many rituals, and perhaps one of the most well-known religious rituals is the act of Holy Communion. This act of incorporation of food as Christ's body has obvious cannibalistic signs but is considered to be an act of devotion; by incorporating Christ one commits to being more like him – that is, 'good'. Both of these texts reference eating the body of the dead as a spiritual and loving act of incorporation with references to Catholicism and imagery which evokes Christian iconography. In *301/302*, the act of incorporation of 302 by 301 is represented as a mercy and an act of love. 301 will absorb 302's fear of herself, freeing 302 of her body at last. In *Taste*, there is a similar focus on love. Tereza's consumption of José is supposedly an attempt to achieve a perfect union of body and soul. The texts link spirituality with the feminine, and it is the cannibals' domestic skills that allow them to turn an abject act of murder, mutilation and cannibalism into an act of love, and also, importantly, help them to apparently get away with it.

301/302 creates parallels between the two women in order to make clear their differences. Where 301's cooking skills and manipulation of the feminine role give her some power, 302 is totally unable to consume, to be in public, and yet cannot escape her femininity at all. Unlike 301 who embraces and performs femininity to suit herself, oscillating between monster and victim as a postfeminist gothic heroine, 302's rejection of femininity leaves her stuck with those definitions imposed on her by others. Although consumption is the ideal feminine subjectivity within a postfeminist, late capitalist culture, the ideal body-type is slim, so the refusal to eat and the protest 302 attempts to communicate with her body is nonetheless also feminine. It is a no-win situation for 302 because the protest through her body does not fundamentally challenge the construction of traditional femininity as consumable object. The film emphasises this and builds up 302's

vomiting from gagging, to bird's eye shots of her leaning over her toilet being sick, to explicit shots of her vomit.



Figure 5.7 302 gags and chokes over the food waste. The tight framing creates a sense of claustrophobia. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 5.8 The bird's eye view hides the vomit but nonetheless places 302 in a position of vulnerability. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 5.9 Finally the film shows the vomit explicitly in a moment of food horror. The extremely tight framing emphasises that it is only 302 who is harmed – her protest does not let her escape. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

As Diane Carson (2007) argues, the film legitimises anorexia as a response to child sexual abuse, and the rejection of all consumption as a reaction against her capitalist-consumerist mother. The problem with 302, Carson argues, is not to do with food and fat phobia, rather, she is reacting to the violation of her body by phallic penetration and the view of her body as meat. 302 rejects the femininity of her body, as anorexia thins out any curves and causes amenorrhea (the cessation of menstruation). Likewise, she rejects men – 301 tells the detective that 302 was not interested in men, and we witness 302 ignoring mysterious phone calls from a male voice. Although 302 attempts to reject her femininity she is not able to take up a traditionally masculine subjectivity (for example, interacting with neighbours and workmen when in public, or writing ‘acceptable’ material for a ‘serious’ publication) and so, because patriarchal society is ordered by the binaries male/female, she cannot escape being read as an object and as inferior by those around her. Carson (2007) argues that the hysterical communication 301 and 302 undertake to avoid male domination is a Pyrrhic victory at best. However, although 302 is left with no way other than death to escape her difference/femininity, I argue that her incorporation into 301 is treated with reverence which is suggestive of a rebirth. Indeed, as 301 eats her cannibal meal we see the ghost of 302 sitting across from her, seemingly content, eating calmly as soft music plays. 301 can see her where the detective cannot which links the spiritual world to her femininity. 301’s cooking transforms 302’s body from a perceived waste product (302 calls herself dirty) to a vital ingredient in a healthy meal, allowing 301 to give alternate value to 302’s body and help her escape her childhood trauma.

For 301, the gift of 302's body allows her to receive love through food instead of asking for love and approval by giving all the time. She strips her femininity of the service-oriented atavistic attributes (although killing 302 is framed as a mercy) and turns towards a more consumer-driven, empowered and individualistic version of femininity. As 302 presents herself naked and asks if 301 thinks she looks tasty, 301 runs to her and hugs her tight.



Figure 5.10 The chiaroscuro lighting is suggestive of an erotic moment but also reflects the lighting used in Renaissance Christian paintings. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 5.11 Compare to the religious scene painted here by Caravaggio. *David with the Head of Goliath*. Oil on canvas. c.1610.

The dark chiaroscuro lighting with soft focus on the background hint at a lesbian eroticism but the hug is distinctly non-sexual, even as their faces are close enough to kiss when they part. Chiaroscuro lighting was often used in Renaissance Christian artworks which suggests that this aesthetic is linked with sacred themes. 302 sinks to her knees out of shot which is, again, suggestively pornographic, hinting at oral sex, but also saintly as if kneeling to pray, and we see 301 straining as she strangles her. Flashes of hands around 302's neck are cut with shots of her face as she looks up, the white-blue light in the background reflecting on her face and glasses. There is a suggestion of holiness and martyrdom in this shot, reminding one of Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) in the close-ups of her face with wide eyes.



Figure 5.12 302 is being strangled but looks very much like a martyr. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 5.13 Close up shots of Joan (Renée Jeanna Falconetti) were used in Dreyer's silent film to show her preoccupation with God and express her martyrdom.

Once she is dead we see her feet being dragged across the floor but the shot is angled as if from the perspective of the dead woman. 301 puts the body into the bathtub, a bird's-eye shot looks

down on the body with 301 kneeling, dressed in nun-like black next to her. Indeed, Kee (2001, 454) suggests this is an altar, the cannibalism is Holy Communion and the head in the freezer we glimpse at the start and end is a holy relic. 301 is a priestess whose power of transformation lies in her cooking skills, put to service not for a patriarchal society but for herself and her double in an act of consumer-driven femininity.



Figure 5.14 301 is nun-like kneeling at an altar on which is the martyred 302.

Taste has a more explicitly Catholic context which presents Tereza's cannibalism as a loving act while simultaneously acknowledging the death. After discussing with José the Andes plane crash and realising that José would not have eaten human flesh, and would not have survived, she sees an engraving on one of his books of a tribal cannibal feast. She realises that it only depicts women and children, and wonders why there are only women; 'It took a while for me to unravel its true meaning' (125). Although Tereza never discloses her interpretation, this episode leads on to her talking about how José fell into despair at the end, unable to take action for himself, instead 'yielding completely' (127) to Tereza. He tells her about a tribe called the Gini in which the women eat the corpses of their men in order to give them 'eternal life' (131). What the text seems to imply is that women have a practical and spiritual will that enables them to feast on what is available and feed it to their children, as well as preserve men through incorporation back into the female body – a birth in death. This is not merely sexuality run amok but something, in a way, more fatal because it is sacred. This reflects women's function in some cultures as providing food in a spiritual capacity, as I discussed in Chapter 2, such as Meah (2014) found in relation to Bengali-American women and the formalisation of their cooking and food preparation as a spiritual offering and sacrifice.

Tereza makes this connection between the sacred and death during her first communion. Her father obtained real white Chinese silk and her mother took her to the dressmaker, cobbler and milliner to create a special outfit. However, on the day of her first communion, she discovers blood in her pants. It is not menstruation; she had been playing ‘doctors and nurses’ with a boy called Boris. He put glass over her stomach and then between her legs, telling her it was an x-ray. She moved and got cut. This blood makes her feel dirty and ashamed, and when she finally looks up from the floor during communion she sees the blood on the crucifix and ‘it became clear to [her] that blood was the sign of death’ (161). Death is presented in Christianity as Christ’s sacrifice to enable eternal life; therefore, while Tereza associates blood with shame as well as death, she also associates death with eternal life and sacrifice through eating the Host.

The novel foregrounds real instances of cannibalism reflecting José’s area of study. However, these real cases are of men eating women. Tereza is especially sensitive to the differences between these cases and herself. It is the blood police find on the walls in one of these cases which reminds her of her first communion and then her cold, distanced planning of his death as she tries to work out how long it would take for the blood to coagulate in his body in order to avoid it. She tells us:

I also wondered how long it took the blood to coagulate in a dead body. That was a logical concern, because I wanted at all costs to avoid any unnecessary blood being spilled in the apartment. Not just because the sight of blood made me sick, but also because I did not want to give myself any extra work when cleaning up. (165).

This practical thinking, on one hand, demonstrates a cold detachment at odds with her instance on her absolute love for José, but on the other hand, shows how, despite her passion for José, her feminine planning and domestic skills – including how to deal with blood – allow her to get away with it where male cannibals fail. Her femininity makes her more and less monstrous because she is less messy/abject but colder.

She also compares herself to the famous Japanese cannibal Issei Sagawa who ate his Dutch classmate Renee Hartevelt in Paris in 1981. When cleaning up the flat, she finds the old article among José’s research which told the story of Sagawa’s crime. She gives the details a few times in the novel, repeating that he ate Renee’s lips, the tip of her nose, and her tongue. He claimed that he did it as an expression of love, and this gives Tereza the idea of eating José. When she does kill José (drugging him and smothering him in his sleep) and begins to eat him she becomes voracious. She uses a razor to slice off the fingertips and eats them in a ritualistic manner, reasoning that as these had been especially sensitive and José had told her this secret fact about himself that these were the best parts to incorporate – the parts that had taken in her body. However, she quickly loses control:

It no longer had anything to do with ritual, or with the ceremonial pleasure I had felt initially. This was something I had not foreseen. It was as if I was in the grip of some drunken stupor or madness beyond my control. (185).

She eats the pads at the base of his thumbs, then gets a knife and slices meat from his forearms. She then takes her knife and is preparing to cut off José's lips when she stops. The harmony of José's face stops her and she feels suddenly tired. She reflects that unlike Sagawa, she had to respect his face. She looks at herself in the mirror, not recognising herself:

I stood there in the bathroom looking at that face, which just then had nothing in common with mine. [...] The eyes observing me had been the eyes of a person in the grip of an unknown passion. A person who, for a moment, had lost her mind' (186-187).

This suggests that the face is the site of subjectivity; Tereza's actions create a kind of subjectivity which she does not recognise, and while José is objectified as a corpse nevertheless his face is the seat of his subjectivity. This is compared to Sagawa whose possession of Renee through cannibalism now disgusts Tereza. 'I was disgusted at myself for even thinking I could have done the same thing' (187). Tereza eventually leaves the head decomposing at the airport, taking a final kiss. Although this is a place which may be discovered¹⁰, and her kiss may well give her away, she is nonetheless undiscovered by the end of the novel. The significance of not eating the head returns in the next chapter as other female cannibals similarly leave it intact. Like 302's head becoming a holy relic, as Kee (2001) argued, this is suggestive of 'Isabella and the Pot of Basil' in the *Decameron* (Boccaccio, 1353c.), a story in which a young woman keeps the head of her murdered lover in a plant pot and waters it with her tears. The head as a site of subjectivity has romantic connotations. The novel represents Tereza's cannibalism as reverent and loving in comparison to Sagawa's disfiguring cannibalism, although ultimately both Sagawa and Tereza murder someone, eat parts of them, dismember the corpse and dispose of it in the city using bags. The main difference being, of course, that Tereza (apparently) gets away with it.

The madness which Tereza experiences does not totally overcome her:

Fortunately, I had the fortitude to stop, otherwise I would have wound up like Sagawa and the poet. The new tenants would have discovered me sleeping in a blood-soaked bed with the disfigured remains of the corpse, which could no longer be called human. They probably would have locked me away in a lunatic asylum. (189).

¹⁰ This is a pre-9/11 bustling airport and the sheer number of travellers leaves the possibility of her discovery unresolved.

Instead of losing herself in a frenzy, Tereza turns to food. Waking up next to the corpse she feels better after putting on coffee and begins to eat bread and jam. Her appetite increases, and she experiences attacks of hunger. 'I immediately associated them with fatigue, with nerves, with the change in the weather and PMS. But I knew myself well enough to know that this insatiable hunger was something new' (188). She imagines eating and eating until people first ask if she is pregnant, and then until she was too fat to move. She laughs at the grotesque image of herself. Her feminine experience allows her to cope with the hunger while acknowledging that it is different from these other causes. Food gives her comfort and prepares her for the practical task of dismembering the remains.

The love that Tereza and 301 display is a desiring, demanding love, insisting that as women they have the skills, strength and entitlement to prioritise the fulfilment of their love in an act of sacred cannibalism. While 302 gives 301 explicit permission, she does so out of desperation as much as love. Tereza suggests José's compliance but this is dubious at best. Nonetheless, their cannibalism is presented as a loving act in contrast to the violence of their sexual desire. This suggests that fulfilment of consumer desires is empowering and helps to construct the self, and that it is exploitative and abject and comes at the cost of family construction.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the female cannibal as a desiring subject. The frustration of her desire leads to violence and the reiteration of femininity as active. This is both empowering and abject. However, when this desire is fulfilled it has a spiritual element which repositions the female consumer as feminine and a coherent subject. The self-centred nature of the cannibalism does make this ambivalent, however, illustrating the exploitative nature of consumption. The texts use the connections and repetitions of past and present, as well as claustrophobia and the anonymity of the city to create a globalgothic atmosphere. This critiques globalisation and the economic drivers of consumerism, which often put the individual before motherhood and family. This is particularly true for the men in these texts who forsake family in order to pursue affairs and are punished. *301/302* foregrounds the importance of the family by blaming the mothers for not being vigilant and putting consumption before family. *Taste of a Man*, on the other hand, blames the consumption of the cannibal for breaking up the family, critiquing consumption as detrimental to family units. The female cannibals ultimately achieve coherent subjectivity at the cost of family relationships and friendships which reveals a critique of femininity which is reiterated too far outside traditional boundaries.

This relates to the next chapter in which the neoliberal cannibal also exposes the fruitlessness of consumerism as the reproductive ideal is undermined by the concept of self-care

and spirituality. However, the texts in Chapter Six offer a more developed critique of cannibalism in contrast with the relatively non-violent cannibalism in *301/302* and *Taste of a Man*.

Chapter Six: Neoliberal Cannibals and Destructive Self-care

In this chapter I explore *Dumplings* (dir. by Fruit Chan, 2004) and *Season to Taste or How to Eat Your Husband*, written by Natalie Young (2014). These texts use the female cannibal to explore fears and desires related to neoliberal globalisation, late capitalist consumerism, and the resulting effects on female lifecycles and subjectivity. Both texts feature middle-aged women who have never had children and follow their pursuits of self-care which are framed as both personally empowering and oppressive, as well as exploitative of others. The lack of generative (re)production in these texts becomes a disturbing theme that illustrates the fruitlessness of consumer-based subjectivities. The texts foreground narratives common in postfeminist media culture that have been mobilised to encourage the development of neoliberal subjects as liberated, empowered, and self-reliant. These narratives include the idea of self-care which plays into the neoliberal moral imperative for individuals to be responsible for their own emotional and physical wellbeing (Negra, 2009). These narratives have been especially directed at women and have a particular relationship to postfeminist media culture. Neoliberalism and postfeminist media culture often seem positive because they offer an illusion of control, that we can have everything we want, and insist that happiness is a human right which is achievable through hard work and finding the right balance (Black, 2006; Rottenberg, 2018). Where these ideologies fail is that they fail to account for race, class, gender and other markers of social inequality, instead placing the blame for failure upon individuals.

The texts in this chapter celebrate the female cannibals as successful survivors of male entitlement and psychological distress through their realisation of neoliberal consumption, but that consumption is rendered horrific and a source of stress as well as empowerment. Thus, the texts ironically invoke postfeminist-neoliberal narratives in order to critique them. They trivialise cannibalism using black humour and irony, and frame the female cannibal as an ideal neoliberal and postfeminist subject. The cannibalism gothicises the foodways that underpin the neoliberal system and illustrate how that system exploits and isolates people, including how this system has disturbed traditional female lifecycles and reproduction. However, the texts also celebrate the successes of the female cannibals, and leave them not only unpunished but apparently flourishing at the conclusions. This suggests an ambivalence about the postfeminist, neoliberal subject because this resilience is rooted in consumption. The positivity and resilience is beneficial to the subject thus illustrating why the neoliberal, postfeminist ideology has been embraced.

The two texts ambiguously critique the narratives of postfeminist consumerism using the cannibalism as a way to illustrate how consumerism is isolating and exploitative, even if it is perversely empowering. They explore how, on one hand, consuming can be a source of nourishment and self-care. The cannibalism is framed as amoral, ecological, and empowering by foregrounding humour, and the women's negative experiences of objectification and disempowerment. The female cannibals present a mediated self to the world that helps them get

away with it. Ironically, on the other hand, this reveals the disconnectedness of consumer culture, and shows how the individualism of self-care is non-generative, non-(re)productive, and also destructive. The self-care narrative relies on the commodification of the postfeminist recuperation of femininity which is also potentially part of a patriarchal backlash. Self-care becomes a practice which helps to construct a feminine identity and contributes to the pressure to succeed at femininity even while it is supposed to be a tool to relieve that pressure. The cannibalism becomes the method by which the female cannibals undertake self-care. Although it is normalised within the texts, the cannibalism is nonetheless horrific at times and presents a gothic version of foodways as human flesh is glibly treated as foodstuffs which is uncanny. This highlights how consumerism is predicated upon the ignorance of materials and exploitation of others, particularly in a globalised setting. The gothic foodways of cannibalism also show how consumerism is yet another site where 'taste' must be exercised and is thus both desirable and a source of anxiety. The texts use temporal disturbances to connect this modern exploitation to the past. This suggests that while exploitation is not a new idea, the lack of regeneration and cannibalism adds new dimensions which critique the construction of postfeminist, neoliberal subjectivities that require women to be both profiteer and consumer – sometimes at the cost of traditional lifecycles and motherhood – and the unsustainability of neoliberal consumerism more generally.

In *Dumplings*, Mrs Li, a former television star who lives in Hong Kong with her wealthy businessman husband, approaches a former Chinese mainlander, Auntie Mei, for her famous dumplings which are said to promote youthfulness. Mei crosses the Hong Kong/China border to obtain the foetuses aborted under the Chinese one-child policy to use as the main ingredient in an ancient Chinese medicinal recipe. Mrs Li agrees to eat the dumplings despite finding out about their ingredients and begins to gain self-confidence. However, upon discovering her husband impregnated a younger woman, Mrs Li demands more potent dumplings. Meanwhile, a mother has brought her fifteen year-old daughter to Auntie Mei to beg for an illegal abortion as the girl's father has made her pregnant. While Mei initially refuses, both the mother and Mrs Li insist and Mei aborts the five-month-old foetus. As Mrs Li eats the dumplings and then has sex with her husband, the young girl bleeds to death in the street as a result of the abortion. At first, Mrs Li is pleased to imagine that the dumplings have worked but when her acquaintances bully her over dinner, she imagines she smells and phones Mei in a temper. Mr Li overhears and goes to confront Mei but ends up eating her dumplings and having sex with her. We discover that Mei is supposedly sixty years old but looks under thirty. The schoolgirl's mother attempts to kill her husband and Mei has to leave her home to avoid being charged for the illegal abortion. We see her surviving as a street vendor vagrant. Mrs Li is similarly on her own and takes the opportunity to approach her husband's mistress. She offers the woman double what her husband is paying in order to abort the foetus and keep it 'for a trophy'. The woman accepts and Mrs Li takes up Auntie

Mei's traditions for herself, choosing perpetual youth for herself over the generative possibility of children.

Unlike many of the texts analysed in this thesis, the narrative structure of the film is reasonably straightforward. The links between past and present, the local and global, are achieved through the preoccupation with aging and the border in the film, and with the artefacts in Mei's apartment. Her collection of ornaments ranging from Hello Kitty, to Dao goddesses, to Catholic saints points to the malleability of the subject in a globalised culture who can draw on different places and traditions to construct a saleable brand. Whether Mei is in her sixties or has constructed a fake suggestion of this to validate her dumplings is unclear. However, the idea of extended or eternal life through consumption, what Blake and Monnet (2017: 7) call the 'selfish individualism and hedonistic consumerism of neoliberal subjectivity', connects the past and future as the future/reproduction is sacrificed to maintain the present by exploiting the past as an ideal to be consumed. Blake and Monnet (2017: 7) argue that this is 'ultimately destructive of all life, collapsing the future into a state of exploited exhaustion.'

Lizzie Prain is the main character in *Season to Taste*. She is a fifty-three year old woman living in the commuter belt to the south of London. The novel documents her 'project' to eat her husband's body and move away to Scotland after she wakes up one Monday morning and bashes his head in with the garden spade on a whim. The novel offers memories and flashbacks of their unsatisfying marriage, Jacob's potential infidelity and passive-aggressive behaviour as well as his depression, as justification for Lizzie's attempts to nourish herself. The superficiality of their marriage meant that it was never clear which of them was infertile and Lizzie's resentment over this lost potential is presented as another justification for her consumption.

While Lizzie carries out her project and remembers the past, she becomes more involved in her community, going for a job interview, baking a cake for a birthday/engagement celebration, and allowing her young neighbour, Tom Vickory, to move into her home while she goes to Scotland to find a place to stay. These interactions serve to show both Lizzie's growing confidence and the relative disconnectedness of the community, which does not suspect what is going on. The narrative is temporally disordered with events narrated in non-linear order, and time lapses within the narrative as well as the flashbacks. The novel also uses numbered, 'handwritten' notes in a different typeface which directly illustrate Lizzie's perspective and function as how-to guide, self-pep-talk, and confessional. As Lizzie finishes her project and returns from a disastrous trip to Scotland, she confesses to Tom what she has done and, unburdened, seems to move on with her life. The ending is ambiguous as she breakfasts in a hotel near her home, ready to go somewhere but it is not clear where.

The texts employ several narrative tropes to celebrate and critique the female cannibalism. Like many of the texts in this thesis they use humour, horror – especially food horror and the abject – as well as employing the globalgothic which creates a disturbed sense of time

and place. Like many other texts in this thesis, the texts employ irony and parody to subvert the straightforward identification of cannibalism as inherently unethical. *Season to Taste* is a dark comedy which Victoria Kennedy (2017) describes in terms of chick noir. She argues that this genre combines both ‘chick lit’ and crime noir genres and offers both humour and horror as response to pressures women face to be “wonder women”. Kennedy (2017: 32) claims that ‘chick noir may be read as feminist wish fulfillment [sic] – representations of women who are able to hit back at the men and the systems that keep them economically dependent and socially degraded.’ The conversational tone of the novel and Lizzie’s candid notes are often witty and humorous, and contrast with the graphic descriptions of dismemberment and cooking. *Dumplings* also employs light-hearted, humorous elements, particularly as Mei is characterised as a trickster figure and is somewhat eccentric with her colourful clothes, traditional songs and glib, forthright conversation. These lighter elements also contrast with the graphic food and body horror which critique consumption. Where *Dumplings* ends on a sinister tone as Mrs Li perpetuates her cannibalism, *Season to Taste* is more ambiguous as Lizzie’s future remains unknown.

In the next section I establish how neoliberalism and globalisation are connected to temporal compression and explain how this is an aspect of the globalgothic which is foregrounded in these texts. I explore how neoliberal consumption also contributes to postfeminist media culture and connects with postfeminist constructions of subjectivity. I argue that neoliberalism, globalgothic and postfeminist media culture share concerns with ageing and time, and that these are used in the texts to reveal a commentary on the older woman and the future of reproduction. In the following section I analyse the texts in detail and discuss the ways that narratives of successful femininity are mobilised to position the cannibalism as an ironically positive method of self-care, and neoliberal culture as amoral, ecological and empowering. I then go on, in the third section, to explore how the texts expose the gothic underbelly of consumption by showing the isolation, disconnection, and destructiveness of cannibalism. I discuss the exploitative nature of the cannibalism in the texts and the ways this is critiqued. Finally, I bring these threads together to draw a conclusion about the ambivalence of this critique of neoliberalism and postfeminist subjectivity.

6.1 Neoliberalism, Postfeminism and Ageing.

Dumplings and *Season to Taste* reflect a neoliberal culture in which individuals must be responsible for their health and wellbeing. This is predicated upon consuming the best resources available and means that social and cultural ideals are very much linked to economics. Both postfeminist media culture and neoliberalism present consumerism as a method of constructing the self, often at the cost of exploitation of people and environments and complicity with oppressive gender ideals. Nevertheless, these ideologies are presented in positive terms as empowering, with the reclamation of traditional skills and objects an exercise in agency. This

reframing of tradition exploits an ideal of the past which is mirrored in the denial of ageing as well as a denial of temporal and spatial specificity.

The globalisation of neoliberalism was hastened by advances in IT which, according to Harvey (2007: 4), has reduced the significance of time and space, its compression echoing Lyotard's idea that 'temporary contracts' have replaced the permanent not only in professional terms but in emotional, sexual, cultural, personal, and political terms as well.

This idea of compression in time and space echoes the anxieties of the globalgothic. Botting and Edwards (2013: 13) describe how globalisation which is facilitated through technology has blurred the boundaries between the national and international with the nation positioned as subordinate to the global fluctuations of capital. They argue that the global and the local have collapsed into each other rendering these separate poles a 'nostalgic fantasy' (Botting and Edwards, 2013: 18). As the distances between spaces can now be meaningless thanks to mobile technology and modern transportation, time collapses as well. The sense of nostalgia for the past, for simpler times and concerns, is, Jameson (1997: 25) argues, a nostalgia for a past that did not exist. Indeed, neoliberal markets commodify tradition in order to sell a version of the past that is profitable because it is fantasy.

Nostalgia brings back trends from the past, and it can include a celebration of primitivism – perhaps including pre-feminist fantasies of/nostalgia for stable gender roles (Pagnoni Berns and Rodriguez Fontao, 2016: 166-16; Hollows 2006). Colette Balmain (2013a: 121) argues that many Asian gothic texts return to folklore to resist globalisation, re-inscribing the local, but this can be self-Orientalising and reinforce difference in a negative way. We can see this in *Dumplings* as Auntie Mei's mainland Chinese past is commodified as a sales tactic, justifying cannibalism as a traditional Chinese medicine. This has the effect of inscribing China as primitive and different but then blurs the boundaries of this as the Hong Kong islanders co-opt this "tradition" as a modern consumer product. This renders the present a gothic recurrence or double of the past, and Hong Kong a double of China despite their differences. In *Dumplings*, Mei's recipe does help her retain her youthfulness, again blurring the boundaries between the past and the present and rendering time – especially in terms of ageing – disturbingly meaningless.

Imelda Whelehan and Joel Gwynne (2014: 178) argue that postfeminist media is obsessed with youth and the "girling" of popular culture'. Thus the idea of body projects, promotion of girls, and the compression of time all contribute to the relative invisibility of, and yet fear of, the older woman. While the fear of older women in popular culture is nothing new, the onus on women to appear ageless is a product of consumer culture.

Technology has increased average life expectancy, especially for women, whose life expectancy has almost doubled, according to Whelehan and Gwynne (2014: 5). As a consequence, women's lifecycles have changed as the menopause is seen more as a transitional stage than an end point with the end of reproductive life no longer in line with the end of

productive life. Whelehan and Gwynne (2014: 3) further argue that neoliberal culture has framed ageing as a choice with extra pressure for women whose worth is measured by having a 'sexy body' as Gill (2007: 255) claims. Whelehan and Gwynne (2014: 5) suggest that 'those who don't retain their youthful exterior [are seen to] have failed.' Furthermore, often due to economic pressures of neoliberalism, women are delaying childbirth and having children much older with the help of fertility technologies. Catherine Rottenberg (2018) has discussed how middle class women are being encouraged to pursue their careers first with some benefit packages in USA including the freezing of eggs for later fertility treatments. Heywood and Drake (2004: 13-15) show how high levels of debt, credit borrowing, and downward mobility among younger generations of Americans has contributed to, among other things, the delay of marriage and childbirth and fewer children overall. Susie Orbach (2009: 5) claims that:

Late capitalism has catapulted us out of centuries of old bodily practices which were centred on survival, procreation, the provision of shelter and the satisfaction of hunger. Now birthing, illness and ageing, while part of the ordinary cycle of life, are also events that can be interrupted or altered by personal endeavour in which one harnesses the medical advances and restructurings on offer.

Lizzie Prain in *Season to Taste* is in her 50s and has delayed childbirth too long, her whole life seemingly stagnant and timeless with no sense of progression. The text explores the results of this temporal disruption through Lizzie's cannibalism. This frames her as an older woman whose failure to remain young and reproduce is expressed through her attempts to use traditional cooking skills to consume her husband and reassert her femininity. However, in *Dumplings*, Mrs Li is still in her 30s and fighting against ageing, trying to disrupt time and natural lifecycles with her cannibalistic consumption. This cannibalism is also framed as traditional but is nevertheless commercial, which emphasises the globalised setting of the film and connects neoliberal consumption with the construction of gender. This is part of a narrative of the-body-as-project. Orbach claims that globalised media has affected our bodies on a physical level, homogenising people and cultures. Orbach (2009: 6) argues that 'our bodies are and have become a form of work. The body is turning from the means of production to the production itself.' While this applies to men and boys, the neoliberal ideology that frames the body as a project is dialogical with postfeminist recuperations of women's bodies.

It is not only the physical body that is a site of production. Expanding markets exploit ideas that connect mind and body whether based upon psychology, holistic therapies or religions. In several texts throughout this thesis, cannibalism has taken the place of religion, positioning the female cannibal sympathetically as enhancing the spiritual welfare of the family, self and community. Tincknell (2011) describes how spirituality is often connected with women and argues that with the disintegration of religion, spirituality in the form of practices including yoga,

scented candles, mindfulness and meditation, and 'self-care' have become integral to the construction of the 'healthy' subject. 'Physical and spiritual renewal,' writes Tincknell (2011: 85) 'are both necessary to femininity and wholly dependent on appropriate forms of consumption.' Thus, the morality of eating meat, for example, is often framed in terms of health of both the individual and, increasingly, the health of the planet and its animal inhabitants. The idea of achieving a moral, spiritual balance, then, is connected with pursuing the care both physically and emotionally of the self, the achievement of which constructs the feminine subject. This theme has emerged as ambiguously connected with female cannibalism in this thesis.

Although Black (2006: 152) points out that pursuing self-care activities including beauty therapies can allow women to take time for themselves, it can also create oppressive pressures. As Gill (2007: 261) argues, there is pressure for this self-monitoring (or 'self-care') to be 'fun' and 'pampering'. Gill claims this goes further than patriarchal necessity as it demands a psychological transformation. The tensions between self-care as genuine caring for the self which promotes empowerment, emotional resilience and wellbeing, and the pressure to practice those behaviours and consumption choices that will create an acceptable body and a balanced lifestyle are central to neoliberalism and postfeminism. These texts explore this tension by using the cannibalistic consumption to show the power and disgust that is entailed in this pursuit of self-care.

This section has briefly explored how neoliberal consumerism is symbiotically related to postfeminist constructions of the feminine subject. I have discussed how fears of female ageing reflect fears related to the compression of time and space in globalisation and the globalgothic, as well as concerns about female lifecycles and reproduction. These fears are 'soothed' (Negra, 2009: 141) by participation in self-care behaviours, which are illustrated in these texts, as I now discuss, through cannibalistic consumption.

6.2 Nourishing the Self

These texts present cannibalism as a method of self-care. This self-care is undertaken to empower Mrs Li and Lizzie through consumption. In *Dumplings*, the cannibalism is supposed to make Mrs Li look younger and feel more attractive in order to renew her husband's attentions. The consumption of the dumplings does help Mrs Li to feel more attractive, she does get her husband's attention albeit only for a short while, and she does end the film more in control and powerful although this is framed as both good for her but sinister in general. Lizzie eats her husband in order to nourish herself. The memories of their life together show that they enabled each other to stagnate and they show how Jacob often told Lizzie negative things about herself, shaping her perception of herself around a lack of ability. Thus, Lizzie's consumption is a very literal interpretation of getting rid of the 'toxic' or negative people from one's life. By framing her consumption as a project, Lizzie creates an achievable goal that will help build her self-

esteem, confidence, and get rid of her husband's body. The aim of her consumption is not a physical renewal but an emotional and psychological one. She uses the cooking skills she does have and values them by writing notes on how she does it as if she was going to instruct others which allows her to credit herself for her skills and determination. Through completing her project, she grows and does not fall into the same pattern of stagnation with Tom Vickory. Although the ending of the novel is very open, with the potential for Lizzie to be caught, it seems ultimately to celebrate her growth.

The texts use this positive change as part of the justification for the cannibalism. They use black humour and show how the women are overcoming male entitlement. The focus on the women as empowered, gaining confidence, and showing resilience and determination encourages the audience/reader to sympathise and identify with the female cannibals. This sets up one side of the exploration of neoliberal subjectivities as each woman successfully negotiates a happier, more powerful subjectivity albeit at the cost of others.

For example, in *Dumplings*, Auntie Mei visits her procurer in a hospital in China. The crowded hallways are lined with people on drips which gives the impression of overcrowding that the one child policy was supposed to address.



Figure 6.1 Crowded corridors simultaneously show the need for the one-child policy and its failure. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

The two women joke about Mei's ex-boyfriend who dumped her because he believed her child would be cursed as Mei had performed so many abortions. The women laugh at his superstitious view and Mei exclaims that she was only 'serving the people'. The conversation frames abortion as both useful – it serves the majority – and meaningless as there would be no spiritual repercussions. With this in mind, Mei's use of the medical waste of this procedure seems ecological and entrepreneurial; she is simply putting medical waste to use: any harm (which goes unmentioned) has been done by the state not by Mei. This is an apolitical position as it assumes that the abortions are performed with 'all things being equal' – namely, that the abortions happen

to male and female fetuses, and that women undertake the procedures willingly for the national benefit (and therefore, their own benefit). As I discuss more fully in the next section, this is not necessarily the case. However, initially, Mei's enterprise is not framed as exploitative as there is no reference to the women involved at all, and it is positioned in opposition to superstitious, patriarchal ideas that abortion is murder.

When Mei is explaining how her dumplings work to Mrs Li, Mei compares it to other rare ingredients including bird's nests, royal jelly and so on. Like any ingredient it has a connection to the wider world and the dubious ethics of attaining it are overcome by money but her blasé attitude communicates her belief that it is no worse than any other ingredient. Indeed, she even claims that her recipe actually works, implying that it is common knowledge that anti-ageing creams and other beauty therapies do not.

At first the film seems to beg the question that if fetuses are not people then how can consuming them be cannibalism? However, it goes further than this as Mei later argues to Mr Li that cannibalism should not even be considered immoral in China as there is a tradition of cannibalism as medicine. Pinar and Jimenez Murguía (2017: 71) argue that *Dumplings* frames the cannibalism as so 'normalize[d]' that it perversely manipulates the audience to accept it. This is accomplished by the blasé attitude and the dark humour Mei uses when talking about and handling the fetuses. She often grins or laughs as she examines them and waves one in Mrs Li's face to shock her. She laughs at Mrs Li's squeamishness and this invites the audience to laugh with her as Mrs Li's reaction is positioned as one of culinary ignorance rather than ethical disgust. Her willingness to eat the fetuses but not look at them reflects the ignorance of source materials consumers often cultivate in order to avoid considering or confronting the ethics of meat-eating more generally, rather than pure disgust at the cannibalism. This becomes clear as her fascination with the fetuses grows and she eats in montage scenes with increasing contentment. Mrs Li's growing involvement in her consumption echoes the neoliberal ideas that encourage us to be selective and informed consumers in order to make the best choices and thus position Mrs Li as (however ironically) acquiring 'good' taste.

The cannibalism is sanitised somewhat as the orange jelly-like fetuses are minced with ginger, other meats, cabbage and egg into an indistinguishable filling for dumplings that look perfectly innocuous apart from small flashes of pink-orange in the filling that might as well be minced shellfish. The steaming presentation of the dumplings in broth, or on bright green cabbage leaves in a steamer also communicate ideas of healing, comfort and low fat foods.



Figure 6.2 The bright green cabbage, simple presentation and steamed cooking method suggest healthy, fat-free food. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

Mei's dumplings are homemade, wholesome, traditional food. The shots of Mei's kitchen, covered in flour and fresh vegetables frames her cooking as part of the narratives of healthy eating. Her own slim physique and vitality also communicate the effectiveness of her treatments with her bright clothing reflecting her youthfulness. It should be noted that while Mei's cooking is presented as homely rather than professional – compare her kitchen to 301's chrome-covered kitchen in *301/302*, for example – it is nevertheless a commercial endeavour.



Figure 6.3 Mei's youthful appearance contrasts with her old-fashioned, cluttered kitchen. Despite its commercial use, it is a home-style kitchen. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 6.4 The clean lines, chrome fittings and lack of clutter frame 301's kitchen as modern and commercialised in comparison.

As I discuss in the next section, the film's lack of family cooking and mealtimes parallels the lack of generative femininity in the film. However, the health-focused positioning of the cannibalism again creates a favourable impression that Mei and Mrs Li are making 'good' consumer choices and using the available resources to construct healthy – and thus beautiful – bodies and lifestyles.

Mrs Li's confidence is eroded by her husband's lack of affection and the belief that this is to do with her ageing rather than anything else. Her view seems to be confirmed as Mr Li has an affair with a young, unnamed maid working at the hotel they are temporarily living in. Mrs Li's desire to be young (and beautiful) is encouraged through media representations. As a young woman she acted in a soap opera and repeats of this show are frequently featured to confront Mrs Li with her apparently lost youth. Although, as Byron (2013b: 104) points out, Mrs Li does not look particularly older than Mei, these shows and Mei's comments such as "hasn't he noticed you changing?" imply that Mrs Li is no longer considered youthful. As Mrs Li longs for a more potent ingredient – a more developed foetus – Mei shows her a magazine with an 80 year old who ate the same thing and 'feels like she's 18 again'. She explains in detail how the older foetus has 'a layer of creamy fat' covering it and is 'cute as a kitten'. This is both disgusting as it evokes food horror through the abject image of creamy fat, and the taboo idea of eating a pet. It is also, however, darkly humorous as her glee and passion are at odds with the disgust and the dissonance between description and attitude evokes a sense of the ridiculous. Indeed, the image of Mei and Mrs Li huddling over a woman's magazine evokes an image of youth and innocence which is at odds with the mercenary and horrific context of their discussion. This scene reflects ironically on the narratives that suggest women must not be seen to age as Mei's enthusiasm and the food horror mock the things women are encouraged to consider appropriate when dealing with the ageing body. Mei suggests that 'for a woman to rejuvenate she must start from the inside'. Here

she refers to eating her dumplings but it could also suggest a psychological or internal transformation achieved through appropriate consumption practises. As Gill suggests, this transformation is not a patriarchal necessity but carried out to maintain a consistent feminine subjectivity. This positions Mrs Li's transformation as not only for her husband but for herself. Although Mrs Li continues to desire her husband, her desire for him to remain faithful to her is not because he breaks her heart – she tells Mei she does not mind him chasing other women so long as he is discreet – but because she is jealous that the competition looks younger and has become pregnant. This is shown when she tells the young maid that she will not “let it happen again” as he is hers – she claims ownership of him which may or may not be bravado and an illusion that she can control his behaviour. Her increased confidence, however, shows how by transforming for herself, Mrs Li has become empowered.

Mrs Li does, in fact, end the film in a more powerful position. She uses her chequebook to buy the maid's abortion, outbidding her husband who wants the baby. She asserts her authority with the doctor, dictating how the foetus is to be delivered despite the doctor's advice that it will be a painful and lengthy process. She also directs him to leave the blinds open so she can watch. The camera frames her in a head shot with the abortion reflected on the mirror behind her so the audience can watch her watching.



Figure 6.514 Mrs Li watches as a mirror reflects the maid. The image shows Mrs Li's authority through her gaze. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

This *mise-en-scène* suggests that Mrs Li is not the subject of the gaze: rather, as Walton (2004: 3) suggests of the contemporary cannibal, she is the ‘subject *with* a gaze’ and her gaze is one of power. Her empowerment is achieved through her cannibalism. It is unclear whether she gets her husband's love or fidelity but this seems almost secondary to her monstrous pursuit of agelessness and beauty which I discuss further in the next section.

In *Season to Taste or How to Eat Your Husband*, Lizzie's consumption is presented in a humorous tone. The cannibalism in the novel mocks the self-care narratives by replacing the normative advice with excessive and ridiculous alternatives. The title of the novel evokes the idea of other postfeminist how-to guides, especially Nigella Lawson's *How to be a Domestic Goddess* (1998) or, more specifically, her first cookbook, *How to Eat* (1998). The format of the novel also evokes food writing as both cookbooks and food blogging tend to separate narrative contextual descriptions, ingredient lists, and method instructions using different typefaces and fonts. Lizzie's 'notes' are presented much like ingredients lists and are numbered and set in a different typeface. Blogging, particularly when using continuous vertical scrolling, also often includes page break symbols which are also used frequently in the novel in the form a fork and knife. This situates the novel against a specific media context and the normative postfeminist narratives of femininity that it offers.

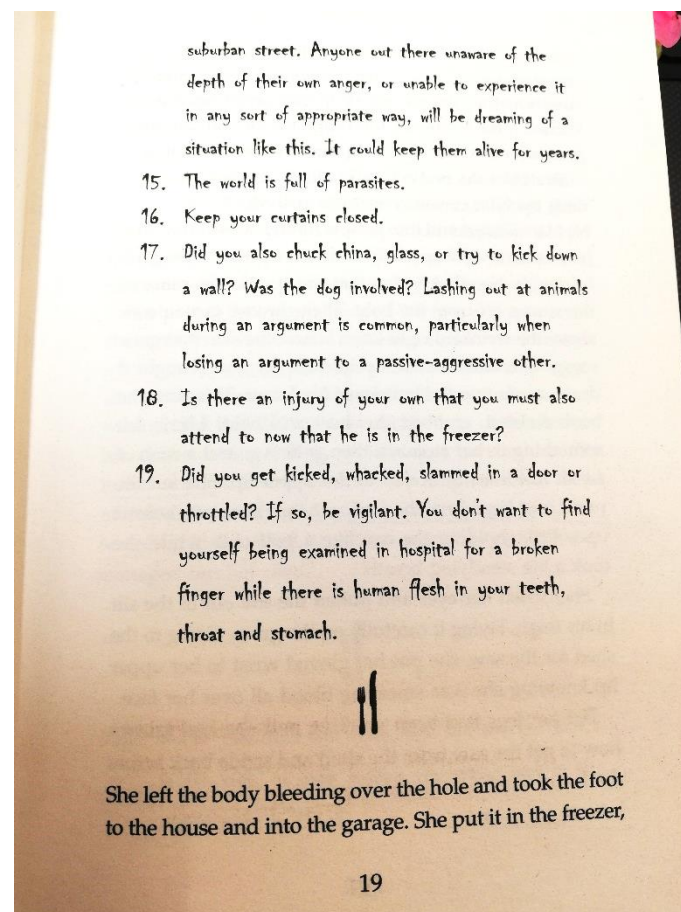


Figure 6.6 The 'handwritten', numbered notes are reminiscent of a recipe with the fork and knife page break icons recalling vertical scrolling blogs.

As DeJmanee (2015) and Hollows (2007) point out, many (middle class) women have returned home and become domestic entrepreneurs, marketing their domestic skills and identity through blogs and craft fairs to create an income. Elizabeth Nathanson (2015: 251) describes how after the 2008 recession especially, many women turned to baking, particularly cupcake baking

capitalising on the urban chic femininity of *Sex and the City* in which the glamorous protagonists eat cupcakes and consume other luxury items, to generate an income while minimising childcare costs by working flexible hours from home. This femininity is individualistic, entrepreneurial, it promotes self-care by removing the self from the disappointing labour market and working flexible hours that better suit the raising of family. This both empowers women to be business owners and escape the rat race, but also re-inscribes women as primary carers while manipulating them into embodying whatever is marketable. As I quoted from Blake and Monnet (2017: 4) previously, this forces people into an endlessly fluid identity and makes them responsible for any failures they encounter as they attempt to fulfil market needs.

In *Season*, Lizzie also attempts to begin a cake-making company after the recession. Lizzie recalls how Jacob had been made redundant when the owner of the antiques shop he worked in closed down and moved to France. This hints at the economic precariousness of being employed by small business owners but also suggests the success and freedom this might bring to the owner.

“Cakes,” he said, watching her bend over the oven to take one out about a month after the shop closed down. [...]

He’d been making suggestions about what he could do, since he didn’t like going to the job centre to collect his benefits. (45-46).

The narrative is written in third person but focalised through Lizzie so this line with the repetition of ‘he’ and ‘his’ suggests that Jacob felt entitled to ownership of her labour. He was not suggesting what *she* could do but what ‘he’ could do. Nevertheless, this endorsement of her baking skills gave Lizzie ‘hope’ (46) and a sense of ownership – ‘you needed something, one thing of your own to do, however small; Lizzie had known that she could cook, and bake, and that she could do these things with love.’ (46). Despite Lizzie’s sense of ownership, the business fails when Jacob botches the deliveries – ‘He got lost, a second time. [...] He didn’t know why’ (49). The customers had to buy a cake from the supermarket after Jacob failed to deliver their cake which illustrates that while people will pay for an illusion of traditional homemade produce, food has been commodified, traditional feminine foodways have been corrupted, and mass-produced, cheaper alternatives make this type of self-employment precarious. It also mocks the narratives that homemade cakes are made ‘with love’ as, in the end, it is the cake that is needed and easily replaced by a commercial replica. Like *Dumplings*, traditional foodways are commercialised but in contrast with Mei’s commodification of cannibalism, *Season to Taste* showcases traditional feminine skills using cannibalism in order to mock postfeminist narratives of self-care. Lizzie’s neoliberal failures are soothed by a postfeminist return to non-profitable production which is also, paradoxically, consumption.

Later, in her notes, Lizzie writes

59. Keep up the notes. Remember when he said that your cakes were probably fundamentally poor owing to a lack of imagination in their creator? To which you'd replied, of course, that it doesn't take imagination to follow a recipe.

[...]

61. Handy to have a good, sharp fruit knife for skinning fiddly bits like fingers and toes. A bread knife will get you through anything but with a bit of mess. Goes without saying of course that a carving knife needs to be in pristine condition. Once sharpened, try storing your knives in a cloth pouch in a separate part of the cutlery drawer. Others have used cork. The principle is the same. (57)

Not only does this suggest that Jacob refused to take any responsibility for his part in their failing business, instead abusively attacking Lizzie's capabilities and sense of self, it also shows Lizzie's (real or imagined) witty response which illustrates a sense of resilience in the face of this abuse which is admirable. The juxtaposition of the advice about knives with Jacob's verbal denigration highlights her present task of eating Jacob's body and humorously draws attention to the idea of blogging or sharing domestic tips that help to market a food business. Where her cakes failed to take off, her cannibalism generates a wealth of domestic advice – and thus, self-care advice – that enables her to tell herself '58. Give yourself some credit for achievement' (57).

Lizzie's notes describe her attempt at self-care by following through on the project to eat Jacob's body but the very excess of the cannibalistic project makes these notes ironic as they mock the usual postfeminist self-care narratives. For example, Lizzie reminds herself she can still look feminine and stylish – '5. You can still wear earrings. Some simple turquoise studs might be nice. Or gold? The point is, no one is expecting you to do this with a cloth on your head' (8). The conversational, no-nonsense tone coupled with the idea that anyone is expecting her to cannibalise her husband, never mind do it in mourning attire, is ludicrous. This invokes and mocks the idea that looking good will make you feel good, even when you are expected to feel bad (or be in mourning). Throughout the narrative, Lizzie refers to wearing red lipstick as a strategy her mother taught her to 'pretend until it's better' (123). Lizzie uses this statement of femininity to show others that she is capable:

She remembered the red lipstick she was wearing. It was an effort towards strengthening her resolve, towards self-love: it was a way of saying to the world, "I know what I am doing" (147).

While this is an old-fashioned strategy her mother used in the 1970s, it is now a postfeminist strategy which allows Lizzie to present herself as completely feminine and in control of her actions by controlling her outward appearance. Lizzie thus mediates herself for others in order to construct an identity that will be acceptable.

Another example of the novel mocking a postfeminist self-care narrative is when Lizzie debates in writing whether to look at her husband's roasted hand while she's eating it, or not. The justifications she gives for looking or not looking reflect the individualistic reasoning behind 'choice' for women in neoliberalism and postfeminism. If women can choose to do anything then it is framed as 'feminist' whether or not it contributes to structural improvement for women as a whole simply because it is seen as the action of a woman who seems 'free' to choose. She writes, '31. Listen, though, looking away is a reflex. It's normal, and human, and absolutely fine. You don't have to adopt the warrior pose while the pieces are in the oven, or sit like Shiva. Remember, a Buddhist wouldn't do this. Or anything like this. What you are doing is more challenging, more stressful than anything anyone has ever done before' (24-25). By reassuring herself that she is human and normal she renders her inability to face what she is doing as a valid choice. Mentioning yoga – 'the warrior pose [...] sit like Shiva' – and Buddhism reflects the appropriation of other cultures by white, middle-class women looking for spiritual and physical wellbeing. Yoga, in particular, has become so extremely popular in the UK for white, middle-class women that Lizzie must give herself permission *not* to use this form of self-care in conjunction with cannibalising her husband. This humour about the construction of postfeminist femininity creates identification with Lizzie who is trying to give herself a break which is easy to empathise with.

However, Lizzie does consider the economic and environmental impact of her consumer choice. She argues for her entitlement to the nourishment, despite the fact that it would nourish other life. This is, again, blackly humorous as it shows how women are taught to put others before themselves and so this kind of self-care, where one's own nourishment is given precedent, needs to be justified. It also shows how consumers are encouraged to consider their ecological impact but still prioritise consumption which illustrates a catch 22 for women in that they are supposed to care for others/the environment but also practice self-care through consumption.

123. [...] It's practical, economical, and in many ways a moral choice.

[...]

126. One could argue that disposing of him in a lake would be good for the water life. Similarly, burying a body in the garden would fertilise the soil and add all sorts of welcome nutrients to the feeders in there. But eating him is nourishing a human being who was, let's face it, undernourished. And not just physically so. The process will be strengthening the psyche and readying you for your journey onward in life.

127. On that note, do not think, if you are a little overweight, or heavier than you'd like to be, "Oh, I am fat, and therefore shouldn't be doing this." It doesn't matter what size you are. You can still eat your husband. (127)

Lizzie's matter-of-fact tone when she writes 'let's face it', is both endearing in its honesty but also does not allow for any disagreement. This not only justifies the cannibalism but serves to

ignore the morality of the initial murder. While the ethics of personal consumption are debated, the overall ethics of the structures that lead to consumption are elided. This passage also brings up weight in relation to ethics. Body positivity has been a prominent postfeminist narrative which commodifies feminism and its rejection of 'the beauty myth' to encourage consumption of certain products, brands and services which are seen to support and cater to larger or unconventional women (Sastre, 2014; Cwynar-Horta, 2016). While this empowers women to love their bodies even if they do not match a particular beauty standard, it also encourages them to adhere to other 'healthy living' narratives that promote beauty under the guise of 'health'. The self-care narratives around this healthy life-styling frame this as more sustainable than dieting because you are allowed treats in moderation, and do not have to obsess about weight instead focusing on attaining 'health'. Cairns and Johnston (2015: 31-32) describe how this involves careful 'calibration' of consumption because women who are too restrictive may be seen as disempowered and fanatical, but not monitoring consumption is seen as unhealthy. As these consumption practices are framed as 'lifestyles' instead of 'diets', you are only supposed to want foods you perceive as 'healthy' which can become orthorexia, or the obsession with only eating/not eating certain foods (Dejamnee, 2015, 433). This passage mocks these narratives by replacing the conventional 'treat' with the cannibalising of your husband. It takes the idea of 'Can Do' dieting to the extreme, rendering it ridiculous.

Although the novel mocks these narratives of self-care, empowerment and can-do attitudes by applying them to a cannibalistic context, it also invokes them to justify the cannibalism and render it funny in turn. Thus, the critique it offers of neoliberal, postfeminist consumerism becomes ambiguous as the horror of cannibalism is lessened. The reasons behind Lizzie's self-care, namely the psychologically abusive nature of her marriage, also show the need for self-care and for setting goals to increase confidence. Indeed, as Lizzie goes about her project, she interviews for a job and connects with the local community. When Lizzie gets offered a job at a local hotel the owners call her 'Liz' (165) which reflects the construction of a new identity. 'For a moment she had it all. She had her health, and a home with a garden. She had a car she could get about in, a correspondent, a neighbour. And she had something to do' (165-166). The idea of 'having it all' is a postfeminist one that suggests women can achieve balance between work and family life. In order to have it all, Lizzie inadvertently constructs a public identity, 'Liz', who appears to others to be 'a perfect fit' (165) instead of a woman who is secretly eating her husband's dead body. In the final scenes Lizzie writes Tom a letter to exonerate him from the cannibalism should anyone ever find out about it. In it she writes, 'Within a few days of achieving total consumption, I had gained weight, as had Rita, my dog. I had also got a haircut. I had been offered a job. Nothing of Jacob went to waste' (274). By describing it as 'achieving' she frames the cannibalism in a positive light as a success. Although Lizzie does not seem to have been underweight when she began the project, the idea of her and Rita gaining weight does not

necessarily seem like a bad thing. Similarly, the idea of getting a haircut is a shorthand that suggests transformation and increased confidence as altering your appearance invites people to notice. This notice has paid off in the form of a job which again suggests the cannibalistic project was a positive self-care experiment. ‘Nothing of Jacob went to waste’ seems to suggest that he has fulfilled his full potential which also frames the murder and consumption as positive rather than exploitative. The short, simple sentences parody a matter-of-fact tone which again creates identification and empathy with Lizzie as these are unequivocal and confident.

In conclusion, these texts use black humour including irony and parody to show cannibalism in a positive light. They invoke narratives of female success through postfeminist narratives of consumption to position the cannibalism as harmless, ecological and entrepreneurial. They show how the pressures of male entitlement and the pressures of the beauty myth are overcome through cannibalism and increase the female cannibals’ confidence and sense of power. In the following section I explore how these texts are ambiguous about the celebration of female power through consumption as the food horror, temporal disturbances, and other gothic elements introduce more of a critique of cannibalistic consumption. They show how cannibalism and consumption are exploitative and disturbing, and the focus they have on remaining young or struggling to survive economically in a neoliberal setting shows how this affects reproductive generation. This lack of childbirth is framed as disturbing because it hints towards the eventual destruction of humanity through the consumption of itself.

6.3 Exploitation, Isolation and the Struggle to Survive

In this section I explore how the texts critique neoliberal consumption as postfeminist empowerment as they explore the lack or rejection of generative possibilities for women who are encouraged to put themselves first and accept responsibility for their physical and economic circumstances. The texts reveal the exploitation of consumption by drawing attention to the cannibalism, showing the more horrific side of it compared to some of the humour these texts also employ, and by showing how people remain ignorant of cannibalism (that is, consumption/exploitation) by being busy with their own struggles to survive in a neoliberal market, or how they join in and accept the exploitation – sometimes by exploiting themselves. The temporal and spatial disturbances illustrate how lifecycles are disturbed and how the supposed past of patriarchy and the present of postfeminism blend to present an ambiguous critique of gender roles and ideals in these texts.

Although *Dumplings* initially rejects any exploitation connected with harvesting the small fetuses, when Mei aborts the five month old fetus from the young incest victim the exploitation of this cannibalism becomes clearer. The camera focuses upwards from beneath the fetus showing it in the foreground but with Mei and Mrs Li in focus above it looking down.



Figure 6.7 Juxtaposing the foetus and the women connects them as human but frames the foetus as object, subject to the women's gaze. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

This odd perspective positions the audience more from the foetus's perspective and juxtaposes the women and the foetus in the same frame, perhaps showing that the foetus is human. Indeed, this foetus looks fully formed and very much like a human baby which adds to the horror of this scene. The two women poke at it and Mei explains that it is a boy which is rare because most abortions in China are of female foetuses. This draws attention to the exploitation of mainland women who may feel pressured to abort a female foetus in favour of waiting for a male child. This not only disrupts reproductive cycles and encourages women to have unnecessary medical procedures but also illustrates how these women are culturally devalued as they are encouraged to value males over their own gender.

The camera pans up the table as Mei cooks the dumplings, making the dough by hand and drinking rice wine while she does it. Mrs Li stands in the background in the shadows watching Mei work. The upwards angle puts them in a position of power, and perhaps could be said to be the perspective of a small ghost-child as the camera roams. The camera then lingers in a bird's eye shot over the dumplings presented in a circle on a layer of bright green cabbage in the steamer as chopsticks pick one up to eat. The greens and the steamed nature of the dumplings suggest the healthy living in their simplicity and this elides the prior horror somewhat. The slow pacing of the scene continues as the camera takes Mei's perspective watching Mrs Li eat. Several long takes

with jump cuts show the process of Mrs Li taking her time over the meal, savouring it. There are occasional reverse shots showing Mei watching.



Figure 6.8 Blurred edges suggest a victim being watched through a window. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 6.9 Mei's direct gaze and head tilt suggest a focused gaze. Being framed through the window emphasises the voyeurism. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)



Figure 6.10 The wider shot shows the unusual set up as Mei watches Mrs Li eat from the hallway, framed behind the windows and between the curtains which creates a sinister tone of voyeurism. The audience is placed directly behind Mrs Li, not over her shoulder, which suggests a ghostly voyeur as in the earlier kitchen scene. (Brightness and contrast adjusted for clarity.)

This creates a sinister tone as Mei sits rocking slightly but very still, head to one side with a slight smile. Her complete focus on Mrs Li eating is shown through the camera's gaze and seems voyeuristic. It is very much like slasher movie shots of victims being targeted as cameras take on the perspective of the killers. However, Mrs Li leaves and a slow, lengthy sequence shows her finally gaining her husband's attentions. She smiles a lot in this scene, but the camera also lingers over parts of her (clothed) body recalling Mei's earlier voyeurism and linking the pornographic objectification of her body parts with Mei's exploitative gaze – Mrs Li's body is a site for others' pleasure.

The sex scene cuts suddenly to an image of blood dripping off a seat as the young girl bleeds out on a bus. Upon leaving the bus, the girl, finally named Kate, collapses on her mother. Another cut pans up Kate's bloody legs and then shows the mother holding her in a pieta fashion but also hysterically asking 'what's going on?' as if she hadn't just procured her daughter an illegal abortion just to save reporting her abusive rapist husband to the police and have the neighbours know what happened. The link between these scenes makes explicit the exploitative nature of Mrs Li's consumption.

The film very much frames Mei as a trickster who gives people options to make choices. She rejects the mother's request several times but not with enough force to stop her asking and she does eventually agree. While performing the abortion, Mei tells the mother 'don't let it happen again'. Of course, the mother perhaps did not 'let it happen' in the first place but she had the power not to let it happen again by reporting it. In this way the film seems to blame the mother. However, Mei had just as much ability to report it, colluding instead to gain financially by exploiting them. This highlights how women and girls are exploited both by patriarchal husbands

and fathers but also by other women, consumers like Mei and Mrs Li who are prepared to let others suffer for their benefit. Where Mei does this in full knowledge of the incest, Mrs Li only finds out after she has consumed it. This shows both the ignorance of consumerism and Mrs Li's privilege as she has not considered why someone might abort a five month foetus. Her selfishness and ignorance critiques the construction of femininity and self-care through consumption as it is entirely selfish and individualistic.

The death of Kate, the only child in the film, as well as her foetus begins to reveal the lack of generative production that the pursuit of agelessness creates. This is finally fully exposed when Mrs Li pays for the maid's abortion. While there is almost certainly a class element that I return to which puts Mrs Li in a privileged position, the maid also seems to have agency in this scene. Mr Li has already offered to pay her to keep the baby. She tells Mrs Li that 'I'm young. I can spare the time. And it will pay enough that I can live well for a while'. She says this while leaning back, relaxed in her chair, seemingly not caring about the realities of raising a child or that she has had an affair with a married man. When Mrs Li asks what she will do if it is a girl, the maid says she will just charge less money. Finally, when Mrs Li tells her she wants the baby, the maid wonders if it is because of inheritance issues which suggests she thinks Mrs Li is as mercenary as she is about the child – not because Mrs Li wants to raise her husband's baby. This callousness towards children reflects the nature of the film showing that it is not only literal cannibalism that dehumanises people: children are valued only as potential labour or income. Mrs Li explains she does not want a baby but the foetus, and the maid accepts Mrs Li's proposal to abort for more money. Her agency shows that while Mrs Li is exploiting her to an extent, the maid is also willing to exploit herself which reflects a neoliberal postfeminist stance. The film does not explore how as a working class woman, the maid's options are limited as her relaxed body language and blasé attitude do not reflect any particular stress about the situation. Rottenberg (2018) claims that neoliberalism is creating two classes of women – those who are fully subjects and encouraged to balance work and lifestyle, and those women who are poorer and who will be left to reproduce and give childcare and other domestic services to wealthy women. While this vision of the future seems extreme, it is nonetheless exactly what this film shows, the maid's apparent agency justifying again the cannibalistic consumption that destroys humanity.

Mrs Li, as a former actress and married to a wealthy businessman, is in a privileged class. Indeed, they are living in a hotel while their mansion is renovated. Mrs Li has staff both in the hotel and at her home to look after the maintenance of the house and feed them both. Indeed, Mrs Li never cooks in the film. She is of a class where she need never get her hands dirty. Throughout the film Mr Li eats chicken eggs which have half-developed embryos in them – a Chinese delicacy. Mrs Li stomps on a tray of these in anger (including one implausibly living chick), and leaves a maid/cook to pick up after her. The maid is carrying a fully grown, plucked bird showing

how even if the chicks were ‘born’, they would still eventually become food. This scene uses foodways to reflect the questions raised throughout the film about the nature of eating embryos compared to the exploitation of their parents. Although the eggs are enjoyed by Mr Li, they look abject with the greying dead chicks surrounded by slimy fluid and the hotel maid displays this disgust earlier within the film.



Figure 6.11 The grey colour and slimy appearance create food horror as it draws attention to the boundaries of the edible.

This sense of food horror evokes sympathy for the chicks even while the plucked bird is taken for granted, uncommented upon as a prop in a scene. This draws attention to the cycles of exploitation at any age. It also shows how our perception of the edible has less to do with rational thought than gut reaction as the human foetuses are presented as far more appetizing both in raw and dumpling form. This scene also illustrates that Mrs Li is only able to worry about her desirability and aging because she does not have to spend her time cleaning, cooking or caring for others. As much as this positions Mrs Li as an exploitative consumer, it also positions her as exploited as well. Not only has Mei exploited her desperation and gullibility but Mrs Li's unhappiness is fed by those around her who encourage her to feel bad about herself.

In one scene, Mrs Li has friends over to the hotel for a dinner party. Her lack of cooking shows her lack of family, and her focus on herself rather than on creating a family. We watch the staff preparing food through the doorway and hear the women gossip about Mrs Li and whether she has had a facelift or used ‘voodoo’ to look better. In order to maintain her social standing Mrs Li has been compelled to look young and beautiful, feelings which are exploited by Mei who encourages her to use whatever resources she is able to buy, and when it does not seem to work as planned, Mrs Li is encouraged to do even more self-care activities.

While the choice to have a family or not is not Mrs Li's responsibility alone, the film's denouement with Mrs Li brutally butchering the foetus of the maid shows how her pursuit of external, physical femininity over domestic, familial femininity has made her monstrous. As Genz

(2007) has explored, this monstrous pursuit of femininity reinscribes the feminine outside of traditional gender roles which can be positive as women are (supposedly) now postfeminist and free to not have children, not perform domestic gender roles, and to construct a subjectivity that is active. However, *Dumplings* shows how this postfeminist position is classed and enables the exploitation of poor women and girls, and this exploitation is ultimately unsustainable as reproduction becomes valueless and children are seen as an expense or source of income rather than as people.

Season to Taste addresses the lack of children more obliquely. The lifecycles of the community are secondary to finding and maintaining steady employment. All of the neighbours struggle, especially the ‘grown-up kids’ (4). This oxymoron highlights how several generations of adults are forced to live together because it is so hard to find employment and this disrupts traditional ideas of appropriate lifecycles. When Lizzie goes for a job interview at a hotel one of the owners tells her ‘My son works in a bike shop in Farnham. Been there seven years now. Went to university and studied engineering. Ended up working in a bike shop. Quite happy, though. Loves it’ (84). The other owner mentions Lizzie’s friend, Tom, who also did a degree in biology and now works in the garden centre. These narratives illustrate the economic precarity of young people whose higher education has not guaranteed proportionate employment in neoliberal capitalism.¹¹ ‘Even the postman,’ (4) we are told, ‘was a man juggling work and a start-up and four small children’ (5). This shows how the community, despite its relative wealth, struggles to maintain employment which can support a family.

For Lizzie, this economic precarity is a central facet of her marriage. She was brought up by a single mother in poverty so Jacob knows he can rely on Lizzie to put up with him because she was ‘practical – poverty had made her that way, he’d said’ (33). Their marriage did not lead to children and the family foodways show both their literal and emotional poverty – ‘you could see from the fridge how things had been: empty, pretty much, and the shelves smeary and old’ (28). This description indicates a lack of care, wealth and fulfilment. This is contrasted with Lizzie’s later feasting on Jacob’s flesh as she contemplates their childlessness. In a moment of self-care Lizzie affirms that ‘if she was firm enough with herself – if she applied all she had to herself as she might have done to a child – there was a chance she would be alright’ (61). This compares the emotional and physical energies involved in childrearing are directed instead towards the self and the accomplishment of Lizzie’s cannibalistic goals. She smothers slices of thigh in herbs and spices and finds that:

¹¹ I use Butler’s (2009, ii) idea of ‘precarity’ to emphasise that while life is by nature precarious, the politics of neoliberalism create and perpetuate the inequality of certain groups. ‘Precarity designates the politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death.’

The old resentments had finally lost their cling. That they hadn't had a baby and had never got to the bottom of whose problem it was or why, that they'd stopped even talking about it after a while so that it just began to hang around her when she was out on her own in town looking at other people's kids, was no longer an issue. Children weren't to be looked at. [...] It was this [cannibalism], or nothing' (62).

Having missed the option of a more traditional lifecycle due to her economic precarity and unequal marriage, Lizzie's cannibalistic self-care becomes a consolation and redirection of her energies. The text uses the cannibalism to mock how neoliberal individualism demands she direct her femininity into self-defining consumption.

The disruption to traditional lifecycles is reflected in the temporal disruption throughout the structure of the text. Lizzie not only frequently dwells on the past both distant and recent, but the novel includes lapses and repetitions within the narrative. Lizzie's neighbour Tom has several chapters interspersed through the novel written in first person but these are out of sync with the rest of the novel and tell the future of Lizzie's narrative from Tom's perspective. This creates a sense of the uncanny as we later read the account from Lizzie's perspective, often with different details that do not quite match but with enough repetition to give an impression of *déjà vu*. Tom's narrative is written mainly in the present tense although Tom is clearly positioned in the future – 'Even after years, and with a new life, I am still that boy at the garden centre' (251) – sometimes, however, this narrative slips into past tense. For example, some conversations, or parts of conversations, are in the present tense 'she says' (233), 'I ask' (233), while others are past 'she said' (234). The lack of temporal order both within each chapter and within the overall structure emphasises the unease of the situation as it hints at an ominous future with Tom talking about Lizzie directly but to an unknown audience. The temporal disruption and the disrupted lifecycles are connected as Lizzie becomes a (metaphorical) mother to a young adult at the wrong moment. When Lizzie tells Tom about her cannibalism he describes it as 'ripping the nipple out of the mouth' (262) which positions Lizzie as a mother-figure to Tom, particularly in the act of feeding.

The narrative juxtaposes Lizzie looking at her aging body – 'she caught sight of her white shoulders in the mirror and chose not to look up from there or down at the sagging breasts' (96) – with her shaving Jacob's legs in preparation for roasting and tells us 'she'd got used to careful preparation' (96). This short sentence draws attention to how the female body requires 'careful preparation' like shaving in order to be considered appropriate and how this labour echoes the food preparation that women are also traditionally expected to perform. The removal of hair is a particularly fraught area and this image of shaving a severed leg evokes the abject through both the image of the leg and also through the hair removal which positions the removed hair as dirty.

Lizzie's attractiveness is linked with her economic precarity when the narrative describes how 'She had failed to civilise. She had not known enough, had enough, to become gracious and

elegant and wise. Now there was only life left living on the edges, eking out something that felt manageable without feeling' (184). Despite her red lipstick and 'careful preparation', Lizzie blames her cannibalism on not having 'had enough' to be 'gracious and elegant and wise'. This draws attention to the ways that choices are limited by class and economic considerations. Lizzie married into a slightly higher class (although during times of recession the middle classes are often precarious) so her choices are still limited by her husband. Instead of leaving him for another man, perhaps, Lizzie's apparent lack of attractiveness leads to her 'failure to civilise' and her cannibalism. Not only does this show how postfeminist narratives reclaiming beauty are limited to certain women, it also illustrates how feeling less feminine has been taken to the extreme as Lizzie's cannibalism transforms her into 'a tougher thing' (184).

The text is punctuated with elements of food horror which while darkly humorous also draw attention to the details of eating and the alimentary process. These often vivid descriptions of cannibalism challenge the sympathy for and identification with Lizzie and show how her consumption exploits and objectifies her husband. For example, in her notes she writes '81. Your husband's flesh will now be in your mouth, oesophagus, stomach and intestines. 82. If you have managed to go to the loo yet, he will have also come out already as waste. [...] 83. Look at the poo' (87). The unexpected frankness of this discussion of the alimentary process could be seen as humorous and perhaps has connotations of self-care programmes such as Gillian McKeith's weightloss show *You Are What You Eat* (2004; 2006) in which McKeith analysed participants' stool. However, this also signals the complete annihilation of Jacob. As Piatti-Farnell (2016: 145) has argued 'the objectification [...] of the human body implies the inevitable annihilation of the identity that goes with it, a devaluation of the higher status as an intelligent being, and a denial of the empathy and respect that we expect from our fellow human.' By literally turning Jacob to excrement, Lizzie objectifies him into an abject and taboo object that one must force oneself to 'look at'. Similar descriptions of consumption also draw attention to the annihilation of the body. For example: 'Then the toenails, the knuckles and the smaller bones had been crushed in a blender with salt, turmeric and cumin. She'd eaten the mush heaped on a plate with herbs from the garden' (88) This pulverisation of the body is abject not just because of the cannibalism but because of the food horror (disgust) of an adult eating 'mush' which also has connotations of the abject.

Season to Taste mocks the professionalisation of the domestic sphere by structuring the novel as a how to guide. It draws attention to the exploitation and objectification of Jacob's body by vivid descriptions of food horror. The time lapses and asynchronous structure also reflect the disordered lives of Lizzie and those around her whose struggle to find employment and survive in neoliberal culture prevents them from obtaining a more traditional lifecycle that might include reproductive possibilities. Lizzie's resentment at her lack of children leads to her cannibalism and while this helps her to gain confidence it also illustrates the lack of humanity as she annihilates Jacob's identity.

6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has examined how texts about middle-aged, childless/free female cannibals reveal fears and desires and perform cultural work relating to the neoliberal disruption of reproductive cycles, the consequences of self-care which elides or ignores consumer exploitation, and nevertheless is desirable because it promotes self-esteem, confidence and resilience. The ambiguity of this critique is illustrated by the narrative tropes which blend the past and present in a variety of ways including asynchronous structures and repetitions, and which juxtapose comedic moments with graphic horror. These texts engage with debates around gender by exploring how neoliberal femininity is defined by enhancing the female body, cultivating mental and physical wellbeing/virtue, and how these priorities can contradict other postfeminist imperatives which position motherhood as the pinnacle of feminine success.

This chapter reflects the previous chapter in that the cannibalism is self-care instead of care for others. The inversion of this illustrates the competing and contradictory narratives of postfeminism and the ways in which it is often critiqued using irony. The spiritual elements of self-care in this chapter contrast with the pseudo-religious focus of the previous chapter which suggests that while religion can still be framed in terms of helping others, spirituality has become entirely self-serving in an era of consumerism which harms not only animals and the environment but the less privileged.

Digestif: Conclusion

Dr Hunt: “Are you saying the future of women lies in cannibalism?!”

The above quote from *Cannibal Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death* occurs when Dr Hunt finally meets Dr Kurtz at the temple of the cannibal women. Corrupted by her ambition to succeed in academia, Dr Kurtz claims she wishes to lead the Piranha women – presumably against men and the US government – when in reality she merely wishes to exploit them for her next book. The joke, of course, highlights the ways in which women with power have often been figured as insatiable, excessive, all-consuming man-eaters, as well as parodying the hijacking of feminist resistance by a self-satisfying liberal elite. Indeed, at the beginning of this project I believed (simplistically) that fictional female cannibals were ultimately positive figures which threatened men and the patriarchy, re-appropriating the stereotype of the vagina dentata or monstrous feminine to illustrate how women are continuing to gain equality and power in the postfeminist era. Or otherwise, perhaps they are part of a backlash fearing that exact thing.

But the texts are more nuanced and ambivalent than that. They do play to certain postfeminist fantasies which position the female cannibal as a figure of empowerment through her consumption. The women tend to get away with their cannibalism and the open endings can be read as having unending potential. However, they also show the destruction as well as the selfishness and exploitation that results from excessive consumption. They reveal how women’s re-appropriation of femininity can sometimes be complicity, and how gaining empowerment often does not prevent the abuse of others. Ultimately, the female cannibal texts reveal the limits of postfeminist consumerism, demonstrating the tension between the pleasure and exploitation involved in consumption – whether that is exploitation of others or, indeed, the self. The decontextualisation of time and space across these texts further shows how the present is sometimes a mere continuation of the past which illustrates how much further feminists still have to go in the struggle for equality.

My project aimed to explore female cannibal texts from 1995-2016 using a combination of foodways theory and feminist theories about postfeminism. I wanted to answer the following research questions:

- What fears and desires does the female cannibal represent? In other words, what cultural work does this figure actually do?
- How do these texts use narrative tropes and relate to national or globalised contexts?
- How do female cannibal texts engage with debates around gender and culture in the period?

In order to answer these questions, I have focused on the cannibalism in these texts as part of foodways and a spectrum of food behaviour which is gendered with women often

constructing the family through domestic labour and feeding practices as well as constructing their own identities and performing femininity through consumption. My framework was also informed by the language and theories of the gothic which contributed the tools I used to read tone in these texts.

This particular approach has allowed me to explore the tensions between postfeminist reclamations of traditional femininity which empower women and the ways these traditions still oppress women. The texts engage with the idea that postfeminism responds to feminism as an 'incomplete project', as well as critiques which challenge the efficacy and ethics of this individual empowerment. Many female cannibal texts contribute to postfeminist media culture as they celebrate the individual empowerment of the cannibals while ambivalently presenting a contradictory need for radical structural change.

The ambivalences and contradictions within the texts carry out cultural work which complicates the straightforward categorisation of consumption as empowering or exploitative, exposing the relationships between neoliberal individualism and postfeminist media culture. The texts use narrative tropes including flashbacks, asynchronous settings and costumes, unreliable narrators and repetitions which evoke a gothic atmosphere and decontextualize the texts. This decontextualisation is an aspect of the globalgothic and elides the local with the global. This not only foregrounds fears and anxieties relating to neoliberal subjectivity and the construction of the self through consumption but reveals how the symptoms of postfeminist media culture circulate globally despite variations in local histories of feminism.

The foodways and feminist framework articulates patriarchal abuses and politics as cannibalistic, especially the objectification of women as chattel which leads to incest, rape, and milder forms of dehumanisation. These texts therefore engage with debates around rape culture and perform cultural work that renders this visible despite the postfeminist dismissal of further need for structural feminism.

The use of incest as a symbol for a spectrum of patriarchal abuse particularly articulates the connection between patriarchy and family structures. Within a neoliberal context, motherhood must become a goal besides economic advancement in order for capitalism to perpetuate itself. These texts engage with the idea that consumption constructs the family while incest or patriarchal abuse destroys it. The cannibalism, then, ambivalently valorises motherhood and consumption as empowering and positive against a backdrop of abuse, while also expressing fears about excessive consumption as many female cannibals reject reproduction.

Ultimately, female cannibal texts undertake messy cultural work exposing the untidiness of both postfeminist media culture and neoliberalism. The cannibalism illustrates this messiness literally, employing the liminal nature of the cannibal as both human and subhuman to reveal the paradoxes and contradictions of these ideologies, as well as using the food and body horror of

cannibalism to challenge the ethics of feminine performativity and empowerment through consumption.

D.1 Next Course

The framework I developed throughout this project has allowed me to compare texts with different tones, generic priorities and national contexts. As a tool for reading my female cannibal texts it has revealed many elements in the texts I did not initially expect to emerge, including the relationships between family foodways, the maternal, and the ways these are positioned in postfeminist media culture and neoliberalism. Reading foodways in relation to feminist critiques of postfeminism, and being alert to globalisation and neoliberalism, has allowed me to explore female cannibalism as a truly unique version of the cannibal. While the female cannibal texts fit with theories by Brown (2013), Walton (2004), and gothicists in general about the movement towards the subjectivity of the cannibal/monster, this framework has allowed me to explore the gendered ways this relates to the fears and anxieties of the postfeminist, neoliberal era. I have revealed a particular relationship between women, food and culture within these texts that varies significantly from earlier variations of the (exclusively male) independent cannibal. The texts illustrate ambivalent, and often contradictory, relationships between women and foodways. On one hand, consumption offers women a way to access power, construct the family and assert their subjectivity. On the other hand, however, it is isolating and selfish, exploitative of others and environments, and returns women to hegemonic ideals of femininity. The individual focus on the cannibal in these texts is supplemented (perhaps paradoxically) with a connection to the past and to the continuing structures of patriarchy. This ambivalent connection between past and present, structure and individualism, foregrounds gender as the driving issue in these texts. The framework I used exposed and supports the messiness and contradictions in these layers of meaning as foodways intertwine geopolitical and personal levels, each inextricable from local and global culture as a whole.

This framework might usefully be applied to male cannibal texts, offering a way of reading gender into cannibalism more broadly. As the history of gender studies illustrates, where we can read femininity into a text, the same or similar theories can be applied to expose masculinity which is often taken for granted in cultural objects/texts. Reading the foodways of male cannibal texts in relation to theories of masculinity may reveal how masculinity functions within cannibal texts. This might reveal relationships between men, consumption and violence, labour and subjectivity which are missing in accounts like Brown's (2013). Likewise, the focus on gender and global foodways would allow the comparison of texts from a range of national contexts. For example, reading the foodways in *The Cook* written by Wayne Macauley (2011) and *The Reluctant Cannibals* (Flitcroft, 2013) might show a preoccupation with male food

authority in foodie culture, how men articulate class using food and consumption, and explore male friendship within working environments.

This framework could also be applied to other monster-texts to examine not only how women/female monsters relate to foodways but how foodways circulate within more fantastical texts. For example, the television show *iZombie* (2015-present, based on the comic book series of the same name created by Chris Roberson and Michael Allred, 2010-2012) presents a zombie epidemic which necessitates the infected to eat brains. Consuming brains allows the infected to maintain a human subjectivity but they also take on traits and characteristics, including muscle memories, of the person they have consumed. The refusal or failure to consume turns them into mindless/brainless monsters. Not only does this present interesting opportunities to explore subjectivity and the ironies of consumption, the main protagonist of the show, Liv Moore, works at a morgue and has unlimited access to brains and which enables her to solve crimes and be a useful member of society not despite but because of her condition, where other infected are often the opposite. How the foodways circulate in this text could reveal wider concerns about privilege and the right to food, as well as the exploitative nature of consumerism, and fears about neoliberal identity.

As I began researching my texts, I encountered many female monster texts that would be worth investigating in relation to the female cannibal as they seem to undertake similar cultural work. The female zombie is one such figure. I chose to focus on cannibals as non-supernatural beings which emphasised, I felt at the time, both their choice to commit cannibalism, and their everywoman potential. As living human beings, they could be any one of us. However, the growth of female zombies with self-consciousness and a sense of moral dilemma has been considerable. Roxanne Douglas and Maria Quigley shared a panel with me at a conference on cannibalism at the University of Warwick in 2018, both talking about female zombies in *The Santa Clarita Diet* (2017- 2019) and *iZombie*. These zombie comedies have evolved from the romantic zombie comedies of the late 20th century and early 21st century but unlike others, the female zombies are the protagonists who are fully aware, fully functional, and try to hide their condition and “diet” from society in order to have a “normal” life. *The Girl With All the Gifts* written by M R Carey (2014) is another example set in a dystopian future in which the zombie girl, Melanie, alters the nature of humanity and subjectivity by asserting her right to live and learn despite being non-human.

In Douglas’ paper, “Zombies and Feminism; or how *The Santa Clarita Diet* could be a Feminist Manifesto”, she described very similar preoccupations with ambivalence that are present in my cannibal texts. Douglas argued that while the comedic aspects of the show focus on the tension between maintaining a perfect domestic and professional life and the bloody necessity to consume human flesh, the increasing empowerment Sheila, the protagonist, feels is eroded as her newfound power threatens those she loves as well as those who “deserve” to be eaten. Douglas

warned that this highlights the problematic position of neoliberal feminism as even in death Sheila must continue to look good, be a good wife and mother who organises food and schedules, and maintain her career. This argument touches on many of the same issues as my cannibal texts including the idea of revenge or eating those who deserve it; constructing the family through consumption practices, especially with food behaviours; using diet and consumption to look and feel confident and empowered; and the threat this consumption and selfish self-care poses to the family.

In contrast, the television serial *Bitten* (2014-2016), based on The Otherworld novels by Kelley Armstrong, shows how the only female werewolf, Elena Michaels, destroys the toxic masculine rules which structure werewolf society. By embracing her inner animal, she radically alters society – both werewolf and human. However, this is not achieved by consuming others, or overpowering them, but by accepting what she is and asking the world to accept the existence of werewolves/those different than them. Again, this show deals with gendered issues such as paedophiles, serial killers, and male power struggles which harm innocent bystanders but its more positive outcome, with Elena living happily with her partner and humans slowly accepting werewolves, reflects an attitude whereby an individual woman's empowerment does lead to positive, structural change though not through consumption. Exploring the foodways in this text might well reveal how consumption functions in this text and how empowerment is achieved without exploitative consumerism.

The framework could also be adapted to read witch texts which, as I pointed out in my introduction, have both fictional and real-world histories which might complicate or complement an understanding of cannibalism and consumption more broadly. Using foodways to read texts on witches, zombies, and werewolves would offer a unifying framework enabling the differences and similarities of these monstrous figures to be compared.

As I have continued finding texts throughout this project the female cannibal has been joined by her family in some recent texts. *The Savages* (2010) and *American Savage* (2014) written by Matt Whyman are young adult novels that focus on a family of cannibals carrying on a paternal tradition started in the Siege of Stalingrad as they negotiate the eldest daughter's new relationship with a vegetarian and her experimentation with becoming a vegetarian herself. Her rejection of family traditions begins a discussion on the values of meat eating, and the family is eventually joined by a radical vegan who believes it is ethically better to eat people than animals. The second novel is set in USA where they become entangled with a mob-boss and set up a vegan restaurant to do money laundering. These novels would benefit from being analysed using a foodways framework. This would perhaps add to or nuance my arguments about foodways constructing the family. Reading the foodways would also focus on the ethics of meat-eating in the texts, and clarify how cannibalism is able to be framed as a positive alternative in a neoliberal era.

The framework I developed is flexible and adaptive, and there are many opportunities to add to my thesis using even more up-to-date versions of cannibals, exploring masculinity, and reading the foodways of other female monster texts. These future avenues of research would add to our knowledge of the cultural work undertaken in (broadly) gothic and supernatural texts, especially in relation to gender, consumption, and the construction of the family and the self.

D.2 Digestif

In *The Avocado Jungle*, Dr Hunt grows hungry enough to look at their guide, Jim, with hunger, and he exclaims “Moderate feminist! You Women’s Libbers are all alike! A couple of days out here and you turn into savages! You throw away all that rhetoric about equality and you get down to what you really want! The domination and consumption of men!” Although Dr Hunt initially apologises, when Jim tells the impressionable Bunny to “See for yourself what the Women’s Movement is really about!” Dr Hunt loses her temper and chases him with a knife until she is apparently brought back to her senses by the arrival of the Piranha Women. His attempts to define feminists as man-eaters is met with exactly the behaviour that both resists and punishes him but also proves him correct. Like the female cannibals in this thesis, this shows the irony (and threat) of desiring a matriarchy or female empowerment but how it nonetheless does not disrupt the status quo. The female cannibal texts illustrate this irony and contradiction at once revealing the pleasures of female consumption while at the same time illustrating how this does not bring about change.

At the beginning of this project I anticipated that female cannibals were empowering, positive figures which threatened patriarchy by ironically embodying the worst stereotypes of femininity. However, as this project has shown, the texts themselves are far more ambivalent. Reading cannibalism as the ironic inversion of patriarchal abuse begins to reveal the truth of Audre Lorde’s (1984: 2) claim that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.’ The contradictions in these texts illustrate how tempting it is to exercise dominance and power, using violence and exploitation to force change but how this empowerment only perpetuates the underlying structures of inequality. At the same time, the texts do critique the ‘master’s tools’ – the parody, as Hutcheon (1985: 6) describes, is ‘repetition with critical distance’ – revealing the violent and exploitative nature of patriarchy by literalising and inverting its use of objectification.

The female cannibal texts perform the cultural work which at once highlights a continuing need for feminism while embracing postfeminist strategies of consumption as a way of dismissing the incomplete project of feminism. Simultaneously they critique postfeminist consumption as exploitative and as no better than patriarchal spectrums of abuse. The texts show female cannibals walking or driving into the sunrise, finishing breakfast, making their next meal,

and yet none have a future to aspire to. The messiness of the female cannibal holds a myriad of contradictions which represent contemporary fears and desires about gender, consumption and neoliberal subjectivity.

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