

MEALS AND MORALS: ANALYZING LARRY BROWN'S CHARACTERS IN
FATHER AND SON THROUGH A DISCOURSE ON DINING

by

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(Under the Direction of James Everett Kibler, Jr.)

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the use of food in Larry Brown's novel *Father and Son* as a means for understanding the complex relationships between the protagonists Bobby Blanchard, Mary Blanchard, Virgil Davis, Jewel, and the antagonist, Glen Davis. Through the home-cooked meals of Mary and Jewel, the genuine and caring nature of these women wins the hearts of the men that surround them. The males in the novel are often torn between poisonous drink and greasy foods and the healthy foods that could make them whole again. The discourse of food and the dining experience provides a touchstone for understanding the character's larger priorities and moral imperatives.

INDEX WORDS: Larry Brown, Food, Eating, Contemporary Southern literature, Mississippi, *Father and Son*, Bobby Blanchard, Glen Davis, Virgil Davis

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving family who has supported me through everything and has always encouraged me to work hard and to dream big.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Go out into the woods, early or late, but preferably not in the middle of the day.

Walk softly . . . You might have to wait for a long time, especially if you made a bunch of noise coming in.

If you see a squirrel far off, don't go chasing after him because he'll only run away and you'll never see him again. . . . Be patient. Wait for them to come to you. If one comes close enough, shoot it. But don't get up and go get it.

. . .

Okay. You've got your squirrel, he's dead, and you've got him in your game bag and are headed back to the house with him. (Wells 146)

This fine description is something readers of Larry Brown might expect in one of his novels, perhaps coming from the mouth of a father to his son, or maybe a group of men sitting around a pot-bellied stove. Brown grew up in tune with, and in love with, the land. Perhaps it will surprise readers to find that this anecdote does not come from one of Brown's favorite hunting or fishing magazines, nor, in fact from any of his works. Instead, it begins his recipe for "Squirrel and Biscuits and Gravy" in *The New Great American Writers Cookbook*. Brown does not follow the traditional pattern of listing ingredients, followed by numbered steps. Rather, he invites readers home with him. He starts at the very beginning and leaves out no detail, no matter how small. Even when he could have made a simple list and sent it in for the cookbook collection, he chose to make the recipe personal. This shows that, for Brown, dinner is more than just a routine to be

followed or a meal concocted from a recipe card. Dinner is about enjoying food, sharing stories, making memories, and taking a moment for oneself. Brown and his food are the epitome of the traditional, rural South at its best. Besides giving specific instructions on how to properly hunt, kill, and dress a squirrel, he informs readers that

It is morally wrong to fry a squirrel in anything besides a big black iron skillet. Put you a little vegetable oil in there and let it warm up. You're gonna want to cook him at a low heat. Get you a pan of flour and sprinkle some salt and black pepper in there. . . . Cook the squirrel until it browns turning often. It should work up a nice crispy brown crust. (Wells 147-8)

One can assume that since Brown was raised in the South as a sharecropper's son, his mother used a cast iron skillet. No self-respecting Southern lady would fry without it. That kind of pan is usually passed on from generation to generation and seasoned more distinctly with use. His mother and her infamous skillet are only part of what taught Brown to treasure such dishes and the rituals of cooking.

All who knew Larry Brown as a man, a neighbor, a father, and a friend would agree that he loved the South. Like with the greatest Southern writer, William Faulkner, Brown made his home in and around Oxford, Mississippi. Hailed for his accomplishments as a fireman before ever picking up a pen, Brown never lost touch with his roots or his home. He knew that to be a success, and more than that one of the greats, he had to write about what he knew, and for Brown, that was the working-class Southerners he encountered every day at home.

My perceptions of Brown, his works, and his life were confirmed at the Fourteenth Annual Oxford Conference for the Book (March 22-24, 2007), held in Oxford, MS. This conference was the first ever to focused primarily on Brown. Only moments into the panel

discussions, it became abundantly clear that his family and friends played a central role in his life. It was both a joy and a privilege for me to hear them recall memories of Larry as a husband, a friend, and a “daddy.” Most of his family attended the conference, including his wife, Mary Annie, his sons, Billy Ray and Shane, his daughter, LeAnne, his mother, Leona, and various siblings, cousins, and other relatives, not to mention the hundred or so close friends. These last included both writers and the musicians he spent time with at his own kitchen table.

As Brown was growing up, his mother Leona was the center of the home. She is the one who encouraged him to read. In Gary Hawkins’s film *The Rough South of Larry Brown* (1999), Leona Brown walks down aisles of head-high, okra plants next to her son and deftly cuts off stalks of the verdant green vegetables with her paring knife. The film then jumps to Leona’s kitchen where she has chopped the okra and is telling the film crew how to cook it properly. She says, “I always just put a little bit [of okra] in at a time and flour ‘em, get ‘em completely covered. Make sure my grease is hot. It’s going to pop” (Watson 151). Okra is a hearty vegetable that finds its way on to many a Southern table in various forms, with fried being one of the favorites, and the Brown family dinner table is no exception. In the film, viewers can tell that the heart of Leona’s home is her kitchen, and she welcomes loved ones and visitors alike. Cooking, the kitchen, and sharing meals with friends are integral parts of the South, so it is no surprise that it plays an important role in Brown’s novels, just as it had in his own life. Not to make it central would in effect be a distortion of that reality.

Life has not been easy for Larry Brown and his family, but being raised in a working-class community helped Brown to create realistic novels. Brown himself held jobs digging ditches, bagging groceries, answering phones for a telephone service, running a small country store, or fighting fires, and “just about any kind of manual labor that you could name” (Watson

114). In a 2004 interview with Orman Day, Brown tells Day, “I also know what kind of people work [in difficult places like factories], so it surely helps to make the characters real. The food they eat, the cars and trucks they drive and the things that are wrong with them, the kind of beer they drink, the music they listen to” (Watson 194). Notably, Brown first mentions the connection between the food that his characters eat (just as with the people he knows) and the verisimilitude of the novel as a whole. Because the dining experience is so central to social interaction in the traditional South, Brown certainly would be remiss by neglecting or downplaying its centrality in his novels. His characters are faced with both basic and complex issues throughout the canon of his work, and eating fulfills one of the most central needs of man. Just as problems like hunger are addressed in the novels, it is in the attention to detail that Brown provides a broader agenda. Each character is faced with the ageless choice between good and evil. All have the potential for hope or destruction. For Brown, the moral imperative in his works is all about the choices that the characters make with the life they have. When discussing Glen and Bobby, Brown says that

it’s about the different ways that they grew up and how one had a father and turned out the way he did, the other one didn’t have a father and turned out the way he did. And how lives take different shapes and how it’s not always influences, it’s also strength of an individual character to not follow those patterns—not to take the easy way and blame all your trouble on somebody else, but to go on and try to do the best you can. All these people got so many problems. (Watson 118)

It is my intention to show that through realistic, even simplistic, elements of food in the novel *Father and Son*, Brown subtly provides a moral background and a touchstone for individual imperatives.

There have been as yet very few academic and scholarly articles that address Brown's novels, and none of them address the central issue of food. The idea of using a discourse of food to analyze literature, and indeed storytelling as a whole, is not new. Major food studies began as early as 1965 with Claude Lévi-Strauss's work on an academic approach to food and eating (Wood 8). Others such as Mary Douglas and Roland Barthes expanded the cultural and social impact of food in various separate studies and continue to rise in contemporary popularity, particularly in the discipline of anthropology (Wood 8-14). In her work *Writing the Meal*, Diane McGee argues that "meals are particularly significant texts because food is, itself, in its essence, closely related to language. . . . [the] mouth is the primary organ associated both with speaking and with food" (21). Just as oral language is produced with the mouth, the regional dialogue of Larry Brown's novels also resides in the mouth of his readers. His stories are direct derivations of the old storytelling methods, and the food of the novel is directly connected to the physical text through its orality. No reader could ever deny that Brown is gifted storyteller, and as it is widely known, the oral narrative tradition is a major strength of Southern fiction.

Echoing McGee's claims, Mary Douglas proposes that while food is an important part of daily functions, it is also "an expressive, communicative system which reflects relationships within social groups such as families as well as people's attitudes to their bodies in terms of what is or is not regarded as acceptable/unacceptable and dangerous/not dangerous" (13). In *Father and Son*, the specific foods that characters eat are as important as the relationships that are made or broken as the result of sharing a meal. Certainly, Larry Brown uses food in the novel to create believable characters and realistic settings, but McGee informs readers that

the portrayal of meals plays a more important role than merely reproducing reality; because eating is important to us socially, emotionally, psychologically,

and erotically, the fictional depiction of meals implies a rich potential for various levels of meaning. . . . Moreover, meals are potent conveyers of larger social and economic issues arising both within the text itself and in the larger historical context in which the work of art was produced. (4)

While McGee's text does not focus on Brown's work or even Southern, twentieth-century novels in general, her ideas can be used to understand the significance of dining in his works, particularly *Father and Son*. The protagonists battle the antagonist over a meal, but most often, at the dinner table emotional stability, even safety, is established. The cooking and eating in *Father and Son* also provide a means for developing, renewing, and even on the other side, destroying, relationships.

CHAPTER 2

MEALS AND MORALS: ANALYZING LARRY BROWN'S CHARACTERS IN *FATHER AND SON* THROUGH A DISCOURSE ON DINING

Many of Brown's characters are rootless and separated from the land, forcing them to find sustenance from processed and purchased foods. While some of the women in *Father and Son* provide meals for their loved ones from their own gardens, they are certainly the exception. It is these women, namely Jewel and Mary, who are connected to the Old South way of life, a way of life that puts family and connection to the land before all else. The juxtaposition of homegrown and processed foods is best seen in *Father and Son*. The novel provides the best of both kinds: the world of peeled and sliced tomatoes from the garden and homemade spaghetti sauce, contrasted with a life saturated with greasy hamburgers and alcohol. The specific kinds of food and drink and whether or not they are wholesome or poisonous are accurate indicators for each individual's moral fiber and priorities. For Jewel, Mary, and Bobby, nutritious food prepared in the home suggests their lives involve moral choices and hard work. Balancing their goodness with poison is the character Glen. His alcoholism and gluttonous consumption of processed food provide readers with a physical manifestation of his internal corruption. Finally, the dynamic character of Virgil embodies the equally realistic gray area of the novel. Virgil has admirable and detestable qualities, eating both wholesome and poisonous foods.

In the novel's first scene the dining experience is introduced: "The linoleum of the counter was so worn it had no pattern. They could see hamburger patties sizzling on the grill behind the register. The room smelled of smoke, onions, [and] grease" (3). The book begins with

two brothers returning to their hometown and visiting the local cafe, Winter's. Randolph, commonly called "Puppy," has brought his brother Glen home from the penitentiary, and Glen insists on going to get something to eat. Glen's longtime girlfriend, Jewel, works at the small diner, and she is surprised to see them. The interaction between Glen and Jewel is tense, and forebodingly, as Glen leaves with Puppy toting a sack of burgers, "A small cloud of smoke [wafts] up from the grill, spreading out along the ceiling, loud sizzling and grease burning" (5). Glen's choice of greasy burgers is not at first recognized as an indicator for his maleficent character. The cafe is a gathering place for locals and Jewel's place of employment. Nonetheless, as readers continue and are able to recognize that Jewel does not thrive in the unhealthy world where she works, the smoke's ominous wafting presents itself as a warning signal.

Jewel's job there allows her to take care of herself and her small boy, David, Glen's son. Glen has never acknowledged his son, and one can safely assume that he has never supported Jewel or David financially. Food for Jewel is her livelihood; but more importantly, at home, Jewel tends to a yard that is "small and neat with flowers and a vegetable garden, tomatoes, some corn, [and] a few clean rows of purple hull peas" (91). Although this description is short, the fertility of the garden and its careful tending suggests that Jewel is self-sufficient and morally upright. In fact, despite her having had a child out of wedlock, this description of her suggests her essential decency. It makes her more realistic; she is a good woman, simply one who has made mistakes. It is also significant that this description of Jewel's land comes after a troubling night spent with Glen. During the night, Glen decides that he wants to leave, but Jewel wants him to meet David. Jewel is distressed at his refusal to have anything to do with the boy: "She hadn't slept well after Glen left and four o'clock in the morning found her at the stove in her robe, frying chicken. What remained of it was lying on a plate now over a cold burner" (91).

Jewel uses food here for comfort. It is a distraction. She has tried to care for Glen, but he rejects her love, though not her bed. Glen's consumption of Jewel's body to fulfill his sexual hunger does not satisfy Jewel. Jewel's longing for a proper and loving union is evidenced in her need to cook in the middle of the night. As Carole M. Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan explain in *Food and Gender: Identity and Power*, "[m]en's and women's attitudes about their bodies, the legitimacy of their appetites, and the importance of their food work reveal whether their self-concept is validating or denigrating" (2). Both Jewel and Glen take action; the difference is that she uses food for reinforcing her love for others while he uses food for destruction. She knows that this relationship is not enough. Instead of becoming angry or depressed, Jewel chooses to be productive. Her need to cook rather than eat, as is the stereotypical action of a lonely or depressed woman who wakes in the middle of the night, supports Caroline Walker Bynum's argument that

[The] traditional association of women with food preparation *rather than* food consumption helps us to understand certain aspects of the religious significance of food. To prepare food is to control food. Moreover, food is not merely *a* resource that women control; it is *the* resource that women control—both for themselves and for others. (191)

Jewel's life has been turned upside down by Glen, again. She feels that things are out of her control, and her inability to connect to Glen emotionally and his rejection of David, leaves her feeling powerless and sad. Through cooking, Jewel is able to regain some sense of normalcy, for cooking is a source of validation and productivity. The chicken she fries will feed her and David later that day, so she devotes her rejected love to her son.

Another man appears at Jewel's house that afternoon and gratefully accepts all that she offers him. This man, the sheriff Bobby, has been a good friend to Jewel and to David. He genuinely cares for them both. This not-so-secret illegitimate brother to Glen and Puppy was raised by his mother and finds himself in love with Jewel. Bobby has stopped by to check on Jewel, knowing that Glen has returned, and she sends Bobby to sit on the porch. Up to this point in the novel, the relationship between Bobby and Jewel has remained platonic, but the scene that follows is pivotal. Jewel chooses to feed him. This is significant because "Men and women use food and food metaphors to achieve the most intimate union as witnessed through language that equates eating with having sexual relations and through practices that equate the exchange of food with sexual intimacy" (Counihan and Kaplan 7). So, while no sexual appetites have been discussed or met, the intimacy that Jewel and Bobby share through food far surpasses the purely carnal sex that Glen desires. Jewel leaves Bobby on the porch and enters the kitchen where,

She got a plate from the safe and put three pieces of chicken on it. There was potato salad in the Frigidaire and she scooped a round clump of it and put it next to the chicken. Plump red tomatoes were on the windowsill and she peeled one over the garbage can with her little paring knife. Three thick slices slid onto the plate from her dripping fingers. She poured a big glass of milk and salted the tomatoes lightly, then got him a fork and a cloth napkin and pushed the door open with her hip. (94)

The thoughtful construction of this plate shows that Jewel cares for Bobby. Brown's diction in this passage is both realistic and sensuous. The portions are generous, and the meal that she provides is healthy and satisfying. It is safe to assume that the tomatoes are from her garden, and Jewel takes the extra time to peel them for Bobby. These bright red beauties are the epitome of

fertility and productiveness. She has effectively used her paring knife, an important tool for gardeners and home cooks. The red juice of the tomato washes Jewel's hands clean from the tainted poison of Glen. She presents her love offering to Bobby, one who deserves to be loved, and this is the beginning of a new, and more intimate, relationship. While Jewel needs Bobby's support, she also needs his protection. As a mother, she must think of David, and Bobby mirrors her feelings. He wants to protect them both. In direct contrast to Glen's drink of choice, Jewel brings Bobby a glass of milk with his meal. The purity of Bobby and Jewel's intentions is established in this scene. The milk is particularly interesting because while other beverages are repeatedly mentioned throughout the novel, including sweet tea, Coke, beer, and other stronger liquors, this is the only time a character drinks milk. Bobby is the character with whom readers sympathize; he is the good guy. It is only fitting that even in the small things of his personal life, he makes wholesome choices. The nature of the small things suggests a pattern of action for the big ones.

In contrast with Bobby and Jewel's healthy relationship and respect for one another, Glen's rejection of David, and consequently his rejection of Jewel, shows his internal disconnection with the parent/child relationship. Just as he chooses to alienate himself from Virgil, his own father, Glen rejects the chance to build a relationship with David. It could have been Glen who shares the meal with Jewel instead of Bobby, but he chooses to reject what is good. His difficulty with making the right choice stems from an unhealthy bond with his mother, Emma. It is no coincidence that two of the mother figures are named such that "Ma" is present in the spelling. *Emma* and *Mary* are foils for what could be considered the worst and best mothers. It is also important to note that Emma's name can spell both "Ma" and "Me." Her selfishness and hate for Virgil, embodied in her name, have poisoned her maternal milk. Although Emma died

while Glen was in prison and remained married to Virgil until death, the poison of her hate for Virgil and the illicit affair he had with Bobby's mother Mary has tainted Glen. Throughout the novel, Glen's memories of childhood resurface, particularly when he visits his boyhood home where Virgil still lives:

[Glen] was thinking of the days he had worked in this garden with his mother, of wandering its rows of tomatoes with a jar in his hand for the worms that crawled over the young green globes. . . . She would send him every other day to cut the okra with a small dull paring knife. . . . wet foggy mornings clambering up and down the muddy banks with his father, the catfish breaking the surface and gasping for water on the ends of their lines. . . . And the fish fry that weekend, his mother cooking in the kitchen and their cousins and uncles drinking beer with his father at the table. Old voices and old times gone by and the memories of them like faded photos on a screen. (25)

This is Glen's only memory where the land and its produce evoke positive feelings about both Virgil and Emma. Notably, the tomatoes, while full of life and potential with greenness, are already crawling with pests that must be eliminated, as opposed to the perfection of the tomatoes that Jewel shares with Bobby. Nonetheless, in this memory, young Glen helps to protect the fruit and tends the land, remembering his own mother's teachings and using her paring knife. Glen has a chance to regain these positive feelings, has a chance to redeem himself and return to the healthy way of living and thinking, but he allows these good memories to fade. Instead, only a few pages later, Glen thinks of the same time period in his life, and it paints a different picture:

[Down at the town square, a] few produce vendors were still doing business. On Saturdays they sold vegetables from the back ends of their trucks, the vehicles

nosed into the high sidewalks and little roofs of wood and tin built over them to shade their goods from the sun, big watermelons and bushel baskets of purple hull peas and yellow squash, bright red tomatoes. At one time that was his lot, too, rising early with his mother to go out to the truck patch and pick the produce from vines still wet with dew, loading them into the truck and getting to the square to set up and hang the scales and lay out the paper sacks, sitting there all day to earn money that his father would drink up that weekend. (29)

The fertility of the land in this passage with the beautiful produce is tainted with the negative remembrance of Virgil. Rather than focusing on the bright colors of the green watermelons, purple peas, yellow squash, and red tomatoes or focusing on the abundance of the produce, everything that Glen remembers from this point on in the book returns to his hate for Virgil. The purity of the fruit, still laden with dew, presents the chance for hope, but for Glen, it is irrecoverable. Reasonably, for a struggling mother with several small boys (including Glen), who works hard to make ends meet by selling vegetables in the square with other vendors, it would be traumatic to see the money squandered by an alcoholic father, but Emma never let Glen forget or forgive his father. Glen's perception of his father is drastically different from the view that readers get from observing Virgil and his interaction with every other character in the novel. The trait that Glen takes from his father is the one thing that he always despised the most: alcoholism.

Glen repeatedly blames Virgil for his alcoholic behavior, but this same behavior destroys Glen's own life and helps him ruin others'. Food for Glen is not a source of comfort, and rarely is it a true source of nourishment. Instead, Glen lives by what Joanne Finkelstein calls "the modern bourgeois ethic that these sensations of need or desire or 'hunger' must be satisfied as soon as possible . . . Having defined a need means that one has made a choice and that one is,

then, willing to act in ways that bring about the quietening (at least, momentarily) of that hunger” (117). Glen’s actions suggest that he is solely focused on his own hungers and care little, if at all, about how fulfilling those desires will affect those around him.

Instead, food becomes a means for Glen to pass on Emma’s poison to others. On the first day in town, at the café when Glen is reunited with Jewel, he sees a young girl whom he finds attractive. Barely legal, Erlene Price is all that Glen cannot and should not have. This is precisely why he decides to make her his victim. It is significant that Glen sees her amid the smoke and grease. The interaction is doomed from the start. Later in the novel, as he drives through the square, he picks her up and offers to take her to dinner. Erlene, looking for excitement and finding it in this dangerous man, goes willingly to a “rib shack” about five miles out of town (112). The seedy restaurant is the perfect place to get Erlene drunk on a few cheap beers. He watches Erlene’s laugh get louder and her smile get brighter and brighter, while he literally licks his chops, finishing off the messy ribs. This is yet another greasy meal with poisonous alcohol that directly contrasts the meal that Glen unknowingly rejected at home with Jewel. Not much later, Glen takes Erlene to his dilapidated house and rapes her. He has devoured her purity, and his appetite for destruction is satisfied only for a time. The poisoning is complete. While it begins with beer, the food does nothing to nourish poor Erlene. Instead, she has lost something that she can never regain; Glen’s number of victims rises yet again. Instead of gaining strength from wholesome foods, Glen chooses to feast on poisoning others.

Unlike Bobby, who pleasantly and gratefully accepts the wholesome milk that Jewel offers, Glen’s drink of choice is always alcohol. He is usually seen toting a bottle. In fact, still holding a beer, Glen has gotten into a car wreck and wakes to find himself in the car, now wrapped around a tree: “The world did not love him and he knew it. He sucked at the bottle and

then [being empty] laid it down” (162). Glen’s maternal milk is a poison. More than that, it is clear that the milk has run dry. He is the son whose needs have become unquenchable. There is no nourishment that will help him now. Glen is too far gone. The chance for redemption has been passed up too many times. Because Glen’s own childhood, and life for that matter, has been ruined, he sees no reason to protect the lives of others. Instead, his mission in life is to create pain and destruction all around him, everywhere he goes.

Struggling with alcohol himself, Brown is able to create a realistic character in Glen, using first-hand knowledge about the addictive and destructive qualities of such poison. Indeed, Brown prides himself on creating believable men and women in his work. In a 1992 interview with Dorie LaRue, he states

I finally found out that [senseless violence and people hating and hurting one another] were not the right things to write about, that the things to write about were the truths of the human heart and people and how they reacted and how they try to do the best they can and get along. And I think that’s what all good literature is about, about people struggling through problems and trying to do the right thing. But a lot of times my characters don’t succeed. And they know right from wrong, but they’re not always able to overcome their obstacles. (Watson 52)

Therefore, Glen cannot be entirely evil, though he comes close. There is only one important scene in the novel that presents him in a positive light. Feeling the need to “lay low” after his encounter with Erline, and having killed a man his first night home, Glen goes to the country to visit his friend Roy. A pastor turned caretaker, Roy lives in solitude on a beautiful place near the water. When Glen arrives, Roy is cooking “split chickens on a grill” and invites his old friend to join him (219). Roy is “more than twice [Glen's] age,” and when Glen arrives, he finds Roy

sitting on the front porch, just like Virgil. Instead of presenting a false offering of beer as he does with Virgil where “he walked across the yard and set it on the porch at his father’s feet,” Glen simply presents himself to Roy (24). Virgil has wished for this kind of reconciliation for the two of them, and instead of allowing his own father a place of importance in his life, Glen turns to this sort of foster father. Glen sees Roy as one who could be his saving grace, someone who sees the potential for good in Glen. The two men go fishing together, and readers can't help but be reminded of Glen's first fishing experiences with Virgil. While fishing, Glen catches an enormous catfish and chooses to let it go. This is the most humane thing that he does during the course of the novel, and yet, afterwards, Glen makes the conscious choice to return to doing terrible things. He knows that he might have a chance at a good life if he lives in solitude like Roy, but he cannot stop himself. He is drawn to evil and does not want to escape it. He has filled his body with unhealthy products, and now, he only craves more.

Readers quickly become skeptical of Glen: his motives, his perceptions, and his actions. Virgil may not have been a good father during Glen's childhood, but he is not an innately evil person, despite the way Glen feels. Similarly, Glen's hate and disgust for Mary are soon recognized by readers for their bias and invalidity. He sees her as a conniving, whorish, home wrecker, but much as with Jewel, Mary's interaction with food shows her tendency for love and compassion. Her maternal nature contradicts Glen's perceptions. She does not follow the road of destruction. Instead, she is the epitome of love, devotion, and hard work. These traits are established through her interaction with food.

The first encounter readers have with Mary takes place at the local store where she has stopped to pick up “some milk and some bread” before heading home (77). Bobby lives at home with Mary, and Mary, like Jewel, is associated with milk. Bearing the name of the mother of

God, she is the ideal mother. Loving and respectful, the relationship between Mary and Bobby is pure. It is through her food that she shows love for the most important people in her life. As she exits the store, she sees Virgil sitting on the steps. She warmly greets him, and although it has been many years, the two still have feelings for one another. Mary kindly asks Virgil whether he would like to come over for Sunday dinner to eat fried chicken and chocolate pie (77). Virgil wants to join her, but he worries about her reputation and declines the offer, choosing instead to munch on his gas station purchases: a stale Moon Pie, a bag of chips, and a Coke. So Mary goes home to fix a meal for herself and a plate of food that will sit in the fridge for Bobby. The parallel here between father and son, Virgil and Glen, is strikingly different. Glen rejects Jewel and the chance for proper nourishment because he is too self-centered and disconnected to understand what he really needs. Virgil desires to make the connection with his beloved, wants to partake of the wholesome food prepared with love, but out of respect for her, he rejects the offer. Mary makes meals for Bobby regularly, and she longs to care for Virgil if he will only let her. Virgil knows that his dinner will “probably be something out of a can. That was about all he had, beef stew or soup. He guessed he could make some tuna fish. All evening he’d thought about that fried chicken and the one who fried it” (132).

While the specific foods that characters in *Father and Son* eat suggest something about an individual character’s traits and priorities, the atmosphere surrounding one’s meals accurately depicts how that character interacts with others. During the course of the novel, Bobby rescues two neglected children, a boy and a girl who are about three or four years old. As he approaches them, “he could see their fear so he moved slowly . . . He knelt next to them. There were tin cans in the rubble of the fire, a crude circle of rocks with the blackened stubs of sticks, the skeletons of small charred fish and dusted with ash” (179-180). At home, Mary is horrified and broken-

hearted to see the terrible effects of physical and emotional abuse on the children. They are literally starving, and Bobby recognizes it right away: “All [the boy’s] ribs showed [and his] belly was swollen” (180). Their small bodies are nearly deformed from old injuries that were never addressed. With a bright smile and a loving heart, Mary cleans them up and sits them at her table. She takes these desperate children to the heart of her own world, and she treats them as she would treat her own son. Mary chooses not pawn the children off to someone else. It is a testament to her character that Bobby knows what his mother’s reaction will be, and that knowledge is exactly what leads him to bring them home rather than turning them over to social services immediately. He knows that they need a safe place, a loving place. At the table, “They acted as if they were starving, and he guessed they were. He sat at the table with them and watched them clean up two places apiece of hamburger patties and vegetables” (181). Again, the food that Mary presents is wholesome and abundant. These small children are starved for food and for love. Mary knows that by loving them through her cooking, they will be able to understand her honest motives. These children have been brought up with abusive and selfish parents, ones that could care less about the boy and girl. Mary first meets the physical needs, and she knows that by doing so, she will have a chance to soothe the emotional needs, if only for a short time.

For Mary and Bobby, as well as any of their guests, inviting others to the table is a sort of sacred act. There is something magical about sharing a meal, something deeper and mysterious that connects the individuals. Mary’s heart goes out to the children; she tries to get Bobby to let them stay the night so that she can “fix their breakfast in the morning” (182). Even as the children snuggle up to Bobby in the patrol car, their bellies stuffed with food, Mary tells the children, “Y’all come back and see me sometime” (183). She honestly opens her home and her

heart to others in need. The outward expression of her love is seen most vividly around the table. Because Mary and Bobby generously provide for children who are not part of their own family, one can more fully understand that they eagerly care for those with whom they are more closely connected.

Eventually, Mary takes the initiative and decides that she will take care of the stubborn Virgil even if he won't accept her invitation. After he gets hurt in a minor fight, Mary visits him at home and offers herself to him. The meal, while not as healthy as the one that Jewel presents to Bobby, is healthier than the meals from a can that usually make up Virgil's dinner. Mary brings Virgil what she knows will please him. He loves her still and readily welcomes her. Later that afternoon, Mary "brought him a thick ham sandwich and another beer" (229). It pleases her to show her love for him. The two lovers are finally reunited as they should have been years before. It would have saved Mary and Virgil, as well as the children involved, a good deal of heartache. The proper union is now aligned. Contented with their relationship, Mary returns home. She goes out back to her well-tended garden. Much like Jewel's, only larger and more fruitful, Mary's garden shows that she is in touch with the land, and this garden gives her a sense of self-reliance and independence. It connects her to the soil and to the community, to Bobby and to Virgil.

[Mary] got her little sharp paring knife and stepped into the muddy rows of the garden to gather some okra and tomatoes. She put the okra in her pockets but she didn't get all of it. . . . Her pockets were bulging with it and there was still half a row to cut. She picked all the tomatoes she could hold in her arms and unloaded it all on the kitchen counter. While she was in there she got to thinking that Virgil might want something good for lunch, so she started making some spaghetti sauce

in a skillet and left [it] on low to simmer. . . . She knew he didn't eat right half the time and wouldn't unless he had somebody to take care of him. (286)

With love, Mary cuts and prepares the tomatoes for Virgil, as Jewel does for Bobby. It is through cooking that Mary is able to show her love and concern for him. In this scene, the tomatoes, ripe and abundant, are accompanied by okra. The bright green color of fresh okra creates a vivid picture of fertility. Indeed, Mary's pockets overflow, like a cornucopia, with produce, and she has not even harvested all that the land has to offer. Bobby warned her that she was planting too much, but knowing Mary, she will give it away to someone in need.

The greenness of the okra also suggests growth, perhaps even rebirth. The renewal of her relationship with Virgil presents the opportunity for a happiness that has been long denied. It is this renewal and proper alignment of relationships, including the relationship between Jewel and Bobby that has been solidified by the end of the novel, that pushes Glen over the edge. He cannot and will not allow their happiness to continue. He believes that it is his duty to enact revenge on them all.

Mary is his target of choice; she is the one who connects Glen to Bobby, Virgil to Bobby, and because Mary brought Bobby into the world, Bobby and Jewel. He knows that by hurting Mary he will destroy his father's life, avenge his mother's anger, cripple Bobby, and frighten Jewel. When Mary goes back outside to finish cutting the okra, Glen attacks her, drags her to the barn, lays her on a bed of hay, and binds her. He returns to the house, knowing he must hide Mary's car, and finds "a skillet full of meat and sauce . . . smoking on the stove" (306). The burning food and smoke signal that Glen will destroy all that is good; he ruins the food that is intended to bring joy and peace, love and contentment. Just when Glen has hidden the car in the nearby woods and returns to the barn to torture Mary, Bobby comes home:

The first thing he noticed was the pan of spaghetti sauce on the stove. He frowned a little when he walked over to it. The stove was cold. He stuck his finger in the sauce and it was cold, too, but burned around the edges It wasn't like her to forget about something on the stove and let it burn He began to be just a little worried about her. (313)

Bobby ignores this clue that something is truly wrong, but his concern does show that Mary is careful and takes pride in preparing her food. He knows that food is an important means of communication and source of pride for her, and she uses the harvest wisely. But it is because Mary has a garden and because she tends it so well that she is saved from a brutal death at Glen's hands. While the sauce on the stove could have led to her safety, it does not. As it turns out, it is her own ingenuity that saves her. Glen taunts, burns, and rapes Mary, but she eventually convinces him to untie her. Knowing that once his torture is over he will kill her, she is able to slip her freed hand into her pocket where her sharp little paring knife is, and she plunges the small blade deep into his neck. Without having spent many hours in the garden and in the kitchen, tending to her land and her family, unwilling to let produce go to waste (and thereby leaving the extra okra on the vine and the knife in the kitchen), Mary's fate would have surely been death. Thankfully, she escapes and goes to the house to find Bobby, her little knife embedded in her attacker. It is because Mary carefully tends to her crops, respects the land and the harvest, that she is saved. Having Mary armed with a knife is certainly a realistic element in the novel's context. However, it is interesting to consider that knives, in the traditional view, are 'male' weapons. They are wielded aggressively, and they pertain to the masculine realm of fighting, war, and the hunt; they are essential for carving meat. From a symbolic point of view, knives are phallic" (Visser *Rituals* 277). The ultra-feminine character Mary wields the small but

important knife in this scene. The knife is one intended for vegetable preparation, not even for the more masculine foods such as meat. She wields an appropriate weapon that ultimately suggests her power is entirely feminine. Glen has invaded her garden, her home, her kitchen, and finally, her body. With her sacred spaces having been violated, Mary's knife positions her as an equal against the archetypal, evil, powerful, sexually-charged, and hateful man. Her small knife takes him from his position of power.

The paring knife that Mary uses to make the sauce releases the tomatoes' red juices, like the dripping slices Jewel places on Bobby's plate; the juices cover her hands. Instead of washing the poison of Glen away, it seems that Mary's sauce, while attempting to do the same, draws the predator even closer. Her small, everyday paring knife saves her life, and she finds herself covered in Glen's blood. This blood must be shed. He is past the point of redemption, and in order for David, Jewel, Bobby, Mary, or Virgil to have a chance at happiness, Glen must die. It is fitting that Mary, bearing the name of the mother of Christ, is associated with salvation. Rather than pure blood being shed to cover sins, the sinner pays for his own sins, having rejected salvation. The two earlier references to paring knives and the red tomato juice have foreshadowed Glen's fall. As Pilate washes his hands before turning Jesus over to the crowd and denouncing his involvement in the death of an innocent man, Jewel washes her hands of Glen by cutting the tomato for Bobby, and Mary disregards Glen's (and through him Emma's) hate and decides to follow love, preparing the blood red sauce. In this analogy, Glen, rather than being the savior, is the destroyer, and, in the end, he is destroyed by his own evil deeds.

Food is not restricted to only the primary characters. Puppy and his wife have a strained relationship, just like the other men in his family including his father and his brothers, Glen and Bobby. He is certainly not the ideal husband even though readers can tell that Puppy wants to do

right by his family and loves his wife, Lucinda. He struggles to make ends meet, and having lost his job, his home life becomes even more strained. Thankfully, this essentially good brother and son, also is figured as a good husband. He wants to make up with Trudy, and he asks her to dinner. She warmly replies, “Why don’t you come on in the house and take you a long hot bath and I’ll fry you some porch chops. I put some beer in the freezer for you” (344). Readers are left with the feeling that Puppy and Lucinda will continue to be happy when she offers herself, her love, her food, and her domestic space instead of insisting on being taken out to eat somewhere away from the home-place. For, “[offering] food, after all, is offering love. Cooking, at its best, is an act of love as well as seduction” (Crumpacker 47). One can safely assume that the love that is shared through the kitchen will also be shared in the more intimate spaces of the house, truly making their house a home.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the interaction between characters in *Father and Son* through the consumption and preparation of food. Just as eating, cooking, and gathering food plays a major role in this novel, the trend continues in the other major Brown novels, as well as in a variety of his shorter fiction. The book length project will also analyze *Joe* (1991), *Fay* (2000), *The Rabbit Factory* (2003), and *A Miracle of Catfish* (Brown's newest novel, posthumously published in March 2007). *Father and Son* has provided the best place for beginning this larger study because it prizes the family unit and its characters are still in many ways connected to the land. The lines between those who are primarily good and overtly evil are not as blurred. Moreover, the food in *Father and Son*, while not always nutritious, is primarily available for consumption. That is not always the case in other works.

The absence of food in *Joe* gives readers an access point into the world of Gary Jones and his family, simply because the world of the novel is so far removed from the everyday world of most readers. Longing for sustenance often fills Gary's thoughts: "All his life he'd been hungry, all his life waiting behind the old man for whatever scraps of food were left, watching the quick champ of his stubbed jaws, the food disappearing rapidly from the plate, the lowered eyes of his mother as if she hadn't noticed that something was wrong" (331-32). Gary's most basic needs go unfulfilled; the small amount of food that his family obtains is taken from him. Sidney W. Mintz in *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom* provides an explanation that can be applied for why the absence of food in *Joe* might resonate more deeply with readers than they might think at first:

Underlying the rich symbolic universe that food and eating always represent, . . . there is the animal reality of our living existence. It is not separate from our humanity, but is an integral part of it. Only because most of us eat plentifully and frequently and have not known intense hunger may we sometimes too easily forget the astonishing, at times even terrifying, importance of food and eating. That becomes clear as soon as we give the subject of food a moment's serious thought. (Mintz 4)

The hunger that Gary Jones and his family feel on a day-to-day basis epitomizes that “astonishing, at times even terrifying, importance of food.” The survival instincts and animal-like hunger of man are both wholly embodied by and entirely rejected by the central characters of *Joe*. In this analysis, it also will be important to discuss Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how that hierarchy both functions and is rejected in the novel's major plot scheme. For example, the antagonist Wade Jones, Gary's father, is only concerned with meeting his own needs, satisfying his own hunger at any cost, even if it means stealing resources from his son. Readers are connected with the pivotal information for drawing this conclusion in the opening sections of the novel: “There were five of the little fish in the can. She put one in each plate. The old man immediately reached over with grimed fingers and picked up a sardine daintily and bit it once and bit it twice and it was gone. ‘That was his,’ she said. ‘He ort to been down here,’ he said, chewing, wiping” (8-9). Although the sardine is not enough to fill even the belly of a small child, the fish is a precious part of the Joneses' dinner, and yet Wade knowingly takes more than his share, leaving Gary to go hungrier than the rest. In contrast, Gary willingly shares food with his family, particularly his little sister Dorothy, because he loves her. Gary awakens in the middle of the night, hungry as always, but he doesn't think only of himself.

He took another package of the cakes out and went to her and eyed the old man in deep hibernation on the bed of leaves he'd made. . . . He shook his little sister until she woke. She seemed startled to see him there. With a finger to his lips for caution he showed her what he had in his hand and then slipped the little cellophane package beneath her minnow net and stood up and made motions with his hands. She stared dully at him, uncomprehending. But when he went out the door, she was sitting up and tearing softly at the plastic with her fingers, a silent child. (108)

By sharing with Dorothy and by being willing to chance getting into trouble for eating food not measured out to them, Gary shows that he values family, and he selflessly puts the needs of others before his own. Later in the novel, Gary has been given some much needed groceries by Joe because the weather has prevented them from working. The young man is hungry, and while carrying several bags down the long dirt road toward home, Gary realizes that “The food was in his hands and no one would know if he stopped now and opened something and ate. But there was a black wall of nothing that somewhere held his family, and his home, and it was that he headed into with ever quickening steps.” (176) This scene shows Gary’s moral imperative. His unwillingness to satisfy selfish desires proves that he values greater things than himself. Family, generosity, and caring for one’s own mean more than a temporary satisfaction could bring him.

The most interesting and complex person to study is the title character. Joe, much like Virgil in *Father and Son*, consumes both healthy and processed foods, but Joe rarely has a home-cooked meal. He falls into the gray area of the real world. He is between the lightness of Gary’s actions and pure thoughts and the inky blackness of Wade’s moral depravity. The first major description of Joe includes a visual painting of his dwelling: “The house felt empty now, always.

. . . There was a pack of hot dogs and a bag of buns and a dozen eggs and two six-packs of Bud in one sack and he put it all in the icebox” (25). Joe’s home lacks his family, both wife and children as well as nutritious foods. Yes, he has some eggs, but the other items are either processed or alcoholic, both of which are a sort of poison for the body. It is clear that Joe doesn’t usually eat at home; instead, he chooses to separate himself from his shattered home and entertains a number of women at various restaurants. The distance of the character from his home and his own table suggests a disconnection from the more important matters in his life. In a 1995 interview with Kay Bonetti, Brown states,

I made [Joe’s] life the way it is to give the reader a sense early on of the brokenness of his life, and the amount of time he spends alone in that house listening to the tape player over and over again, watching junk on television that he doesn’t even like, eating poorly, drinking way too much, smoking all these cigarettes, and all the carousing that he sometimes does. (Watson 90)

Although “eating poorly” is not first on the list, Brown does not forget to mention it as a significant indicator for Joe’s life and as a means for creating a believable character. The idea that “convenience foods are often constructed as a threat to the family meal, and hence, the family itself” plays a large role in analyzing Joe’s broken life (Ashley et al. 133).

The novel *Joe* can hardly be discussed without analyzing its sister book *Fay*. Fay Jones, Gary’s sister, leaves the rural landscape and life of hunger that the family must endure in *Joe*. She is determined to put the life of starvation behind her. She thinks to herself that the “South seemed best. She had vague ideas about a coast. . . . She imagined groves of citrus trees and sunny days picking the fruit and a tiny house where she would have her own groceries She imaged one solid place where she could stay and maybe she could somehow send for the others

then” (9). Fay doesn’t imagine the coast because of beautiful beaches, the ocean, the people, or the weather. For her, the coast means satisfying a physical and emotional hunger, the need for food and for a stable home. Unfortunately, along the way, food and sex become synonymous for her instead. Her luscious body gives Fay the chance she needs to find someone to care for her and that care begins with a dinner date. The issues of dining at home versus meals purchased in restaurants sets up a major tension in the novel, similar to the trend that connects Joe to food.

Bob Ashley, et al., in *Food and Cultural Studies* suggest that

‘Home-cooked’ meals are seen as imbued with the warmth, intimacy and personal touch which are seen as markers of the private sphere and in opposition to foods which are the products of a public, industrialized and anonymous system of food production. It is for this reason that commercially produced foods often seek to add value to their foods by associating them with “home.” (124)

All of the meals that Fay eats in restaurants are simply poor substitutes for the “home-cooked” meals for which she longs. The love, concern, and real connection that Fay finds in Sam are centered around the home that they create and more specifically the food they share.

Before Amy died she’d shown Fay where everything was in the kitchen, all the utensils and knives and pots and pans and graters and cutting boards, and where she kept all the food. She found the bag of red potatoes and pulled out four big ones and set them up on the counter to wash and peel and slice up later. She set out the flour and two bowls. Fried chicken and mashed potatoes and gravy. She thought she’d open a can of green beans from the cabinet and make some biscuits. That was one thing she had learned from her mother, how to make biscuits. She might not have been very good for anything else much, like protecting them from

their father, but she knew how to make biscuits. She'd seen her make them out in the woods, out of canned milk and lard and flour, and bake them in an old dutch oven in the coals of a fire. (130)

Fay prepares this meal for Sam on his first day back to work. She desperately wants to make it perfect, wants to be the "wife" he needs. She knows that by cooking for Sam, she can give him her love. The meal itself is reminiscent of the one that Jewel prepares for Bobby, and this one is equally critical. Just as Fay wants to care for Sam, he meets all of her most basic needs. As those needs are met, Fay is able to see real love and to, more importantly, give real love. When Fay has fled to the coast, her mind is filled with memories of the home they made together:

It was the best breakfast she'd ever had aside from ones that Sam had made for her sometimes. He would whip up three eggs in a bowl and pour them in a greased skillet and dump in chopped ham and cheese and green peppers and make a thick omlette that would have her stuffed by the time she finished it. It was hard to think of him and not start crying but she kept sitting there and eating. Trying to calm down. She had to take care of herself now and find a job and she had to get to a doctor somewhere and she had to find a place to live. She ate her breakfast slowly and enjoyed it and even after she'd finished she kept sitting there and drinking coffee. (162)

This meal is particularly significant to Fay for a number of reasons. Unlike most of the other men in her life, including her own father, Sam deeply cares about Fay's needs and desires. He wants to satisfy her. She not only has enough to eat at his breakfast table; she is "stuffed." There have never been times in Fay's life when she had more than what was absolutely necessary to survive. She has been forced to leave a life of abundance for one of hunger again.

In contrast with Sam, the other men that meet Fay, and in some ways fall victim to her, do not truly attempt to build loving or meaningful relationships. Both Chris and Aaron use food as a means of seduction. It is no surprise then that aphrodisiacs like oysters play a major role in the latter part of the novel.

[Chris] slid [an oyster out of its shell], swirled it around in the sauce, popped it into his mouth and bit into a cracker. . . . She could tell he was really enjoying them but she didn't see how. To her they looked like some guts or something.

. . .

"I don't think I can eat that," she said. "It looks like a worm or somethin."

"A *worm*?"

"Or somethin. It don't look like nothing fit to eat." (189)

The graphic description of Chris's meal and his consumption of it directly contrast with the peaceful and tender meals that Fay shares with Sam. Chris's actions in this scene focus on his teeth and mouth. The description is not focused on the beauty of the food but the repulsive qualities that only make Chris's chewing even more revolting. Fay has had to eat things that she did not like before in order to survive, but this meal is just too much. The interaction around the table in this scene is the first hint that Fay's relationship with Chris is rapidly going wrong.

Fay's third significant relationship is with Aaron. Aaron is not idolized by the novel like Sam, nor demonized like Chris, although Chris and Sam are entirely realistic characters. Aaron, at times, takes Fay out to dinners that she enjoys, and he seems to want her to be content. He even gives her a place to stay when she has nowhere else to go. The trouble with his mother's "bed-and-breakfast" is that it is only a poor imitation of the unspoiled home that Fay creates with

Sam. There is a kitchen full of breakfast in the mornings, but Aaron's mother is frequently absent.

when [Fay] got to the kitchen there was nobody there. . . . Beside the toaster a loaf of bread sat, and a handwritten card was propped against it saying HELP YOURSELF. Her plate was piled high when she sat down again at the table on the front porch, a hot cup of coffee beside the plate, her napkin neatly in her lap as Amy had shown her. So much Amy had shown her. (259)

This breakfast is homemade and filling, but Fay eats it alone. She has no part in the preparation, which gave her great joy at Sam's house. Here she only consumes the food given to her. Her hunger is satisfied, but that does nothing for her emotional needs, as suggested by thinking of the home she had with Sam and Amy, despite the fact that she is with another man. The wholesome mother figure is conspicuously absent in this book, but the grief-induced alcoholic, Amy, is probably one of the best maternal substitutes. Additionally, Arlene, Aaron's mother is certainly no wholesome mother figure, as she was once a porn star, a business with which her violent sons are still connected. The empty shell of Arlene's home allows Fay to see that meeting physical needs alone will never be enough.

Brown's emphasis on the importance of food in his works perhaps reaches its height in the *The Rabbit Factory* (2003). Certainly, the most comic of all Brown's larger works, it solidifies all of Brown's major images, including food. If readers were in doubt that food should be considered a controlling element in his fiction, they need only glance at a list of characters from *The Rabbit Factory*: Mr. Hamburger, Merlot, Frank, and Miss Muffet (who, as the nursery rhyme goes, *sat eating* her curds and whey). Moreover, if that evidence is not enough, Mr.

Hamburger owns a unique butchering business. A mobster to the core, Mr. Hamburger uses this business to conveniently dispose of unwanted materials, or people for that matter.

[Domino, Mr. Hamburger's employee] unwrapped the fresh meat from the cooler. Sometimes the lion meat was old beef. Sometimes it was old mutton or pork. He was sure the lions didn't care what it was. He figured they'd eat anything, goat, horse, mule, burro, whatever. This stuff wasn't lion meat and it hadn't been there yesterday but it was so fresh it still had some blood oozing out of it. He guessed maybe Mr. Hamburger had brought it in sometime. This meat was in some strange chunks and didn't really resemble any meat he'd ever seen, but he knew there were plenty of other kinds of meat in the world. (32)

The male-dominated world of Mr. Hamburger is logically associated with the most masculine of all foods, meat. The oozing blood and violence of chopping, cutting, grinding, or devouring the products takes food to a new level in this novel. There are hints along the way that readers want to ignore. The world of *The Rabbit Factory* has moved to a recognizable urban landscape and has too many characters that are sympathetic and realistic for readers not to be drawn into the story, but the hints of a darker underbelly to Memphis and nearby cities take readers to the edge of some horrifying fears, including cannibalism. Brown leaves little to doubt:

After things got quiet, [Domino] went back to the truck. He got hold of the frozen bag of guts. And felt inside it then what felt like a human hand. It felt exactly like a human hand because it had four outspread fingers and a thumb. Then he felt around on what felt like a foot. He could feel some toes. A big toe for sure. And then a . . . head? And just as it hit him what he'd been cutting up in Memphis

earlier in the evening, and what he'd delivered to Mr. Hamburger's house for his big dog to eat (54)

Mr. Hamburger's argument with Frankie, a hired hit man, suddenly becomes dreadfully important. The consumption of unknown processed foods has reached a new height. The humor with which Brown explores cannibalism makes the following scene even worse: "later, she [Miss Muffett, Mr. Hamburger's dog sitter] could go out to the shed in the backyard and get something for supper from one of the coolers. There was probably some fresh hamburger in there since Mr. Hamburger had just been working out there right before he left for Chicago. There was always something to eat out there" (231). Nearly gagging with the realization, readers must follow Miss Muffet as she grills her "hamburger" with onions, sizzling until done and put onto her dinner plate. In this modern dog-eat-dog world, food is used to show that we are consuming one another with our actions.

The plot strand of Mr. Hamburger and his employees is only one of at least four major intersecting threads. Other characters are frequently hungry, and they never hesitate to stuff themselves. For example, Anjalee and Wayne gorge themselves on hotel room service at the Memphis Peabody:

they lay back on satin sheets in the plush Peabody suite . . . eating nachos with melted cheese poured over them and shrimp cocktails and crackers and for her a tossed salad with pepperoni and chopped-up bits of provolone. . . . They got food all over the nice bed. . . . He wondered how much she was going to charge him. He wondered if it would be more or less than what she had charged Frankie, the dumb [s.o.b]. He was a hamburger by now. Or a dogburger." (111-12)

Lenny and Anjalee are removed from a home. The hotel room that they share is only a miserable substitute for a real one. The food they eat is a combination of semi-nutritious fare and junk. The food here is a parallel for their relationship; there is a hope for something better, something healthy, but they are focused on meeting their immediate desires, junk food and lots of it. The spilled food shows a lack of concern about wastefulness and suggests a sort of carnality and dirtiness about their relationship.

Through *Father and Son*, *Joe, Fay*, and *The Rabbit Factory*, Brown explores the spectrum of filial, paternal, maternal, and other relationships, and the medium for fully understanding those relationships is food. As this study has shown, there is more to Brown's works than surface regionalism. Food provides a discourse for understanding the complex familial, filial, and sexual relationships in his works.

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Moral of the story: To be sitting and doing nothing, you must be sitting very, very high up. A turkey was chatting with a bull. "I would love to be able to get to the top of that tree," sighed the turkey, "but I haven't got the energy."Â Beside the young man one couple was sitting and listing all the conversion between father and son. They were little awkward the attitude of 25 years old man behaving like a small child. Suddenly young man again shouted, "Papa see the pond and animals." Alone in the wheel of light at the dining room table, surrounded by an otherwise darkened house, I sat in tears. Finally, I'd succeeded in getting both kids to bed. A relatively new single parent, I had to be both Mommy and Daddy to my two little children. Since this Prologue is written in the first person, the narrator tells us a limited number of things we might not know otherwise, and perhaps things the characters themselves might not want others to know about them. Why is this time of year appropriate for a pilgrimage? Spring is the earliest time without hazardous weather, and spring is Easter time. What kind of information does our narrator, Chaucer, reveal about each pilgrim in turn? The narrator mentions the professions of the pilgrims, their places in society, and their attire. What has the narrator done to convince us, the readers, that The dining halls were open, though at that hour of the morning there were no students, only cafeteria workers and maintenance men eating breakfast before their shifts began. I went upstairs and got myself a cup of coffee and a couple of soft-boiled eggs, which I ate alone at a table near a window in the empty main dining room. Classes started today, Thursday, but my first class with Julian wasn't until the next Monday.Â One was the son of a famous West Coast racket boss and the other was the son of a movie producer. They were, respectively, president and vice-president of the Student Council, offices they utilized principally in order to organize drinking contests, wet-T-shirt competitions, and female mud-wrestling tournaments. The main characters are Frank Ashurst and Megan David. He is a representative of the upper class, a graduate from the university, he is "pale, idealistic", and he has a bent for literature. As an educated person, he loves talking about philosophical matters. The girl they meet is different.Â Two more characters reflecting this contrast are Ashurst's friend Garton and Megan's aunt Mrs. Narracombe. Garton is opposed to Ashurst to some extent (he is "like some primeval beast" and very communicative, while Ashurst is more meditative), but mostly for diversity of characters. He is also well-educated and intellectual and may even seem somewhat haughty.Â Robert was talking through his hat." There is also a symbol in this story â€” the apple tree (the title is not occasional, of course).