**1.**

**Introduction**

I knew, at a very young age, that my grand-uncle Nicholas B. was a Knight of the Legion of Honour and that he had also the Polish Cross for valour, *Virtuti Militari*. The knowledge of these glorious facts inspired in me an admiring veneration; yet it is not that sentiment, strong as it was, which resumes for me the force and the significance of his personality. It is overborne by another and complex impression of awe, compassion and horror. Mr. Nicolas B. remains for me the unfortunate and miserable (but heroic) being who once upon a time had eaten a dog. (*PR* 2008, p.32)

Joseph Conrad recounts this family story, originally told to him by his grandmother, in *A Personal Record* (1912) and, fittingly in a volume which is part-memoir, part-self-mythology. This moment of ‘gastronomical degradation’ (2008, p.32) synthesises a range of ideas ‒ personal, national, and creative ‒ that define its author. Conrad’s great uncle, Nicholas Bobrowski, served under Napoleon as a lieutenant in the French Army having enlisted to fight against France and Poland’s common enemy, Russia.[[1]](#endnote-1) The anecdote describes a moment in the disastrous Russian Campaign of 1812 when, during the retreat from Moscow, starving and lost, having become detached from the main column, Bobrowski and two fellow officers chanced upon a ‘Lithuanian village dog’ (34), which they decapitated, skinned, cooked and devoured. The moment in which this piece of family legend is transmitted is relayed in the present tense to convey both the immediacy and the endurance of the recollection:

A silence in which a small boy shudders and says firmly:

“I could not have eaten that dog.”

And his grandmother remarks with a smile:

“Perhaps you don’t know what it is to be hungry”. (34)

Unsurprisingly, the older Conrad confesses that ‘The childish horror of the deed clings absurdly to the grizzled man’ (35).

What quickly attracts attention, however, is how productive is this anecdote about a meal eaten in desperate circumstances. Not only does it allow the adult Joseph Conrad, a Polish émigré writing novels in English, his third language after Polish and French, to engage with his *szlachta* heritage as Konrad Korzeniowski, but in the process it also transforms this tale of degradation into a triumphant national myth. However offensive must have been the ‘unhealthily obese’ dog, whose ‘skin showed bare patches of an unpleasant character’ (34), to the refined palate and social standing of a member of ‘the B‒‒ family [who] had always been honourably known in a wide countryside for the delicacy of their tastes in the matter of eating and drinking’ (32), Conrad is able to set the claims of inherited honour against the brute reality of the survival instinct to find in the grim tale a patriotic determination to persevere in the cause of Poland:

He had eaten him to appease his hunger, no doubt, but also for the sake of an unappeasable and patriotic desire, in the glow of a great faith that lives still, and in the pursuit of a great illustration kindled like a false beacon by a great man to lead astray the effort of a brave nation.

*Pro patria!*

Looked at in that light it appears a sweet and decorous meal. (35)

In Conrad’s hands the story of Nicholas B. is multi-layered, uniting the human survival instinct to patriotic fervour, the individual to the representative type, and private deprivation to public circumstance. This wealth of connotation extends to Conrad himself, as he goes some way towards identifying with his great uncle’s plight by listing the unusual foods *he* has been driven to eat in a life spent upon the high seas and in foreign climes: ‘I have fed on the emblematical animal, which in the language of the volatile Gauls, is called *la vache enragée*; I have lived on ancient salt junk, I know the taste of shark, of trepan, of snake, of nondescript dishes containing things without a name ‒ but of Lithuanian village dog never!’ (34) The ‘emblematical’ use of food and eating is everywhere in Conrad’s fiction, whether in tales which draw upon his engagement with the colonial world during his two decades in the merchant marine or, closer to home, in his political writings where food is creatively fashioned to serve as a site of contestation.

Conrad’s anecdote serves as a piece of familial and national self-mythologizing and sets a precedent for his inclination to blend – and blur – fact and fiction. In ‘Henry James: An Appreciation’, he famously declared:

Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and hand-writing – on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth … a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder, of human experience. (*NLL* 1924, p.17)

Conrad’s fidelity to the truth through first-hand impression means that, in his hands, the novel form is more authentic in recreating not just a documentation of the past but a lasting record of human experience. The Lithuanian-dog anecdote is a case in point. Conrad first announced the series of ‘intimate personal autobiographical things’ (*CL*4 p.125) that comprise *A Personal Record* (1912) to his literary agent, James Brand Pinker, in September 1908.[[2]](#endnote-2) Serialized in the *English Review*, under the editorship of Ford Madox Ford, these personal sketches were composed in the interstices of *Under Western Eyes* (1911). In Part II in the manuscript of *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad includes, as part of the biography of Peter Ivanovitch, the following sequence, which was subsequently omitted from the published volume:

On another occasion he had to kill a creature as fierce as himself and also hampered in its purpose by a broken chain. One night just before dawn (the alert primeval man must have been napping from sheer weariness) he found himself unexpectedly in the middle of a small hamlet. He stood holding his breath and looking at a few low mounds the dark log-huts. Everything was still as death. This stillness was suddenly broken by a harsh jingling rattle, a sort of low choking cough and an enormous watchdog flying over a fence made for him without another sound. It was like a streaking shadow with a white patch in front. He turned and fled instinctively but the chances were not equal; the dog’s chain was much lighter than the man’s. The shadowy dog’s fanges [*sic*] gleamed rising at his throat and the man’s hatchet swung with unthinking precision met the shadow with a slight crash. The body of the silent dog carried off by the primeval man afforded sustenance for a couple of days to the dual personality of the convict. (99.37b)

When this extract is set alongside the family anecdote about grand-uncle Nicholas B, the boundaries between life and art are rendered porous, while the relationship between real-life inspiration and the art it generates chimes with the great nineteenth-century debates about realism in the novel. This book examines the place of food within the fictional works of Joseph Conrad, especially the manner in which the fictional presentation of food in the novels articulates and engages with the historical facts and details surrounding the consumption of food at the end of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth: the ideological environment of an era when food becomes a politically encrypted commodity within a colonial and capitalist market. Through food Conrad examines the tensions between coloniser and colonised, social constructs of morality, ideology, and the political and ethical methods of food production. All of this is played out against a background of urban growth, a crisis in national identity and the decline in support for the British Empire.

**II**

In her biography of her husband, *Joseph Conrad and his Circle* (1935), Jessie argues that the ‘gastronomic degradation’ that Conrad’s great Uncle Bobrowski was forced to endure when he killed and ate a Lithuanian dog had a direct impact on the psyche of the young Konrad Korzeniowski and affected his life-long eating habits (p.220). This, accompanied by the deprivation experienced by his exiled parents, Apollo and Ewa, added to Conrad’s sensitivities when it came to food. Najder reports that in Vologda, the Korzeniowski’s ‘quarters became a meeting place for Polish and Ruthenian political exiles’ but all that Apollo could offer them for refreshment would be ‘tea and rusks’ (2007, p.21). After Conrad’s mother died, he and his father lived in Chernikhiv. In a letter to his cousins, the Zagorskis, Apollo writes, ‘We tremble with cold, die of hunger’ (29). There is a poignancy therefore in the first piece of recorded writing by the young Korzeniowski: ‘To my dear Granny who helped me send pastries to my poor Daddy in prison – grandson, Pole-Catholic and szlachcic, KONRAD’ (22). This message, written in a boy’s hand on the verso of his photograph, anticipates the significance that food will play in Conrad’s later life, letters, and fiction.

The anecdote of Great Uncle B. is just one episode in what could be termed, the three culinary lives of Joseph Conrad, each of which informs and configures all aspects of his life and writing from his childhood in the Ukraine to his years as a merchant seaman and finally his life as an author of English literature. As Henry James so elegantly put it in a letter to Conrad, ‘To taste you as I taste you is really thus to wander away’ (Stape & Knowles 1996, p.57); a sentiment that inadvertently pays tribute to the way in which Conrad uses meals as the ‘occasion’ for storytelling in his fiction. Conrad’s short story ‘Falk: A Reminiscence’ (1903) opens in a ‘small river-hostelry’ where an ‘execrable’ dinner serves as a fitting backdrop for an ‘artless’ tale of cannibalism. In *Lord Jim* (1900) the narrator, Marlow finds it ‘easy enough to talk of Master Jim after a good spread’, indulging his listeners in ‘fables of strife’ that fill the ‘after-dinner hour’ in which men are too replete to take up any other occupation and who are likely to forget the fable ‘before the end is told’ (1968, p.22). In Conrad’s short story, *The Informer* (1906), Mr X breaks bread and pours wine as he regales the narrator with tales of anarchist plots, interrupting himself to ‘attack impassively, with measured movements a bombe glacée’ which he ‘swallowed carefully’ (1927, p.79). Conrad’s depiction of the meal reflects the divisiveness of ‘X’ and the narrator, a collector of Chinese bronzes and porcelain. In ‘Falk’, seamen may eat ‘execrable’ food but their tales are honest and ‘artless’. The cuisine in *The Informer*, however, is as artful as the tale being told and as pretentious as the teller and the listener. In this respect, the meal becomes the yardstick upon which to measure the integrity of the characters involved.

Food and eating in Conrad’s fiction is often charged with negative psychological emotions that, arguably, reflect the author’s own state of mind. The novel which proved the most challenging in its creation was *Under Western Eyes*. Najder claimed it ‘caused [Conrad] more anguish than anything else he ever wrote’ (2007, p.409) and certainly his physical and mental anguish is reproduced on the page when Razumov tells Sophia Antonovna, ‘the definition of Cabanis: “Man is a digestive tube... you can’t ignore the importance of a good digestion. The joy of life – you know the joy of life? – depends on a sound stomach, whereas a bad digestion inclines one to scepticism, breeds black fancies and thoughts of death. These are facts ascertained by physiologists. Well, I assure you that ever since I came over from Russia I have been stuffed with indigestible foreign concoctions of the most nauseating kind—pah!”’ (2007, p.208).

Apart from distracting Conrad from ‘Razumov’ (the original title of *Under Western Eyes*) the ‘series of autobiographical’ papers which eventually became two volumes: *The Mirror of the Sea* and *A Personal Record* provide an interesting account of the ‘fantastic meals of salt junk and hardtack’ which he experienced ‘upon the wide seas’ (*PR*, 234) and offers an opportunity to consider food on board ship in the Merchant Navy of the nineteenth century.

Conrad’s first sea voyage was in December 1874 aboard the *Mont-Blanc* which sailed from Marseilles to Saint-Pierre. Conrad does not personally record what he ate on board, but Najder quotes an historian who described the ship’s culinary routine:

Every morning, at 7.20, the “down” (i.e., resting) watch would be wakened for coffee and biscuits with butter *à volonté*; in bad weather eau de vie was added. At 11 lunch and at 17 hours dinner. The time of meals was counted as part of the rest. Food was little varied but sufficient and consisted of salted bacon three or four times a week, potatoes, salted cod, seasoned beef, sardines in oil or tuna. Every evening there was soup and dried beans. (Najder 2007, p.51)

Food in the French Merchant Navy was considered superior to that of its English counterpart and Conrad had his first experience of British naval food when he took up his position on *The Duke of Sutherland* in 1878. The Agreement and Account of Crew details the dietary allowance for the sailors: Bread, probably in the form of hard tack, was provided daily. One and a half pounds of salted beef, and one and a quarter pounds of pork were allowed on alternate days. Half a pound of flour and peas on alternate days, one pound of rice per week, an eighth of an ounce of tea daily and half an ounce of coffee as well as two ounces of sugar and three quarts of water. This allowance became known as the ‘Pound and Pint’ and was supplemented by a daily allocation of lemon, lime and sugar to combat scurvy (Simmons 2010, p.102). But sailors still suffered from all manner of ailments due to lack of proper nutrients mainly due to the way they were cooked, by boiling, while fresh fruit and vegetables were missing entirely from the menu.

The Pound and Pint gives a factual breakdown of a sailor’s diet but the greatest insight into the psychological effects of the poor diet is most keenly represented in Conrad’s *The Nigger of the* ‘*Narcissus*’ (1897). Jocelyn Baines describes the novel as ‘the distilled essence of Conrad’s experience at sea’, adding that ‘the process of distillation has virtually eliminated all the squalid ingredients ... the stench below deck, the damp and the cold or the heat, the frequent bouts of bad food’ (1960, p.77). Even so, Conrad uses food in the story to capture the hierarchical tensions on board – it is only the officers who have the privilege of a fruit pie on a Sunday – as well as the precarious mood of the sailors. If, as Najder suggests, *The Nigger of the* ‘*Narcissus*’ ‘gives a more realistic and complete picture of life at sea than does *The Mirror of the Sea*’ (2007, p.100), then the suspicion by Captain Allistoun that the rebellious conduct of the crew was down to ‘food’, tells the reader more about its importance than any factual account. Indeed, Jimmy is described as ‘capricious with his food, and railed bitterly at the salt meat, at the biscuits, at the tea, as at articles unfit for human consumption – “let alone for a dying man!”’ (*NN* 1946, p.31). Interestingly, it is Jimmy’s ‘fastidious appetite’ that leads Belfast to steal the officer’s fruit pie. Jessie also describes Conrad as ‘fastidious’ about his food while Jimmy’s capriciousness is not a little reminiscent of a dramatic account told by Jessie in which Conrad petulantly beating his bandaged fists on his pillow demanding cauliflower cheese over cold meat for supper (*Circle* 1935, pp.78-79).

After the ‘Narcissus’ has overturned and then righted, the men are put on shortened rations of a ‘half allowance of biscuit. Peas, sugar and tea had been finished long ago. Salt meat was giving out. We had plenty of coffee but very little water to make it with it’. The men ‘took up another hole’ of their belts. ‘Hunger’, we are told, ‘lived on board ... Not dead starvation, but steady, living hunger that stalked about the decks, slept in the forecastle; the tormenter of waking moments, the disturber of dreams’ (105). Perhaps the memory – or just the threat – of that ‘living hunger’ made regular meal times a necessity for Conrad and prompted, as Jessie explains it, ‘an anxiety to know what next he would have to eat.’ This desire is fictionalized in *The Nigger of the* ‘*Narcissus*’ as the ‘grizzled sea dogs’ talk of their first meal on land: ‘steak and onions for supper ... and a pint of bitter’ or ‘Ham an’ eggs three times a day’ (108). This depiction adds some validity to a caricature of Conrad which appeared in a newspaper and which was promptly thrown on the fire by Jessie before her husband saw it. The story is recounted in Jessie’s words: ‘I once had a cutting sent me which must have been inspired by some malicious mind. It was supposed to be a man at breakfast in the saloon of an Atlantic liner. The steward had just finished attending to him when the passenger asks: “What time is lunch?” and the steward says: “You can have it practically now, sir.” Then in brackets (“We don’t know whether this is correct, but we will have to ask Mr. Joseph Conrad”)’. (*Circle* 1935, p.78). Ironically, when the crew of the ‘*Narcissus*’ finally reach land, they head not for their longed-for meals but ‘To the Black Horse’. Conrad, on finishing *The Nigger of the* ‘*Narcissus*’, could still have had the taste of that hard tack and salted meat in his mouth when he wrote to Garnett telling him: ‘Nigger died on the 7th at 6pm.; but the ship is not home yet. Expect to arrive tonight and be paid off tomorrow. And the End! I can’t eat’ (*CL*1 1983, p.330).

**III**

This book begins in Chapter Two with a detailed historical contextualisation of food and food related events that correspond with and form the sociological, political and anthropological basis of Conrad’s work, and develops the pathway for examining food within the novels and short stories. Historical food studies such as Fraser’s *The Coming of the Mass Market 1850-1914* (1981), provide an invaluable account of the widespread impact of the growing meat trade during the nineteenth century and the advent of refrigerated and steam-powered ships. Fraser’s historical analysis contextualizes Conrad’s short story ‘Falk’ and enables not only a narratological evaluation but a historically informed one. Equally, James Gregory’s *Of Victorians and Vegetarians: The Vegetarian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2007) provides the context for vegetarianism as a counter-culture and allows for *Eating as Narrative* to draw upon and extend the association between meat eating and capitalism by arguing for an association between vegetarianism and anarchy. The historical chapter of *Eating as Narrative* enables a narratological approach to Conrad’s texts, while also offering a consideration of post-colonial issues by showing how food was a driving factor in the colonial project. *Eating as Narrative* complements current scholarly investigations into Conrad’s work, revisiting existing critical engagement with colonialism, politics and cannibalism in Conrad’s work, while also acknowledging current literary food studies. Kate McCloughlin’s edited collection, *The Modernist Party* (2015) is one of the most recent to investigate social occasions – usually mealtimes – in modernist texts and demonstrates the growing interest in scholarly approaches to food.

Chapter Three provides a close analysis of food in Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) and demonstrates the role of eating in the narrative as a way of exposing and interrogating issues of culture, gender and race. *Almayer’s Folly* sets the template of Conrad’s fiction: to undermine the western perspective and reverse the colonial gaze, confusing the divide between ‘them’ and ‘us’. This theme continues into Chapter Four by drawing upon the issue of cannibalism in Conrad’s short story ‘Falk’ (1903). As a case study of the ‘taboo’ aspect of food, I examine the colonial context of cannibalism through Conrad’s novella, ‘Heart of Darkness’ (1899) before moving on to discuss the numerous instances of anthropophagy at sea in the nineteenth century. A. W. Brian Wilson’s *Cannibalism and the Common Law* (1984) has proved invaluable in its extensive account of moral and legal issues surrounding the necessity of eating a fellow member of a crew in the event of shipwreck. This chapter shows how Conrad’s fiction draws upon this grim fact of sea life to question the moral code and supposedly ‘civilized’ status of white Europeans. There is one story in particular – that of the Greely Arctic Expedition – which I show to have been a likely source for Conrad’s ‘Falk’ and which epitomises the hypocrisy of colonial attitudes of moral superiority.

The fifth chapter continues the interrogation of what it means to be civilized by exploring how food becomes politicized, allowing for a comparison between meat eating and the corrupt nature of capitalism, and the association between anarchy and vegetarianism in *The Secret Agent* (1907). Where cannibalism is exposed as a reality of nineteenth-century society in ‘Falk’, in *The Secret Agent* it is used a metaphor for the greed of a growing capitalist culture. Scholarly investigations into metaphors of eating owe much to Maggie Kilgour’s *From Communion to Cannibalism* (1990) in which she explores the relationship between the eater and the eaten. Her chosen texts for study range from Homer and Ovid to Melville and Coleridge, acknowledging that she is not ‘omnivorous’ in her analysis and omitting ‘Shakespeare and Conrad’ which she would not want to ‘regurgitate’ (18). *Eating as Narrative*, although touching on the power of ingestion and the relationship between the act of consumption and the assimilation of the colonial world, explores not just metaphors of eating, but the act itself as a study of cultural and political identification.[[3]](#endnote-3)

The work which most fruitfully provides the intersection between anthropological and historical studies of food with literary criticism is Timothy Morton’s *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste* (1994), which focusses primarily on the political rhetoric of vegetarianism alongside the life and work of Percy Bysshe Shelley. *Eating as Narrative* embeds this interdisciplinary approach to food in literature in which theories of humanitarianism, politics and diet are employed in the reading of Conrad’s works. Morton’s manifesto to take ‘account of how individual acts of consumption are always caught up in something larger’ (3) informs the basis of this current study. Morton’s later anthology of essays, *Cultures of Taste/Theories of Appetite: Eating Romanticism* (2004) brings together further contemporary studies in food.

My discussion of *The Secret Agent* has been stimulated by Penny Bradshaw’s chapter in Morton’s anthology in which she engages in an illuminating discussion of James Gillray’s satirical handling of eating and politics in his famous illustrations. As I show, Conrad’s references to food in *The Secret Agent* similarly juxtaposes meat eating and colonial violence.

The final chapter of *Eating as Narrative* examines bread, hunger and liberty in *Under Western Eyes* (1911), focussing on the spiritualization and politicization of bread, the condemnation of ideological fervour and the personification of Russian autocracy as a hungry and cannibalistic mother. Two studies have informed the historiological approach to this chapter: Smith and Christian’s *Bread and Salt: A Social and Economic History of Food and Drink* (1984) and Elena Hellberg-Hirn’s *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russianness* (1998). Both studies show the importance of bread in Slavic cultures as a symbol of hospitality, idealism and freedom. I add to the workwith a consideration of Conrad’s essay, ‘Autocracy and War’ (1905). The result is a narratological interrogation of food and hunger in a novel that resulted in Conrad’s complete nervous breakdown. Najder contends that his attempt to remain impartial was hindered by the ‘deeply rooted opinions’ Conrad had about Russia and its politics (2007, p.412). With this in mind, Conrad’s representation of food and eating in *Under Western Eyes* betrays the gloomy future which he envisaged for Russia and in its wake, Poland.

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Conrad’s representation of food as a site of cultural signification and politicization is mapped out in the Preface to his first novel, *Almayer’s Folly*. Written in 1895 but not published until 1921, Conrad declares his intention – radical in its time – to reveal ‘a bond between us and that humanity so far away’ (1945, p.viii). The ‘Author’s Note’ is written as a response to an essay entitled ‘Decivilized’ (1891)[[4]](#endnote-4) by the acclaimed critic and poet, Alice Meynell in which she criticizes colonial literature, claiming that it is debased or ‘decivilized’ by its subject matter.[[5]](#endnote-5) In Conrad’s judgement, it is not just the tales that she ‘contemptuously dislikes’ but the ‘strange people and the far-off countries also’ (1945, p.vii). These ‘strange people’ are ‘honest cannibals and the more sophisticated pioneers of our glorious virtues’ (vii). Conrad’s mention of cannibals in the first paragraph of his first ‘Author’s Note’ introduces a theme that will run throughout his writing both literally and metaphorically.

Cannibalism in the nineteenth century was considered a ‘savage act’, only committed by those races outside the boundaries of western codes of conduct. This view had been fuelled by the numerous travel accounts that came from explorers and writers who described acts of ferocious cannibalism and sacrificial rites. One of the most important was Cornelius de Pauw’s *Philosophical Researches on the Greeks* (1788) in which he claims that the Bedouins of Turkey and the Kurds of Persia indulged in anthropophagy. The word ‘cannibal’ in fact derives from the word ‘cariba’ – meaning bold – and was used by the Arawak Indians of America to identify themselves (Avramescu, 2003, p.12). After the discovery of the Americas, many accounts of cannibalism were published, notably Michelle de Montaigne’s essay, ‘Of Cannibals’ (1580)[[6]](#endnote-6) in which he describes the capture, killing, roasting and eating of the enemy by American Indians. Montaigne challenges the notion of barbarism, suggesting that this method of revenge is more humane than the methods used in Europe. Despite this, the label of cannibal and barbarian on any race of people that was not white or European, produced a psychological divide of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

The reference, then, to ‘honest cannibals’ is designed to engender cultural anxiety in the European reader for whom Conrad is writing. Conrad describes cannibals as ‘honest’ in the same way that he describes the cannibals on the steamer in ‘Heart of Darkness’ as exhibiting the very civilized quality of restraint, the quality signally lacking in both the white ‘civilized’ pilgrims on board and, more extremely, in the ‘remarkable’ Mr Kurtz. The cannibals in Conrad’s Malay fiction are Europeans. Falk in the short story of the same name is a Scandinavian who stranded at sea, kills a carpenter and eats him. In *Lord Jim* (1900), the starving and ironically named ‘Gentleman Brown’ and his ‘sorry gang’ of ‘hungry ruffians’ attempt to extort food from ‘chiefs and village headmen’ whose toes – it is rumoured – Brown threatens to ‘have roasted’ if they refuse him (1964, p.263). In his political fiction, Conrad has Verloc, the protagonist of *The Secret Agent* eat meat with his fingers, ‘without restraint and decency’ (1947, p.253). In *Under Western Eyes*, the Russian autocrat Mikulin is metaphorically consumed by his own ‘savage autocracy’, which ‘does not limit its diet to its enemies’ but ‘devours its friends and servants as well’ (1971, p.306). These examples serve to show that the ‘decivilized’ are not those in far off countries but white men and Europeans.

In his Preface to *Almayer’s Folly*, Conrad closes the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’ with his assertion that he is ‘content to sympathize with common mortals, no matter where they live; in houses or in tents, in the streets under a fog, or in the forests behind the dark line of dismal mangroves that fringe the vast solitude of the sea’ (*AF,* p.viii). The international representation of food in Conrad’s novels erodes the division between East and West. In *The Secret Agent*, the fog-ridden streets of London are served by restaurants such as that ‘peculiarly British Institution’, the Italian restaurant in which the Assistant Commissioner eats a ‘short meal’ and afterwards is ‘struck by his foreign appearance’ (149). In late nineteenth and early twentieth-century London, Italian risotto dishes included rice imported from China, India or Malaysia. In *A Handbook of Cookery for a Small House* (1923), Jessie Conrad explains how to cook Risotto: ‘Wash a teacup of Patna rice through four waters ... Drain the rice dry and have ready a teacup of Parmesan and Gruyere cheese’ (48). The recipe incorporates a specific type of rice which forms the basis of cultural life in Patna, North East India and is measured in that quintessentially English symbol, the tea cup. In addition, the rice is mixed with Italian and French cheese producing a hybrid dish of international ingredients.

This division between East and West is not only eroded in Conrad’s novels but deconstructed. The ‘glowing heap of oranges and lemons’ in *The Secret Agent*, that make up the ‘violent blaze of light and colour’ of the ‘fruiterer’s stall at the corner’ of Brett Street, are a beacon of ‘luminous glory’ (150). These ‘exotic’ fruits, probably from North Africa have a two-fold significance in *The Secret Agent*. First, their association with the nursery rhyme ‘Oranges and Lemons’ – which describes a public execution – pre-empts Winnie’s fears about the manner of her own death. Secondly, the light provided by the oranges and lemons cuts through the dark and fog of the London streets. In so doing, the East brings light to the West.

**IV**

Of course many diverse factors implicitly contributed to the debate about realist presentation. Modern advancements in steam ships at the end of the nineteenth century enabled the importation of food from the colonies and this expanded the variety of tastes available to a growing urban middle class which had tripled in size between 1851 and 1871. This new middle class became consumers of manufactured foods, foreign recipes and new modes of dining (Humble 2008, p.vii). Identities, embedded in traditions such as the ‘Roast beef of Old England’ and the rural connection to the land were challenged by new, more industrial methods of producing food such as battery farm hens and factory made jam. Food from overseas such as rice, traditionally seen as the food of the Asian continent, became a daily staple while curry was established as a particular favourite of the middle-class and lower middle-class (Chaudhuri 1992, p.240). The status of women also changed, their focus becoming the home and family. Middle class women were established as moral agents of good cooking, their role to ‘neutralise the threat of the Other by naturalising the products of foreign lands’ (Zlotnick 2003, p.74). Indeed many foreign recipes were often subjected to some form of Anglicization. Kedgeree, for example, originally an Indian vegetarian dish of rice and lentils, was transformed into an English breakfast recipe of rice, egg and smoked fish. This adaptation might suggest some discomfort about eating the food of the Other and therefore its appropriation is acceptable only through its reinvention. However, the naturalization of Indian dishes was also a way of assimilating India into the British Empire in which ‘the Other presents itself not as a source of threat and contamination but as a source of nourishment’ (Zlotnick 2003, p.73).

Dinner parties also played an important part in combating growing Victorian anxieties about what it meant to be civilized. As Mrs Beeton suggests in her *Book of Household Management* (1861), ‘The rank which a people occupy in the grand scale may be measured by their way of taking their meals … The nation which knows how to dine has learnt the leading lesson of progress’ (2000, p.363). Using modes of dining as a measure of civilized behaviour however, was problematic for those who could not afford to feed themselves. Movement to the towns and cities had created an urban working class that existed primarily on bread, jam and tea with perhaps and chips for dinner or a ‘kipper or a few cheap sausages’ (Drummond & Wilbraham 1939, p.488).

Concerns about the degenerating effects of urban living prompted the rise of social reform movements. In 1888, William Booth, founder of The Salvation Army (1878), opened up the first ‘food depot’ in Limehouse, London. Two years later he wrote a manifesto entitled *In Darkest England* which highlighted the plight of Britain’s poor of which he claimed there were three million who were ‘unable to attain the regulation allowance of food which the law prescribes as indispensable even for the worst criminals in our gaols’ (1942, p.25).[[7]](#endnote-7) Booth described this ‘submerged’ one tenth of the population as ‘de-humanized inhabitants’ of the slums of Britain’s capital cities who lived in ‘monotonous darkness’ and ate poisonous food not dissimilar to the unfortunate ‘savages’ of ‘Darkest Africa’ who were forced to eat ‘snakes, ants, and mice’ to exist (17).

Booth’s manifesto inspired newspaper commentary on the issue of the ‘surplus population’, those ‘useless people’ that are a problem of ‘modern life’ (*Liverpool Mercury*, 13 September 1890. Public concern with the ‘residuum’ who were vulnerable to ‘social and moral ruin’[[8]](#endnote-8) played into Malthusian anxieties[[9]](#endnote-9) that food production would not be able to keep up with population growth. William Booth’s use of Henry Morton Stanley’s *In Darkest Africa* (1890) as an analogy for the poor of Britain positioned them as ‘Other’ (Walker 2001, pp.87, 238). In 1910 H. Rider Haggard wrote an appraisal of William Booth’s efforts to redeem the poor. His account was aptly entitled, *Regeneration* – an ironic swipe at Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* of 1892[[10]](#endnote-10) – and was a glowing account of the good works carried out by the Salvation Army. But it also expressed the growing anxiety about the waning powers of the British Empire: ‘He [General Booth] will be one of the few, of the very few enduring figures of our day: and even if our civilization should be destined to undergo eclipse for a period, as seems possible, when the light returns, by it he will still be seen’ (2000, p.209). If the poor were reduced to the eating habits of ‘savage’ Africans and white Europeans were losing their grasp on inherent codes of conduct in the face of adversity, what did this say about the cohesiveness of an emerging modern society? Mrs Beeton’s edict of 1868, ‘Man, it has been said, is a dining animal. Creatures of the inferior races eat and drink; man only dines’ (2000, p.363) placed food as the defining factor in the modern writer’s engagement with the savage and the civilized.

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**2.**

**Historical Context**

**1890 to 1920**

Konrad Korzeniowski, as a sailor in the British Merchant Service, was a cog in the colonial machine that linked the British economy with foreign markets. Britain’s reliance on sea-trade was crucial in feeding the growing and increasingly industrial population of Europe. In the British colony of Natal on the south-east coast of Africa, sugar, tea, coffee, indigo, rice, tobacco, cotton and pineapples as well as wheat, oats, barley and potato were all cultivated and exported to Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. (Parkin 1895, p.172-178).

Conrad’s fictional focus on imperial and foreign trade finds itself in Malaysia, where, before he was an author, the young Konrad Korzeniowski served on two trading ships, the iron barque, *Highland Forest* and the *S. S. Vidar*,[[11]](#endnote-11) a small steamer (Najder 2007, p.112). Indeed, South East Asia and the Malay Peninsula – under the control of the British at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries – was intrinsic in supplying Europe with tin, sugar, rice, pepper, spice, gutta-percha[[12]](#endnote-12) and tapioca’ (Parkin 1895, p.232). Singapore, a colony of Britain from 1824[[13]](#endnote-13) was considered ‘one of the great centres of the world’s commerce’ with most of the trade between Australia, China, Japan, the far East and Europe passing through it (231). As such it was also a culinary diaspora. Although it was owned by the British and used equally by the Dutch as a commercial entrepôt, tens of thousands of Chinese migrated to Singapore in the nineteenth century and it had been used for centuries by Arabs as a focus of commercial trading. Historians have described the island as consisting of ‘a great variety of Malaysian and Muslim peoples from differing social and economic backgrounds but sharing a lingua franca and important elements of a common culture’ (Roff 1964, p.75). This common culture would have embedded a hybrid diet of food from Asia and Europe influenced by the domestic servant, usually a Malay or a Chinaman (Leon-Salobir 2011, p.15). In Singapore between 1819 and 1939, the sourcing and preparing of food was down to the cook. The result was a fusion which consisted of curry, mulligatawny, kedgeree, pish-pash, ‘chicken country captain’ as well traditional European fare such as caramel custard and chicken chop (16).

In Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) Singapore is not only the hub of civilization where Tom Lingard sends Almayer’s daughter Nina to be educated, but it also serves as the base for the English Captain Ford who travels to and from Singapore to Sambir in a steam ship. Indeed, when Nina returns from Singapore, Almayer assumes that his now civilized daughter will find the ‘preponderance of rice on the family table’ (1945, p.35) abhorrent to her, a comment that is testament to the culinary diversity of Singapore.

Trade with Malaysia was an important source of food for Britain and at the end of the nineteenth century, tin became a major export to meet the growing demand for canned food. As well as tin, palm oil was also a major export. Again, mercantile products from England, the ‘Manchester goods’ mentioned in *Almayer’s Folly* served as useful bargaining tools despite heightening the political tensions that dominated the area. More importantly to the British, however, was control of the Malay Straits ceded to Raffles in 1824 by the Sultan of Johore[[14]](#endnote-14) for trade between the East and the West and in particular the trade from India under the control of the East India Company. The Straits Settlements had a tiny population of 200,000 in 1857 and were generally considered little more than ‘a scantily populated, jungle-covered wilderness politically divided into a series of small states of varying degrees and isolation’ made up of ‘riverine kampongs’ or rural settlements. But by 1858 European sugar plantations comprised 10,720 acres of land in the south of Malaysia, providing Britain with this ever-popular food product. Bananas too were being exported out of Malaysia and South East Asia, amounting to an international trade of a ‘million tons in 1910’ (Flandrin & Montanari 1999, p.466).

However, as Conrad shows in *Almayer’s Folly*, trade was hindered by a ‘hinterland of nine squabbling little Malay states, the Negri Sembilan’ (Havinden & Meredith 1993, p.41) which resulted in a succession of wars which lasted for forty years. English involvement in Malaysia did not take hold until the 1870s and 1880s when the trade in tin, rice, pepper, gambier and tapioca was properly exploited. The wavering interest of the British is also a feature in *Almayer’s Folly* and one that Almayer blames as part of his own lack of success in trade.

There were also problems with importing food into the U.K. from abroad. Foreign meat was often infected with rinderpest[[15]](#endnote-15) or foot and mouth and was sometimes spoiled or adulterated. As the century progressed, the late Victorians became increasingly anxious about the safety of food importations and groups such as the Tory anti-free traders and the Land Nationalisation Society (established in 1881) sought to reverse England’s dependency on foreign supplies (Gregory 2007, pp.14-15).

Despite attempts to reignite British agriculture, the bleed of manpower from the countryside to the towns continued. By the end of the nineteenth century, seventy seven per cent of the population of Great Britain lived in an urban area and in the first decade of the twentieth century, London had over seven million inhabitants. Between 1860 and 1900, the number of male agricultural labourers shrunk by more than forty per cent. In 1851 there were 63 millers in the county of Rutland, by 1911 there were only 22 (Fraser 1981, pp.10-11), a statistic that marks the decline of bread as the ‘staff of life’.

During the 1880s 2.5 million people left England to migrate abroad, mostly to America. Ironically, however, as overcrowding in the towns and cities became a problem during the 1890s, people also left to return to the countryside (10-11). In addition to this, during the 1880s and 1890s, twenty thousand Jewish immigrants from Russia and Poland sought refuge in the East End of London (20). Although many of them were skilled in clothes making, they were forced, like many other labourers, to seek work in the local jam and meat factories where wages could be as low as three shillings a week (21) and the quality of the food reflected the poor pay. In, *The Soul Market* (1907), a study of the labouring class, Olive Christian Malvery describes the preserved food factories as ‘The British “Jungle”’, a reference to Upton Sinclair’s damning portrayal of the Chicago meat packing industry published the same year. Taking a job in a jam factory herself, Malvery describes the filthy state of the women workers who were ‘absolutely unfit to touch food that was meant for human consumption’ (92). In addition to this, the fruit used to make the jam was often rotting or adulterated with sweat from the workers. Worryingly, the cheapness of jam meant that it was eaten at two out of the three meals a day a working class child would eat at the fin de siècle (Drummond & Wilbraham 1957, p.332).

The decline in the agricultural workforce meant that Britain had to look abroad for its foodstuffs and with industrial output increasing – textiles and manufactured goods being used to trade with Africa and Malaysia – Britain and its people were gradually becoming more affluent and able to spend more money on food. Bread made up the bulk of a labouring family’s diet with bacon the main meat product, usually supplied from domestic pigs. Although pigs had always played a key role in the English diet, it was becoming unacceptable for people to keep them in towns and cities. In addition to this, English bacon was considered too fatty for refined London tastes (Oddy 2003, p.17). Imports of bacon from Ireland and Denmark became popular and with the development of transportation via trains from coastal areas, the consumption of fish also increased. By the 1890s, Britain was consuming 25Ibs per head per year making the fishing industry a lucrative one.

But by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, 87 per cent of butter and 76 per cent of cheese, was being imported (Oddy 1970, p.20). Cheese from Canada, New Zealand and the United States was also commonplace. Foreign fruit also became more popular amongst the working and middle classes. After 1860 steamships were capable of importing oranges from as far afield as the Azores, Malta and Crete and pineapples were being brought over from the West Indies. Bananas became a popular staple with 6.7 million bunches imported each year from 1909 to 1913. Strangely, eggs although abundant in the U.K. were frequently imported from Russia as consumption rose from 45 per head per annum in the 1880s to 100 per annum in 1913 (Fraser 1981, p.31).

**Meat**

Despite an increase in expenditure on food, methods for cooking were still limited in working class households in England. Not many poor families owned ovens and therefore meat was generally cooked in a pot on the hob or bought as ready-cooked or canned or preserved. It was also customary to take dishes to bakeries, where food could be cooked in ovens still warm from the morning’s bread-baking. Many of the better off ‘shook their heads at the way poor women bought “tins of salmon and potted meat, and various other preserved delicacies, rather than take the trouble to cook a wholesome meal of fresh food”’ (Malvery 1907, p.48). But potted and canned products were cheap costing only 4d or 5d a pound. Much of this meat was imported from the great meat packing and canning factories of Chicago. To add to their nutritional deficiencies, the lower classes were also the ones who became the consumers of convenience foods such as ‘packet jellies, powdered gelatine, or ready-cut lump sugar and castor sugar, prepared and chopped suet, or stoned raisins’ (Fraser 1981, p.40-41).

The variety and abundance of food arriving from the colonies changed the way that people in Britain ate their food and spent their money and the most significant impact came with the development of refrigerated meat products. In 1874 the first consignment was shipped from the United States to Britain by T. C. Eastman of New York[[16]](#endnote-16) and two years later, Charles Tellier, a Frenchman, succeeded in bringing a cargo of frozen meat all the way from Buenos Aires. By 1880 refrigerated ships were reliable enough to import frozen meat from Australia (Fraser 1981, p.107). Before refrigeration became the norm, the most reliable method of transporting meat was to import live cattle from afar afield as Canada and the U.S. In 1877 T. C. Eastman shipped 1000 cattle a week across the Atlantic. The method, for obvious reasons, was not ideal and when it arrived in the dock the animals were in such a poor state they had to be fattened up or slaughtered immediately. In many cases, the carcasses were then misleadingly sold on as Scotch beef.

Before the development of refrigerated ships, food producers had been looking for ways of meeting the public demand for meat products. One method of providing cheap meat to the public was through concentrates. Part of the search for a meat product that would last long periods of time without rotting was motivated by the need to provide protein and vitamins to crews on merchant ships and for polar explorers who could spend up to two years living on preserved food. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Sir John Franklin’s failed voyage to the Arctic in search of the North West Passage, created a scandal when it was suspected that the sailors had resorted to cannibalism. His second attempt in 1845 was even more disastrous. When John Rae finally discovered the fate of Franklin and his crew in 1854, nine years after they had left England, there was enough hard evidence for Rae to make it publicly known that the men had this time resorted to cannibalism before dying from starvation.[[17]](#endnote-17) Interestingly Rae’s discovery has since been overshadowed by the ‘official’ version by Francis Leopold McClintock who did not once mention the word ‘cannibalism’ in his 1859 account.

The success and growth – not to mention the reputation – of the Empire depended on claims to new land and trade with foreign countries. But this was not to be at the expense of the European claim to civilized and moral behaviour, a claim that was severely undermined by sailors and explorers resorting to cannibalism, an act that was perceived during the Victorian era as a peculiarly ‘savage’ one. The discovery of a Northwest Passage would provide a trading route 3000 miles shorter than the established trading route with India and China via Cape Horn. But expeditions were thwarted time and again by issues surrounding food. During the era of Franklin, the only preserved meat product was pemmican, a mixture of dried meat and grease or fat (Brandt 2011, p.90).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, meat extracts became a popular staple and it was Bovril that took the lead in the marketplace. Cheap, versatile and light, in 1904 Captain Scott endorsed Bovril for his trip to the Antarctic and in 1909 the explorer Ernest Shackleton became the face to the catch phrase, ‘It must be Bovril’ (Fraser 1981, p.135). Somewhat ironically, Oxo Bouillon Trading Cards were imprinted with an image of the ‘discoverer of the Northwest Passage’, Sir John Franklin (Brandt 2011, p.394). Conrad’s satire of such blatant myth making is subtly conveyed in ‘Heart of Darkness’ in which he writes that The Thames is lauded as having ‘known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin ... the great knights-errant of the sea’ (1967, p.47). But the somewhat disingenuous advertising of the spurious nutritional properties of convenience meat products, in particular meat extract, is saved for the subject of Conrad’s short story, ‘An Anarchist’ (1906) in which he criticizes the commercial and capitalist production of cheap food products. As Stephen Donovan points out, ‘the real-life counterparts of B.O.S., Ltd played a pivotal role in South America’s economic modernization’ (2003, p.75). But Conrad’s concerns were about the huge profits that a few companies were making in the industry, ‘the vertically-integrated corporation, supported by vast capital reserves and exercising direct control over every stage in the production process’ (76).

Meat production, in all its guises, had become a big international business run by powerful American corporations. Public concern about the legitimacy and ethics of its practice was soon heightened by the publication of Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle* (1906) which highlighted the malpractices and adulterated food that was being shipped to England from the meat packing factories of Chicago. Despite revelations about the quality of their products and a new Public Health Act in 1907 which was specifically related to food (French & Phillips 2003, pp.442-470), meat manufacturers could not keep up with demand and began to look to Argentina for new sources of beef. The Argentine Press warned of the ‘Jungle’ methods of American meat packers and feared monopolisation by the Americans reducing the possibility of obtaining a good price for their cattle. At this time the British market made up sixty per cent of the world trade in meat. During the 1880s and 1890s meat prices started to fall only to rise steeply in the first decade of the twentieth century. Dependence on the Argentine for a supply of meat became a grave concern, especially as the distributing companies in England were generally American owned. In 1880 one sixth of Britain’s meat supply was imported. By 1914 foreign markets were providing one third of meat consumed in Britain (Fraser 1981, p.154).

**Food in the Merchant and Royal Navies**

Ironically, the quest for an effective method of preserving meat had its impetus in providing protein not only for Polar explorers but also for sailors in the British merchant and Royal Navies. The navy – the country’s largest buyer of cattle – suffered from the problem of how to stock their ships and feed their crews adequately for long periods of time away from land. Every British sailor drew a ration of four pounds of salt beef per week (in addition to two of pork), which needed to be steeped in fresh water to be rendered edible. Even then it was an acquired taste. One account calls it ‘stony, fibrous, shrunken, dark and gristly – much like jerky, a modern snack food descendant’ (Rimas & Fraser 2008, p.116).

In Conrad’s short story ‘Falk’ (1903) the ‘misfortune’ of the protagonist of the same name – a sailor in the merchant navy – is accelerated by the fact that ‘several barrels of meat were found spoiled on opening, and had been thrown overboard soon after leaving home, as a sanitary measure’ (1946, p.228). The ‘misfortune’ which besets Falk is the necessity of eating another human being in order to survive. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad talks of the fear of being held up ‘at the very gates of the English Channel’ through unfavourable winds which can leave the sailors stranded and when ‘short rations became the order of the day, and the pinch of hunger under the breastbone grew familiar to every sailor’ (66). In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the advent of refrigeration improved the quality and variety of food on board. But as Neil Atkinson points out even with refrigeration and steam ships, ‘fraudulent ship-provisioning’ was still a problem. On the steamer *Hinemoa* the crew were supplied with ‘rotten meat with maggots crawling on it’ (2001, p.38) an echo of Conrad’s ‘Falk’.

Food on board ship was a consistently contentious issue. Sailors would often spend many months at sea. Conrad’s voyage on *The Duke of Sutherland* from London to Sydney took just over three months.[[18]](#endnote-18) In the event of a disaster, such as a shipwreck, the spectre of starvation was never far from sailors’ minds.[[19]](#endnote-19) Even so, food on board was still considered monotonous.

On *The Duke of Sutherland* the daily food ration consisted of the following:

Bread or ‘hard tack’; salted beef (11/2Ibs) and pork (11/4Ibs) on alternate days; flour (1/2Ib per day) and peas on alternate days; 1Ib of rice per week; and daily allowances of tea (1/8oz), coffee (1/2oz), sugar (2oz), and water (3 quarts). This measure became known as the ‘pound and pint’. Sailors were issued with a ration of ‘Lime and Lemon Juice and Sugar’ to prevent scurvy (Simmons 2010, p.102).

Before refrigerated ships were introduced, preserving food for three or four month journeys proved difficult. The quality of the food was also dependent on the skills of the chef, known on sailing ships as ‘the Doctor’ (Atkinson 2001, p.44). In *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus*’ (1897), Podmore, the cook, is also known as ‘Doctor’ and proves to be a self-righteous vanguard of spiritual and physical health.

Before the ‘Pound and Pint’, introduced in the 1840s and 1850s, there was no standard of provisions for the crew and even after it was made a legal requirement, a sailor’s diet consisted primarily of ‘salt junk’ – salted pork or horse – and ‘bread’, a product resembling a dog biscuit. In the second half of the nineteenth century, canned meat became a dietary staple on ships replacing dried soups. Canning was first developed at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the Frenchman, Nicholas Appert. As the process was modified, it became a reliable way of preserving anything from corned beef to boiled mutton and by the middle of the century was made a part of the ‘ordinary ration’ of the Royal Navy (Drummond & Wilbraham 1957, p.320). But canning did not come without its own scandals. After Stephen Goldner was awarded a contract to supply the navy with tinned meat in 1845, Arctic explorers were finding that their supplies were spoiled on opening. As a result, in 1856 the Navy opened up its own canning factory at Deptford (320-321). Previous to this, Bryan Donkin had experimented with canned food, supplying the Royal Navy with ‘preserved provisions.’ The same year that Goldner received his commission to provide the Navy with tinned food, Franklin set off on his fatal voyage to the Arctic. Three of the bodies were recently forensically examined and discovered to contain high levels of lead. It is believed that the lead from the seals on the tin cans had poisoned them (Brandt 2011, p.379).

When considering stories such as Franklin’s, it is not surprising that food was a subject matter close to every sailor’s heart and once a ship had docked, sailors would often take advantage of local eating houses or food sold on the streets. In *The Mirror of the Sea*, Conrad relates a tale about his time on the *Duke of Sutherland*. Anchored in The New South Dock of Australia, ‘while sitting on the rail’ of the ship, Conrad describes the ‘voice of a man crying “Hot saveloys!” at the end of George Street, where the cheap eating-houses (sixpence a meal) were kept by Chinamen (Sun-kum-on’s was not bad)’. Conrad continues that he has ‘heard this most pertinacious pedlar (I wonder whether he is dead or has made a fortune)’ and is ‘fascinated by the monotony, the regularity, the abruptness of the recurring cry, and so exasperated at the absurd spell that I wished the fellow would choke himself to death with a mouthful of his own infamous wares’ (1906, p.84). Conrad’s reaction implies that local hawkers took advantage of sailors, selling them food that was barely an improvement on what they received on board. It also reflects Conrad’s own enduring concerns about disingenuous food advertising.

**Sugar**

In 1877, Konrad Korzeniowski took a job as steward on the barque *Saint-Antoine* which travelled around the West Indies before returning to Europe carrying a cargo of sugar. In his short story, ‘A Smile of Fortune’ (1912), the island ‘Pearl’ in the ‘tropics’ is a main port of call for colonialists exporting the product: ‘All the population of the Pearl lives for it and by it. Sugar is their daily bread, as it were’ (1914, p.3). Conrad’s fictional depiction of this idyllic island is somewhat undermined by the history of slavery in the West Indies as a means of cultivating sugar for export.[[20]](#endnote-20) Huge profits were being made by the European empire through the transportation of African slaves to the West Indies and sugar became the ‘first modern, global’ commodity. The purchase of these African slaves was financed through the production and sale of rum, also made from refined sugar (Pilcher 2006, p.17).[[21]](#endnote-21) In the years 1880-1884 Britain imported 12 million pounds worth of sugar, much of it coming from the West Indies (Fuchs 1905, p.126-130). The majority of it was used for making jam, marmalades and golden syrup as well for chocolate. Fry’s cocoa factory employed 2000 people and used 250-300 tons of sugar every week. Not only did sugar provide employment for the working classes but it also gave them a cheap source of energy, even if it was nutritionally deficient (Pilcher 2006, p.18). However, the driving force behind the popularity of sugar came through the fashion in drinking tea, coffee and chocolate which had been sweetened. Consequently, the English developed the reputation for having ‘the sweetest tooth in Europe’ and by the end of the eighteenth century, sugar had become England’s leading import (Flandrin & Montanari 1999, p.392).

Since the early 1700s, sugar had been a contentious political issue. In 1796, the farmer John Lawrence published *A Philosophical and Practical Treatise on Horses* in which he remarked, ‘It has been said that the world could not have either gold, sugar, or coals but at the expense of human blood and human liberty’ (Morton 1994, p.16). Ethically, refraining from the purchase of sugar and sugar products would mean less money went to the government in the form of taxes. During the early 1800s, abstaining from sugar could be interpreted as a way of putting pressure on the government as a protest against slave trading (19). But as the century progressed the taxes on sugar became less and less until in 1874 duty on imported sugar was abolished. In 1899 there was a call to put the tax back in order to pay for the Boer War. Despite opposition to this, in 1901 a small tax was indeed added (Fraser 1981, p.169).

Sugar takes on a comical site of contention in Conrad’s short story, ‘An Outpost of Progress’ (1897) in which two Belgian colonials having failed at home, find themselves on a Belgian trading post in Africa where they expect to ‘let life run easily here! Just sit still and gather in the ivory those savages will bring’ (1945, p.90). Ironically, the two protagonists, finding they are unable to feed themselves, are reduced to scant provisions of ‘rice and coffee; they drank the coffee without sugar’ because ‘the last fifteen lumps Kayerts had solemnly locked away in his box’ (109). When Carlier announces, ‘I mean to have sugar in my coffee to-day’ (110) and Kayerts refuses to give it to him, a fight ensues ending in the death of both men.

The representation of sugar in this short story and in ‘A Smile of Fortune’ highlights the foodstuff as not only a cheap commodity – and almost a human right – but also a politically charged one. During the nineteenth century the argument about sugar tax was relieved by the growth in European beet sugar which negated the need for mass importation from the West Indies.

**Fruit and Vegetables**

Throughout the nineteenth century imports of fruit including bananas, pineapples, oranges, lemons, tangerines and many more started to arrive in England from North Africa, the Middle East, Florida and California (Flandrin & Mantanari 1999, p.437). With the introduction of refrigerated ships, fruit and vegetables could be transported from the colonies without detrimental effect to the cargo. Before this, the transportation of even hardy vegetables such as potatoes resulted in much of the cargo being lost. Again, in Conrad’s short story, ‘A Smile of Fortune’, the seventeen tons of potatoes that the narrator purchases in the tropical island of ‘Pearl’ is stored in the ‘after-hatch’ for ‘more than a week’ (1914, p.92). During that journey the narrator describes how ‘Whiffs from decaying potatoes pursued me on the poop, they mingled with my thoughts, with my food, poisoned my very dreams. They made an atmosphere of corruption for the ship’ (91).

When refrigerated ships were introduced, perishable fruit and vegetables from the colonies such as South East Asia were no longer considered to be luxury items but became ‘items of mass consumption’ mainly available between November and April when home grown fruit and vegetables were out of season (Flandrin & Montanari 1999, p.465). This development would certainly account for the ‘violent blaze of light and colour’ that emanates from ‘the glowing heaps of oranges and lemons’ on the ‘only fruiterer’s stall’ in the ‘blackness of a wet London night’ in Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* (1947, p.119).

**Rice**

At the time that Conrad was writing, Burma was a British colony and its capital Rangoon (Yangon) was the centre of distribution for food – primarily rice – and timber to Europe. Up until 1900 much of this rice was used for making starch and alcohol but later it comprised a significant part of the European food diet. The trade in rice during the nineteenth century was a complicated and carefully balanced market. Up until the First World War, rice was one of the world’s most important food products with fifty per cent of the population eating it. The main rice suppliers were China, India, Burma and Siam (Thailand). Up until the 1860s British India was the biggest exporter of rice, providing not only Europe but other Asian countries too. After 1867 when India suffered a famine, Burma took its place as the number one exporter. However, when Burma itself was short of supplies, China and Bombay took their turn in meeting the needs of other Asian and European countries. After 1900 rice was exported directly to the West Indies and Africa – rather than being re-routed from Europe – and Britain, Germany, Holland and Italy, all became major consumers of Burmese rice (Latham & Neal 1983, p.260-280).

Alfred Russel Wallace’s study, *The Malay Archipelago* (1869) – a work that Richard Curle described as Conrad’s ‘favourite bedside companion’ (1928, p.120) – includes comments on the main trade of Lombok and Bali as that of ‘rice and coffee; the former grown on the plains, the latter on the hills. The rice is exported very largely to other islands of the Archipelago, to Singapore, and even to China’ (Wallace 2011, p.146). The significance of rice in Malaysian and Indonesian culture is not confined to economics. Rice is ‘part of the tradition, religion and law of many of the ethnic groups’ (Van de Kroef 1952, p.51). In Java, for example, rice constitutes many of the traditional folk legends. In some, one of the gods of rice, Dewi Shri, transforms herself into a rice bird (*Glatik*) who shows the peasants how to pick ‘the rice kernels one by one from their stalks’ (51). In Conrad’s novel, *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) a ‘serried flock of white rice-birds rose above the trees with a faint scream, and hovered, swaying in a disordered mass that suddenly scattered in all directions, as if burst asunder by a silent explosion’ (1924, p.250-251). The rice-birds form part of the order of the day as the women husk the morning rice. Conrad’s allusion to them in his novel, although only passing, signifies his understanding of their symbolic importance in the social fabric and the traditions of cultivating rice. In his *Malay Archipelago*, Wallace describes the role of rice in a ceremony in which he was the guest of honour.

In the evening the Orang Kaya[[22]](#endnote-22), came in full dress (a spangled velvet jacket, but no trousers), and invited me over to his house, where he gave me a seat of honour under a canopy of white calico and coloured handkerchiefs. The great verandah was crowded with people, and large plates of rice with cooked and fresh eggs were placed on the ground as presents for me. A very old man then dressed himself in bright-coloured cloths and many ornaments, and sitting at the door, murmured a long prayer or invocation, sprinkling rice from a basin he held in his hand (2011, p.59).

In a slightly less believable recount, Wallace tells how one Rajah made sacrifices of human heads to the temples in order to secure a good rice crop. More in keeping with Conrad’s own fictionalized account of the part rice plays in Malaysian culture, Wallace also notes that women’s work is centred around the preparation of rice, ‘an hour’s work every evening to pound the rice with a heavy wooden stamper, which violently strains every part of the body’. This, he maintains, is a part of the female routine which begins from the age of nine or ten and certainly accounts for the amount of time that Mrs Almayer in *Almayer’s Folly* spends preparing the ‘family rice’. In addition to this, rice was also used as a way of taxing the population as detailed in an account by Wallace of The Rajah of Lombok whose wealth was measured by the amount of rice he collected from his people. Wisely, he only took a small measure but in doing so also managed to secure a census of how many people lived on the island that he ruled. Significantly, the collected rice was termed ‘Government rice’ and handed out to people in times of hardship (147).

In Conrad’s fiction Malay society is authoritatively represented by the place rice holds in its customs and daily life. However, in Jessie Conrad’s cook book, *A Handbook of Cookery for a Small House* (1923), rice is represented through the medium of its place in the English household. One of the most popular foods that incorporated the use of rice was curry which has a long history in England with the first dish being served in 1733 at The Norris Street Coffee House at Haymarket (Chaudhuri 1992, p.238). The availability of spices such as turmeric – the main ingredient in curry – made it a popular and easy recipe. Although curry did not necessarily need rice with it, Jessie Conrad stipulates, ‘The cooking of rice is the principal part in preparing a dish of curry’ (1924, p.55) and Mrs Beeton in her *Book of Household Management* (1861) includes a specific recipe for cooking ‘Boiled Rice for Curries, &c.’ (2008, p.278). In the 11 August 1888 edition of *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, an anonymous writer devotes nearly three pages to an article entitled simply ‘Curry’, extolling the special place of the dish in English society. ‘Curry’, he begins, ‘though commonly regarded as of Indian birth and of pure Eastern begetting, undoubtedly took its rise immediately from Europe’. Continuing to detail every possible combination of curry, the writer declares, ‘Rice is a medium through which the curry flavour is conveyed, and, as a medium ought to be pure, neutral and natural ... Rice is a good, honest servant’.[[23]](#endnote-23) This personification of rice echoes the Empire’s view of its colonised subjects. In *Almayer’s Folly*, Ali is the ‘faithful servant’ who cooks Almayer’s rice. In ‘Falk’ it is the trusted Chinese cook that brings Falk his rice and fish.

Curry and rice also represent the swift appropriation of a colonial dish into the English diet in the same way that England appropriated people, customs and their land. Paradoxically, this romantic view of Eastern fare does not apply when the coloniser is forcibly subjected to a rice diet. Almayer in *Almayer’s Folly* lives on a staple of rice and fish, considering his diet demeaning to his position as a white man. The British Colonial Administrator, Hugh Clifford complained that it was impossible for a European to eat enough rice to comprise a satisfying diet. In his account of his journey through Trengganu and Kelantan, he writes: ‘The bulk of those who formed the expedition – that is to say, the Malays and Dyaks – were accustomed to regard rice as their staple, and therefore it was no hardship to them to live upon the diet supplied. The Europeans and Sikhs, however, were not accustomed to live upon rice, and the effect of the diet upon them was soon only too apparent ... To people unaccustomed to it, it is a physical impossibility to consume a quantity sufficient for health’ (1897, p.7). It is ironic, therefore, to consider the valued place of rice in European cooking as a foodstuff not essential to life but a commodity to be used at will.

**Cereals**

During the years 1880-84 Britain was importing £183 million worth of food and £21 million worth of this was wheat (Fuchs 1905, p.126-130). Flandrin and Montanari explain how despite increases in agricultural production, England was still unable to produce enough grain at competitive prices. Colonial and ex-colonial continents, such as Africa and the Americas provided a seemingly ‘inexhaustible’ land resource that could be cultivated to provide England with cereals at prices significantly lower than European tariffs. ‘This revolution in food supplies was also the result of rapid new rail and sea links’ and while England abandoned ‘uneconomical grain culture’, they replaced it with manufacturing such as cotton, linen and tobacco (1999, p.487) which they used to trade for food.

The moment when Marlow in Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’ remarks upon the emaciated African workers who are building a railway,[[24]](#endnote-24) describing them as ‘black shapes’ that ‘crouched, lay, sat between the trees’ and who had been ‘fed on unfamiliar food’ until ‘they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest’ (1967, p.66) reveals the effect of European intervention. Indigenous crops to the Congo, such as millet, were destroyed and replaced with maize which could be exported to Europe to provide a cheap means of cereal for the consumer. England’s imports of grain were balanced by the export of manufactured goods. Conrad satirizes this ‘trade’ by drawing attention to the African whose ‘black bones reclined at full length’ who looked at Marlow with ‘sunken eyes’ and who ‘had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck ... It looked startling round his black neck this bit of white thread from beyond the seas’. When Marlow remarks, ‘Why? Where did he get it. Was it a badge – an ornament – a charm – a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it?’ he expresses the irrelevancy of mercantile trade to the starving indigenous population whose crops have been destroyed to grow those preferred by the West (66-67).

**Fish and Chips**

In England during the second half of the nineteenth century, cheap convenient food was becoming the norm. When baked potatoes became available for sale on the streets, they were enthusiastically adopted as a staple of the working class diet. Cooked in hired ovens, they were sold by ‘baked-potato-men’ from heated brass chimneys that could be wheeled around the streets. By 1851 there were over 300 of these tradesmen hawking this cheap, convenient and healthy food. At the same time improved transportation of fresh food through the use of railways, meant fish was becoming increasingly available. Fried fish in particular was a cheap and easy dietary choice. The two foods were quickly paired although it wasn’t until the 1860s that fried fish was being sold with deep-fried sliced potatoes (Groom 2004, p.32). By the end of the 1880s the fish and chip shop was a ‘well established feature of working class areas’ (Fraser 1981, p.108). Despite being generally greasy, smelly and dirty, they could provide a meal for six to eight for sixpence (109).

But fish and chips were also ideologically coded foods. In Ireland, this popular meal was seen as a usurper of ‘the enthroned Roast Beef of Old England’ which had been ‘ambushed by Francophile bandits: the quick, vernacular Robin-Hood radicalism of fysshe and chippes’ (Groom 2004, p.34). Roland Barthes, writing in 1957, examined the ideology of the chip concluding that ‘la frite, chips, are the alimentary sign of Frenchness’ (1993, p.62-64). Considering the strained relations that existed between England and France the proliferation of the fish and chip shop symbolized not only an invasion of French cuisine but also a denationalisation of food as foreign cuisine blurred the boundaries of national identity.

The proliferation of fish in the public and political mind is a subject Conrad tackles in *The Secret Agent* (1907). On the London streets, a cab carries Winnie, her mother and Stevie through the streets of London as it ‘jolt[s] in front of a steamy, greasy shop in a blaze of gas and in the smell of fried fish’ (1947, p.130). Meanwhile in the parliamentary offices of Sir Ethelred, the Assistant Commissioner, and Toodles, the ‘Private Secretary’ employ fish as a metaphor for the capture of the perpetrator of the Greenwich bombing. The analogy emphasizes the current political question of nationalising the fisheries. Sir Ethelred is in the process of putting through the ‘Bill for the Nationalisation of the Fishers’[[25]](#endnote-25) and as a consequence Toodles finds himself ‘buried in special books up to our necks – whole shelves full of them – with plates’ about fish (171). The emphasis on the metaphorical allusion to fish – the ‘dog-fish’, the ‘sprat’, the ‘whale’ all used as terms to describe Mr Vladimir – reinforces the relationship between political intrigue and fishing. Bearing in mind that part of the impetus for the nationalisation of the fisheries was to protect U. K. stocks from foreign fishermen, questions of nationalism and foreign invasion become embedded in *The Secret Agent* through food.[[26]](#endnote-26). It is also significant that the fisheries were big business. By 1913 Britain’s annual catch of fish was over one million tons (Fraser 1981, p.163), offering the opportunity for substantial profits.

**Vegetarianism**

The relationship between vegetarianism and social reform was becoming a Europe–wide phenomenon in the nineteenth century. The Russian writer Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy inextricably linked vegetarianism with moral purity while his abstinence from both meat and sex was a conscious ethical and moral decision. In 1891 Tolstoy wrote a Preface to a translation of *The Ethics of Diet: A Catena of Authorities Deprecatory of the Practice of Flesh-Eating* (1883)[[27]](#endnote-27) by the British vegetarian, Howard Williams who extolled the virtues of abstaining from meat. Tolstoy’s Preface was entitled ‘The First Step’ and included a disturbing portrayal of the Tula slaughterhouse and a description of how the workers kill the cattle. For Tolstoy vegetarianism was not about health but about the association between meat eating and violence not only towards animals but to fellow human beings (LeBlanc 1997, p. 84).

This humanitarian view of vegetarianism had also been developing in England since the 1840s and in 1891 the Humanitarian League was formed by Henry Salt and Edward Carpenter. In America in 1900 the Kellogg’s company was the largest manufacturer of vegetarian food while in 1875 the French began the Société Vegétarienne de France (SVF) influenced by the growing vegetarian movement coming out of Switzerland, Germany and Belgium (Ouédraogo 2000, p.203).

At the end of the century, humanitarianism, peaceful revolution and anarchy came together, often identifying and collectivising itself through ideologically based vegetarianism. The political refugee, Prince Kropotkin, came to England to run *The Anarchist* and set up the Utopian-based commune, Clousden Hill in Northumberland in 1895. Members produced their own food, striving for a complete withdrawal from the capitalist economy. Although a few of these communes sprung up around the country, they soon disbanded when some members proved to be lazier than others or attracted those who just did not want to work. Clousden Hill was the longest surviving, finally closing its doors in 1902. Ford Maddox Ford writing under the pseudonym Daniel Chaucer wrote *The Simple Life Ltd* (1911), a satire of an anarchist, vegetarian co-operative. Communalism philosophy evolved around equality, sharing and freedom from the state. Meat eating and the production and marketing of meat was seen as wholly capitalistic and just as Shelley in the early nineteenth century had linked meat eating with violence and capitalism, so too did these ethical communes. With the advent of vegetarianism, food took on a new political and metaphorical symbolism. It was no longer just a commodity for trade but a symbol of ideological philosophising.

In the 1890s the vegetarian movement sought members from the working classes aligning itself with the ‘bohemian influx’ of socialism which also sought reforms in marriage, contraception and an end to the charlatanism of faith healing. However, not all socialists were convinced by the benefits of vegetarianism. Henry Hyndman, the leader of the Marxist Social Democratic Federation condemned humanitarians, vegetarians and ‘arty-crafty’s and all the rest of them’, suggesting it kept ‘a lot of useless people alive’ (Gregory 2007, p.158).

Writing into the twentieth century, social commentators such as George Orwell considered the association between socialism and vegetarianism a damaging one. In *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) he describes vegetarians as ‘cranks’ and considers that the ‘food-crank is by definition a person willing to cut himself off from human society in hopes of adding to the life of his carcass; that is a person out of touch with common humanity’ (1961, p.147). As the twentieth century saw increases in food importations, Orwell regretted the sacrifice of British food and the effects of industrialization. ‘What the majority of English people mean by an apple is a lump of highly coloured cotton wool from America or Australia; they will devour these things, apparently with pleasure, and let the English apples rot under the trees’ (170).

**Restaurants**

The popularity of vegetarianism was however reflected in the abundance of vegetarian restaurants in London during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Not only were they outlets for socialist and temperance material, but they were also popular destinations for the working class seeking a cheap meal. St George’s House Café in St Martin’s Lane which opened in 1887, offered ‘macaroni and egg cookery, together with special American dishes, curries etc’ (Gregory 2007, p.135-137). This ‘de-nationalisation’ of food was becoming more prevalent in nineteenth-century England not only through colonial imports but also due to foreigners arriving in London and opening up restaurants serving their own national food as well as that of other nationalities. In 1865, Soho was a home away from home for German immigrants with a number of German restaurants catering to its expatriate population (Panayi 1995, p.100). Writing in 1899, Lieutenant Colonel Newnham Davis’s *Dinners and Diners: Where & How to Dine in London* critiqued a variety of restaurants including *Romano’s* which was run by ‘a Roman’, *Monico’s* in Shaftesbury Avenue, owned by a Signor Giulio C. Nobile, and *Le Restaurant Des Gourmets* in Lisle Street, run by a ‘burly Frenchman’ and which sold not only French food but also Italian paté and turbot. Most interesting is the *The Tivoli* in The Strand. Owned by a M. Aubanel, it boasted a reliable Russian chef who cooked ‘Russian hors-d’oevres’[[28]](#endnote-28) pandering to the fashion for the upper class style of dining *a la russe* in which the food was carved and plated by the servants and served to the diners instead of the traditional method, *à la française* in which the guests/customers helped themselves from a selection of dishes. Newnham Davis goes on to articulate the variety of foods available to the discerning diner: ‘not only France, but countries much farther afield are systematically pillaged that Londoners may dine, and I do not despair of some day eating Mangostines [an exotic East India fruit] for desert’ (cited in McLaughlin 2000, p.158).

In *The Secret Agent*, the Assistant Commissioner eats at ‘a little Italian restaurant ... – one of those traps for the hungry’ which has an ‘atmosphere of fraudulent cookery mocking an abject mankind in the most pressing of its miserable necessities’ (148). The narrator of *The Secret Agent* comments that ‘the Italian restaurant is such a peculiarly British institution’ and the people who eat in such establishments are ‘as denationalised as the dishes set before them’ (149). In Conrad’s novel, the fine cooking and expansive menus of Lieutenant Colonel Newnham Davis are nowhere to be found. Instead the invasion of foreign restaurants selling ‘fraudulent cookery’ is juxtaposed against the influx of ‘sham’ anarchists that bring with them fraudulent ideologies.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, England became a safe haven for political refugees and was the only European country not to refuse anarchists the right to live here. In Conrad’s short stories and novels he uses restaurants as fronts for anarchist activities. In *The Secret Agent*, there is an implication that the Italian restaurant harbours anarchists. In ‘The Informer’ (1908), the Hermione Street operations are above ‘a little Italian restaurant of the flyblown sort’ where the ‘comrades could get their meals ... unnoticed amongst the other customers’ (1927, p.78). Like the Assistant Commissioner in *The Secret Agent*, Italian food that ‘denationalises’ offers a cover for foreigners allowing them to blend into cosmopolitan London.

The concept of the ‘restaurant’ as opposed to the hostelry, inn or table d’hôte was a French one with central Paris first opening its ‘restorative bouillons’ – the origins for the word ‘restaurant’ – in the 1760s. Unlike the table d’hôte which had set meal times and a shared buffet table from which people scrambled for their dinner, restaurants offered a more individual experience. Menus were printed and people could dine alone instead of sharing a table with strangers. Customers could also choose a specific meal and know exactly how much it was going to cost. As restaurants spread throughout Europe they began to cater for all nationalities. Whichever country they were in, Englishmen could order roast beef while Frenchmen could have salmon and chips allowing them to retain some of their national identity even when abroad (Grew 1999, p.80-82).

Restaurants were also an opportunity to experience a different culture and cuisine. When the Assistant Commissioner in *The Secret Agent* walks into the Italian restaurant he immediately ‘seemed to lose some more of his identity’ (148). After eating a ‘short meal’ he ‘contemplated his own image with a melancholy and inquisitive gaze, then by sudden inspiration raised the collar of his jacket ... he completed it by giving an upward twist to the ends of his black moustache ... He was satisfied by the subtle modification of his personal aspect’ (149). Although there is no historical evidence for restaurants being used as fronts for dangerous revolutionary activity, it makes perfect sense for Conrad to do so in a fictionalized form. Indeed, the psychological threat to identity through eating the food of the Other is made tangible by the actual threat of anarchist bomb plots.

It soon becomes clear in Conrad’s writing, that food and eating houses, when mixed with politics, hold negative connotations. At the beginning of ‘The Informer’, the restaurant in which the narrator and ‘X’ meet is a ‘very good restaurant’ but the narrator is soon appalled when he considers that he and the ‘destructive publicist’ (73) share ‘the same taste in cooking’ (140) as if it confirms their shared inhumanity. When ‘X’ attacks a ‘*bombe glacée*’ Conrad is emphasising the negative connotation between food and politics and in particular ‘sham’ anarchist activities. By using ‘Stone’s Dried Soup’ tins in which to conceal bombs in ‘The Informer’, Conrad makes fun of the idea of the anarchist threat to England by implying that anarchic propaganda by deed is possibly more appealing to the public than the ‘Stone’s Dried Soup’ that should have been inside the tins.

At the beginning of the short story ‘Falk’ in which a man’s moral code is tested after he resorts to eating human flesh in order to survive, the narrator and his listeners find themselves in a ‘small river-hostelry’ with ‘rotten’ planks, a ‘decrepit old waiter’ and ‘chipped plates’. The hostelry serves ‘chops’ which ‘recalled times more ancient still’ (145). Although at the beginning of the story the reader has no idea that cannibalism will be its subject, the nature of the food and the environment in which it is being eaten, creates the atmosphere for the ‘artless tales of experience – the tales of hunger and hunt’ (81). Similarly, later on in the story, the table d’hôte which sells ‘execrable’ chops warns the reader that its proprietor, Schomberg, is as fraudulent as his cooking. More importantly, however, is the fact that what Schomberg offers is supposed to represent a home away from home, a taste of Europe in a foreign country. The irony is that much of what Britain was eating at the end of the nineteenth century was foreign food from the colonies, Americas and Australia. In a more subtle way Conrad was also hinting at the fraudulent nature of imperialism through the prism of food.

**Food and Revolution**

In *Under Western Eyes* (1911), Conrad attacks all aspects of the political system; the autocracy of nineteenth-century Russia, the ‘bland democracy’ of Geneva and the messianic fervour of Russian revolutionaries. Food and in particular bread, becomes the medium through which Conrad directs his criticism. Within the unstable climate of pre-revolutionary Russia, food represents tradition, conflict and religion, while eating becomes a metaphorically cannibalistic activity which represents the savagery of autocracy.

Food – and the lack of it – played an important part in uprisings in nineteenth-century Russia and was the cause of the mutiny which broke out in 1905 aboard the *Battleship Potemkin* when a member of the crew, a sailor called Omulchuck, complained about the quality of the soup. An illustrated London newspaper reported the details of the incident as follows:

The Russian Revolution spreads apace. Last week the entire Russian Navy, besides the inhabitants of nearly every big city in the country, seemed to have broken out into open revolt. The first act was sudden and dramatic. A sailor on board a man-of-war, the *Kniar Potemkin*, complained to an officer of the soup he had had for dinner. The officer shot him dead ... As we go to press it appears as if the whole of the Russian Navy are practically in a state of mutiny (*The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* 8 July 1905, p.2).

The mutiny was over by the 15 July and the Roumanian Government’ (sic) ‘allowed the crew to disperse themselves into the country, out of reach of Russia’s revenge’. But the events on the battleship stirred revolutionary ardour. ‘There are reports of serious risings in no fewer than thirty-eight districts in the Government of Kherson, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, and Torida’ warned the same London newspaper (*The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times* 15 July 1905, p.18).

Exactly one year earlier, M. De Plehve,[[29]](#endnote-29) the Russian Minister of the Interior had been assassinated by a man named Egor Sazonov (Avrich 2007, p.113). In the journal, *Social Democrat*, Theo Rothstein, writing just after Plehve’s assassination, described the minister as ‘bestial and fiendish’.[[30]](#endnote-30) Rothstein claims that in his role of minister, Plehve was responsible for numerous crimes against humanity as well as an incompetency in managing the national grain stores. The Minister of the Interior, as a government position in Tsarist Russia, had a lot to answer for. The state responsibility of feeding the Russian people was maintained through serfdom and autocracy. Therefore when Miss Haldin remarks in *Under Western Eyes*, ‘I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread’, she brings two contradictory desires together. Man needs food but in order to get food he must work and in Russian society that means never being free.

In 1891 the worst famine of the century occurred. It affected 36 million people and 400,000 died of starvation (Smith & Christian 1984, p.350). In an interview with one starving family, a reporter of the time writes:

I questioned the family, and discovered that their breadwinner, the father and husband, had died for his country in Manchuria, and a grateful Government thus attended to the needs of his dying wife and children. Their food was a semi-poisonous kind of weed, ground up with a little rye flour, acorns, and oak bar (351).

The man died in the Russo/Japanese War,[[31]](#endnote-31) that which Conrad believed would end with ‘a new political organism to take the place of a gigantic and dreaded phantom’ (*NLL,* 86).

The inclusion of these seemingly incidental references serve a greater purpose. Indeed bread has a special place in Russian society. In the nineteenth century 60% of arable land was given over to rye crops (16.5% to wheat). When Conrad talks about Russia as a phantom he means that it is a fantasy imagined by Peter the Great, an idea that does not exist, in the same way that bread exists as an ideological foodstuff. Russian bread should be ‘thick, not light, not doughy, and made well, out of fresh flour ... Good bread is the most important thing’ (Smith & Christian 1984, p.258).[[32]](#endnote-32) In *Under Western Eyes* the bread that Razumov considers is ‘stale’, indicates not only a dissatisfied and hungry people but an obsolescent political system that deprives its people of both good bread and liberty.

This link between bread and liberty was used as a political tool by the Russian anarchist, Peter Kropotkin, whose publication, *I Khleb Volya – Bread and Freedom* – was first published in 1903 and produced twenty four editions. Printed in Geneva and Paris, the literature was smuggled into Russia between 1903 and 1907. Apart from extolling the virtues of Anarcho-communism, it also promoted unionist activity.[[33]](#endnote-33) In the second edition printed in September 1903, it called for the people to rise up against ‘Agrarian terror’, telling the peasants that they needed ‘neither tsar nor state’ only ‘land and liberty’ and calling for a return to the system which operated in medieval Russia in which autocracy did not exist and the local authority was decided via a town assembly. The village would live in freedom and people would take ‘bread, clothing and other supplies’ from ‘the common storehouse’.

The starvation of the Russian people serves as a backdrop for Conrad’s ‘historical process’, threading its way through *Under Western Eyes*. When Tekla remarks, ‘... was it not sin enough to live on a Government salary while half Russia was dying of hunger?’ she voices the economic split of Russia under an autocratic government (150). With this in mind, it is not surprising that food is used by Conrad to convey the dislocated psyche of the Russian Empire and its people which is emphasized by the disparity of their diets.

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**3.**

**Food as Cultural Narrative in *Almayer’s Folly***

Hopefully, one might discover for each particular case the way in which a society’s cuisine

acts as a language through which it unconsciously expresses its structure. (Lévi-Strauss 1968, p.411)

‘Kaspar! Makan!’ are the opening words to *Almayer’s Folly*, the first piece of fiction written by Joseph Conrad. ‘Kaspar’, being a name, makes ‘Makan’ which is Malay for supper or dinner, the first proper word that begins Conrad’s career as an author. Notably, Conrad does not use an English word to start his life as a writer of English literature but that of a colonised people under European rule. As such, the voice of the colonised becomes authoritative just as the food of the colonised Other plays a dominant role in supplying Europe and the British Empire with edible products – not least, rice, sugar, fruit, spices – placing the East as an important source of sustenance for the West. This reliance on the food of the Other undermines the perceived superiority of Western culture. In Conrad’s Malay novels, food acts as a narrative which challenges these perceptions by undermining European eating habits. In *Lord Jim* the English pirate ‘Gentleman Brown’ and his ‘gang’ survive on ‘dirty rice’ and ‘a bunch of bananas’ (1964, p.263). The option of cannibalism is never far from the mind of Brown and his followers, reinforcing the notion – evident in a number of Conrad’s novels – that cannibalism is a pursuit not of the exotic Other, but of the European white man. In *Almayer’s Folly*, food symbolizes the strength of Malayan culture through the production, preparation and consumption of valuable commodities such as rice, coffee, mangos and fish. Production upholds the Malay economy and its trade agreements – both at home and abroad – while preparation establishes gender divisions. How food is consumed highlights the cultural differences and the tensions that exist between the East and West in a struggle to assert the dominant identity. Combined, all three serve as a metaphorical and geographical backdrop to *Almayer’s Folly*, creating a narrative map through which the reader can navigate the text.

At the beginning of *Almayer’s Folly*, Almayer stands at the ‘balustrade of the verandah’ of his ‘new but already decaying house’ looking down at the Pantai River. He takes ‘no further notice’ of the call to eat by his Malay wife, instead preferring to ponder on his fruitless European dreams of ‘wealth and power’ (3). Dismissing his wife’s call to dinner allows Almayer more time to dream and ignore the reality of his plight. This reality is brought into sharp focus by the meal that he is served, ‘a plateful of rice and fish, a jar of water, and a bottle half full of genever’. Almayer is also given a ‘cracked glass tumbler and a tin spoon’. He then ‘attacked his rice greedily but after a few mouthfuls he paused, spoon in hand, and looked at his daughter curiously’ (17). This attack is a physical manifestation of Almayer’s earlier thoughts at the balustrade when he looks at the ‘angry and muddy flood’ and the water which ‘swirled and roared angrily’ (4). Ian Watt has pointed out that the ‘duplication of “angry” and “angrily”’ is a ‘rhetorical device[s] for demanding attention’ (1994: xlix). The equally aggressive adjective used to describe the way in which Almayer eats his rice – ‘greedily’ – emphasizes his own agitated mood. As an antidote to this, Almayer escapes with his bottle of genever – Dutch Gin – into his dreams of a life in Amsterdam. Almayer’s avoidance of his ‘unpleasant reality’ is fleeting because the food that he must eat every day and the ‘tin spoon’ with which he must eat it, serve as tangible reminders of his real life. The next occasion in the narrative in which Almayer is occupied with eating is a near repetition of the first. Interestingly, the second occasion in the narrative occurs before the first in the duration of the story: ‘Almayer felt happy enough that evening; the preparations were nearly completed; to-morrow he would launch his boats. In his mind’s eye he saw the rich prize in his grasp; and with tin spoon in his hand he was forgetting the plateful of rice before him in the fanciful arrangement of some splendid banquet to take place on his arrival in Amsterdam’ (65). The repetition evokes a sense that Almayer’s dreams are played out with the same regularity as the evening meal. The dream of the ‘rich prize’ is piteously undermined by the ‘tin spoon’ that Almayer actually grasps while his day dreams of a ‘splendid banquet’ render his simple meal of rice and fish distasteful (65). The narrative voice at the beginning of the novel positions Malay food as a reality to be suffered but as the novel progresses, this voice changes. This change can be usefully gauged by the shifting focus on food – in particular rice – as an important and intrinsic part of Malay life and traditions.

Allan Simmons has identified the ‘instability in the narrating voice’ of *Almayer’s Folly* ‘its unease with the savage/civilized opposition’ (2006, p.44). Half way through the novel, there is a shift in the tone of the narrating voice which at first asserts the distinction between ‘savage’ and ‘civilized’ as representative of the Oriental/Occidental respectively. By chapter eight, this distinction has blurred until it becomes ‘untenable and, instead, suggests a substratum of identification between them, based on their shared impulses’ (49). Simmons sees this narrative shift as a change in ‘attitude’ from the perspective of the narrator which ‘become[s] increasingly distanced from those of Almayer, suggesting that they undergo a transformation’ (42). This ‘shared substratum’ isolates Almayer. Conrad’s mischievous ability to make the reader unwittingly complicit in Eurocentric and colonial attitudes is given some relief by the representation of food through the voice of the narrator as its importance in Malay culture becomes apparent and allows an insight that goes beyond Almayer’s blinkered perspective as a ‘superior being’ who dreams of a ‘splendid banquet’ of Western food (65).

The opening words of *Almayer’s Folly*, ‘Kaspar! Makan!’ (3) are spoken in the narrative present of the novel. The food reference, ‘dinner’ acts as a point of fixity in a narrative which moves between an account of the past provided by an unstable narrative voice who tells Almayer’s story and Almayer’s dreams of indeterminate and vague possibilities; Almayer and his daughter ‘*would* be rich’, they ‘*would* live in Europe’, they ‘*would* be rich and respected’ and ‘nobody *would* think of her mixed blood’ (3; my italics). The movement from thoughts of the past to dreams of the future is prompted by Mrs Almayer’s call for dinner. Hers is a ‘shrill voice’, ‘an unpleasant voice too’ (3) which takes Almayer back to Macassar and the ‘poisonous shores of Java’ (5). Poison becomes what Gérard Genette terms an ‘iterative narrative’ in *Almayer’s Folly* in that it ‘provide[s] a sort of informative frame or background’ (1983, p.116-117). Poison is delivered through the vehicle of food, investing it with a deathly quality. Here, the iterative narrative of poison is continued with Almayer, having fled the ‘poisonous shores of Java’, finds himself in a situation in which ‘that easy and final manner of solving the social, political, or family problems in Malay life’ is not just a metaphor but a stark reality. The threat of having his food poisoned adds to Almayer’s sense of identity as a victim of his circumstances. To protect himself, ‘the faithful Sumatrese Ali cooked [Almayer’s] rice and made his coffee, for he dared not trust any one else, and least of all his wife’ (28).

The use of food as a means to deliver poison secures its purpose in the narrative as a frame inside which the ‘social, political’ and ‘family problems’ of Sambir society are played out (27). The site of these intrigues occur around the cooking shed which is situated at the back of Almayer’s house: ‘The front wall was cut in two by the doorway of a central passage, which led to the back courtyard and to the cooking shed’ (15). Poison is not only to be found hidden in food, but is also the focus of intrigues and gossip, conducted around the preparation of food. Almayer fails to build his trading post on commodities such as rice and gutta-percha, not only because of Lingard’s fantastical and expensive explorations, but partly because, as the only white man on the river, he is isolated by the Arabs and shunned by the locals who don’t like to trade with a man whose ‘star has set’. Trading with the white man would leave the locals vulnerable to the displeasure of the Arab traders. ‘Had they done so they knew there was no mercy to be expected from Arab or Rajah; no rice to be had on credit in times of scarcity from either (28). Food becomes a site of political manipulation, similarly used through the character of Morrison in *Victory* (1915) who is bankrupted by his lending of rice to the Malay people: ‘He would often sail through awfully dangerous channels up to some miserable settlement, only to find a very hungry population clamorous for rice, and without so much “produce” ... he would land the rice all the same, explain to the people that it was an advance, that they were in debt to him now’ (1924, p.6).

Almayer’s inability to outwit his rivals in business is further hindered by Lakamba’s ‘profound knowledge’ of his and Lingard’s ally – the old Rajah of Sambir’s – ‘most secret affairs’. Lakamba who begins his career as a ‘private individual on a rice clearing’ (24) rises to become the New Ruler of Sambir, deposing the Old Ruler who ‘by a convenient decree of providence and the help of a little scientific manipulation’ dies (27). The Old Rajah is physically poisoned while the knowledge obtained about Almayer leads to a metaphorical poisoning of his business and reputation. Lakamba’s information comes from the very person Almayer suspects of poisoning him, his wife, who has secret moonlit meetings with Lakamba. ‘Often ... the belated fishermen of Sambir saw a small canoe shooting out from the narrow creek at the back of the white man’s house’ where the cooking shed is located (25). After Nina returns, Mrs Almayer, ‘being much too active for the happiness and safety of the household ... resumes intercourse with Lakamba, not personally ... but through the agency of that potentate’s prime minister, harbour master, financial adviser and general factotum’ the ‘horribly disfigured’ Babalatchi (38). Their aim is to persuade Almayer to reveal the whereabouts of ‘the old white man’s treasure’ (40). ‘There at the back of the house, squatting on his heels on scattered embers in close proximity to the great iron boiler, where the family daily rice was being cooked by the women under Mrs Almayer’s superintendence, did that astute negotiator carry on long conversations in Sulu language with Almayer’s wife’ (38). The importance of Lakamba’s status in Sambir projects on to the site at which they take place, establishing the cooking shed as crucial to domestic and political life in Sambir. However, the fact that this is also the location where the ‘family daily rice’ is cooked makes the intrusion by Babalatchi – Almayer’s business rival – intensely personal. Almayer, ineffectually, mutters ‘vague threats of personal violence’ (59). The veiled mood of threat and intrigue cements the purpose of food metaphors in this narrative; to produce anxiety and discord.

After a narrative sequence in which Almayer, standing on the balustrade, reflects on the ‘wreckage of his past’ (11), his reverie is finally broken by ‘a hazy recollection of having been called some time during the evening by his wife. To his dinner probably.’ Food establishes structure by returning Almayer to the narrative present and offering stability to a plot in which the main protagonist is prone to fantasy and dreaming. In the first chapter, Almayer waits on his balustrade for the return of Dain, the Balinese Prince who is ‘now more than a week late!’ and in whom Almayer has invested all his hopes for the future (4). The narrative shift from these fantasies to the reality of Dain’s arrival is marked by Almayer’s greeting to the Balinese Prince, ‘drop down to the jetty and let your men cook their rice in my Kampong while we talk in the house’ (13). This request – the subject of which is food – comes within the first section of dialogue uttered by Almayer. Dain’s refusal of this invitation undermines Almayer’s belief in the reality of the Balinese Prince’s promise, again reinforcing the suggestion that food represents stability. Despite this, Almayer’s return to the distasteful reality of his old house and a meal of rice and fish does not prevent Almayer from dreaming of a new life in Europe, clinging on to the hopes he has invested in Dain. In chapter five, the narrative returns to the point at which the novel began but now in a voice that is reflexive, indicating a foreknowledge of proceedings. ‘Almayer *would* climb up slowly to the verandah of his new house to get out of the rain, and leaning on the front rail with his head sunk between his shoulders he *would* abandon himself to the current of bitter thoughts, oblivious of the flight of time and the pangs of hunger; deaf to the shrill cries of his wife calling him to the evening meal’ (74; my italics). The certainty with which Almayer *would* eat his evening meal is now in direct contrast to the thoughts that accompany the meal in the first chapter – ‘they would be rich’ and ‘they would live in Europe’ (3) – because there is narrative certainty in the fact that Almayer *will* eat his evening meal as opposed to the uncertainty that he *would* be rich. Simmons has pointed out that ‘the blend of voices/thoughts of the narrator and Almayer in “free indirect style” affords simultaneous versions of the same situation’ (2006, p.42). Although Simmons is referring exclusively to the opening example of Almayer as he stands on the balustrade and is called to his dinner, his ultimate conclusion that, ‘Conrad’s first novel is simultaneously an example of the colonial literature of its age and an important critique of the ideas implicit in such literature’ (44) can be usefully employed when analysing the two separate versions of the same event in the first and fifth chapters. Ultimately, making food the pivot between these simultaneous positions, allows the reader to navigate the narrative and identify the shifting focalization. In addition to this, Ian Watt suggests that Almayer’s ‘predetermined fate’ is established in the narrative (1994, p.lviii). More significantly, however this predetermined fate is represented by the certainty and content of Almayer’s meal times.

Almayer’s desire for ‘wealth and power’ is cemented by the first piece of dialogue spoken to his daughter: ‘Nina, I am hungry.’ As Almayer ‘attacked his rice greedily’, Nina stands ‘by the table, one hand slightly resting on its edge ... Her face turned towards the outer darkness – through which her dreamy eyes seemed to see some entrancing picture’ (16). Meanwhile Almayer ‘swallowed another spoonful’, as if consuming part of that ‘splendid banquet’ of his imagination. Then rising, ‘looking fixedly before him as if contemplating some enchanting vision’ (17). But the vision that Almayer sees as he finishes his rice, leaves him ‘oblivious’ to his daughter’s dreams. In the second meal that Almayer eats – the first in the duration of the story – Nina is ‘reclining in the long chair listen[ing] absently to the few disconnected words escaping from her father’s lips. – Expedition! Gold!’ (65). Again, Almayer is so caught up in his own dreams of prestige and wealth that he neglects to consider the most precious thing he has, his daughter. In the first part of the novel, food fixes the narrative present, but as the story progresses, the repetition of Almayer’s meal times that coincide with his dreaming, complicates the duration of narrative events and emphasizes Almayer’s myopic obsession with his own desires. As an extension of this, the repetition also deflates time within the story adding to the impression that twenty five years of Almayer’s life has swiftly passed and has been negligently wasted on hopes and dreams that will never be realised, while his present reality is an absent-minded mechanical process inscribed by the way in which he eats his food.

At the opening of the novel, the narrating voice echoes Almayer’s own feelings about the food that must be endured in this ‘savage life’ (29). When Almayer’s daughter, Nina, returns from a ‘civilized’ education in Singapore the reader is informed that she ‘accepted without question or apparent disgust the neglect, the decay, the poverty of the household, the absence of furniture, and the preponderance of rice diet on the family table’ (31). The narrator positions rice as the food of primitive society placing it in direct opposition to the cosmopolitan and more civilized Singapore in which colonial expatriates would have enjoyed a varied diet of foods such as eggs, mulligatawny soup, sago pudding, beef, toast, jam, and curries (Leong-Salobir 2011). In the Vinck household it can be supposed that Nina would also enjoy this colonial/Asian diet. Nina’s lack of ‘apparent disgust’ at the ‘preponderance’ of rice confuses the distinction between what is savage and what is civilized, not least because despite the variety of foods which would have been available to him in Sambir; chicken, lady’s fingers, bananas, mangos, eggs, Almayer provides his family with rice and fish and even this meagre diet cannot be guaranteed because of his poverty-stricken condition. The life to which Nina must now adapt is only ‘half-savage’, while the European Vinck girls are ‘no better than dressed-up monkeys’ (31). The narratorial shift brings a changing perspective to life in Sambir which is circumscribed by rice, producing a positive cultural picture. The ‘usual scene of daily activity’ in which Nina participates shows ‘women busily engaged in husking the daily rice; of naked brown children racing along the shady and narrow paths leading to the clearings’ (37). The term ‘daily rice’ carries deliberate Oriental echoes of the Occidental term ‘daily bread’ and with it the insinuation that the ‘daily bread’ of the Christian Lord’s prayer, can be replaced by an Eastern staple. As such, not only is this a way of undermining Western values but it also positions Malay life – portrayed at the beginning of the novel as alien – as familiar.

Rice may dominate and structure the daily lives of the people of Sambir, but fish, the other staple of daily life – and the only other consumable on Almayer’s plate at the beginning of the novel – is crucial to the function of the narrative in the movement of the plot. In chapter one, the status of Lingard as ‘Rajah-Laut’ is acknowledged by the ‘quiet fishermen (7). However, it turns out that the fishermen are anything but quiet. In chapter two, the ‘belated fishermen’ report the events at the ‘white man’s house’ that are discussed with relish ‘round the evening fires far into the night’ (21) and which are intrinsic to the authenticity of Almayer’s downfall. In chapter four, Nina paddling home in her canoe hears ‘some distant hailing in the darkness by the returning fishermen’ (50). The word ‘hailing’ is suggestive of news being shared by the fishermen, most likely the appearance of that ‘unusual object’, the ‘European-rigged vessel’ and, most significant to the plot, the arrival of Dain (50). The small intrigues that the fishermen initially report grow into more important warnings. At the end of chapter seven, Babalatchi spots ‘the black specks of the fishing canoes ... The fishermen seemed to be racing ... The man in the foremost canoe now within hail of the first houses of Sambir laid in his paddle and stood up shouting: “The boats! the boats! The man-of-war’s boats are coming! They are near!” In a moment the settlement was again alive with people rushing to the river side’ (106). The description of the fishermen’s boats as ‘black specks’ maintains the intention of the narrative to undermine their importance in the politics of Sambir life. In chapter eight however, news of the destruction of Dain’s brig is swiftly brought to Abdulla’s attention: ‘The rumour of the capture or destruction of Dain’s brig had reached the Arab’s ears three days before from the sea-fishermen and through the dwellers on the lower reaches of the river’ (109). Far from being at the margins of the narrative, the fishermen are not only central to the Sambir community by providing them with food but they also act as spies, informers and messengers, as well as validating the plot and maintaining the mood of anxiety and intrigue.

Babalatchi also takes advantage of the seemingly innocent occupation of fishing to spy on Bulangi’s Siamese slave girl, Taminah, who he wishes to buy. Babalatchi, ‘fishing at break of day in the creek over which stood Bulangi’s house’ uncovers ‘proof’ of the relationship between Nina and Dain (61). A few minutes after spotting Dain and Nina in a ‘long canoe’, he spies ‘Bulangi’s slave girl paddling in a small dug-out to the town with her cakes for sale’. The ‘fish baskets’, (61) like the cooking pot in Almayer’s Kampong become the focal point for spying and secret assignations. They are also witness to Dain’s plan to fake his own death and the site at which Taminah hears Dain and Nina persuade Bulangi to help them with their escape.

As a slave Taminah also appears to be at the margins of society – ‘an apparition of daily recurrence and of no importance whatever’ (110) – but her identity as a seller of cakes allows her – paradoxically – to move freely around Sambir without suspicion. ‘From early morning she was to be seen on the paths amongst the houses – by the riverside or on the jetties, the tray of pastry, it was her mission to sell, skilfully balanced on her head’ (37). Taminah, like the fishermen, becomes an important and reliable source of information. When questioned about Dain’s death, Abdulla is confident of the truth of her report and engages her to spy upon Almayer’s Kampong: ‘You will be there selling your cakes to the men of the sea. What you see and what you hear you may tell me’ (111). Taminah, however, following her usual routine of getting up at dawn to sell her cakes, has overheard the plot to fake Dain’s death. Her cakes become a ‘double load’ because ‘with her knowledge of the words spoken in the darkness, she held in her hand a life and carried in her breast a great sorrow’ (112). The power she obtains as a cake-selling slave positions her on an equal footing with Lakamba, who tells Dain, ‘Only yesterday I planted rice in a burnt-clearing; to-day – you say – I hold your life in my hand’ (80). Food represents power as well as becoming a site of knowledge and a structure for daily routine. But it is also used as a metaphor for concealment with Taminah – in her guise as an unobtrusive slave and cake seller – never revealing the ‘wild tumult of newly aroused feelings’ which drive her to revenge (114).

The possibility of poisoning which contaminates the narrative, gives the rice cakes[[34]](#endnote-34) a noxious quality. Innocuous but nevertheless tempting from the outside, Taminah is the personification of what she sells; she embodies food as a commodity. Babalatchi’s attempts to buy her – ‘decidedly he would offer fifty dollars more to that thief Bulangi’ (134) – reinforces her association with the cakes. In addition to this, food related metaphors dominate the narratives that surround her. After discovering Dain’s love for Nina, Taminah continues to visit the brig to ‘feed her dumb, ignorant soul on despair.’ Her heart becomes a ‘useless and barren’ vessel for the ‘seeds of all love and all hate’ (116). Taminah, as a representation of the poisonous possibilities of her cakes, is associated with death and infertility while the ‘heavy weight’ that ‘was crushing her down’ is transformed from a tray of cakes to ‘the rage of jealousy’ (117). ‘Shivering, she felt within a burning fire, that seemed to feed upon her very soul’ (118). The metaphor of simultaneous heat and coldness[[35]](#endnote-35) brings connotations of rotting while the burning brings a new dimension to Taminah’s association with her cakes, an impression that she too has been cooked or corrupted by the awakening of her ‘senses’ to love and jealousy. This metaphor is physically manifested as she spies on Almayer’s Kampong: ‘Now and again the thin blue smoke’ – from Almayer’s cooking shed – ‘rushed out – thicker and blacker – and drove in odorous masses over the creek, wrapping her for a moment in a suffocating veil’ (120). In her maddening despair, she is smoked – another version of cooking – by Almayer’s fire. Taminah’s corruption is also concealed by this ‘veil’ allowing a simultaneous narrative which produces two perspectives of Bulangi’s ‘little Taminah’ (61). From the outside, to the eyes of those who make ‘friendly calls inviting her in for business purposes’ – to sell her cakes – she appears as a ‘supple figure straight as an arrow’ who has ‘soft eyes’ (112). In contrast, in Bulangi’s creek where no eyes can see her, she is ‘crouching low on the mud’ and ‘supporting herself by the slimy pile’ with ‘black oily water at her feet’ (117). Similarly, while spying on Almayer’s Kampong, she hides by a ‘narrow ditch, full of stagnant water’ (119) while her tray of cakes is rested on the ‘stump of a tree’ (120): a stark contrast to the external narrative that sees her carrying her tray on her head and living ‘like the tall palms ... seeking the light’ (112). When Dain leaves and Taminah’s jealousy is extinguished, like a fire, having ‘nothing now to feed upon’ she returns to ‘the torpor of her former life’ (116). Taminah’s invisibility as a slave and a seller of cakes, conceals the torrent of feelings beneath the surface. This metaphor of concealment is reproduced in the ‘banana plantation’ which, ‘visible above the bushes, swayed and shook under the touch of invisible hands gathering the fruit’ (120) suggesting that the motivation or cause for an action is predominantly invisible, in the same way that inconspicuous food metaphors drive the narrative forward.

Dain Maroola also uses the cover of food to hide his true motivations, arriving in Sambir under the guise of ‘wanting to collect trepang and birds’ nests’:[[36]](#endnote-36) ‘He said he was a trader and sold rice’ (57). Like Taminah, the trade of food allows Dain to move between the various races and factions in Sambir in an attempt to buy gunpowder to fight against the Dutch in the Acheen War. He visits Almayer, he sells rice to Abdulla (according to Babalatchi) and he trades with Lakamba. A paradox ensues: as a ‘Brahmin’ Dain ‘refus[es] all food during his often repeated visits to Lakamba’s and Almayer’s houses’ (58). Although there is no explicit reference to poisoning, food as a means of concealment in this section of the narrative suggests that this is the motivation for Dain refusing to eat.[[37]](#endnote-37) Despite his reluctance to engage in commensality with the inhabitants of Sambir, his influence is not diminished. He ‘effected’ a ‘reconciliation’ between ‘the Rajah’ (49) and Almayer and this allows Babalatchi to once again ‘become a frequent guest in the Dutchman’s house’ (59). Ironically, Babalatchi’s presence in Almayer’s ‘cooking shed’ forces he and Dain to ‘talk on board the brig’ (59) where Taminah, in her covert mission ‘passed the noon hours under the shade of the brig’s awning’ (114). Spies– whether hiding behind domestic rice-pots, trays of cakes or fishing baskets such as those in Bulangi’s creek – are ever present, informing the narrative and adding to the sense of concealment.

In chapter five, there is a significant narrative shift from an Occidental to an Oriental perspective which also employs food as a means of concealment. Almayer, dreaming of ‘the paradise of Europe’ is oblivious to the paradise which Dain seeks through the ‘central passage of the house’ to the ‘edge of the banana plantation’ where ‘a clump of palms and mango trees formed a shady spot’ (63). Food signposts the developing relationship between Nina and Dain who conceal their relationship within the ‘seclusion’ of tropical fruits in which the ‘the subtle breath of mutual understanding pass[ed] between their two savage natures’ (63). Nina and Dain become part of a landscape narrated by images of food in which fruits such as mango and banana act as sites of erotic desire, reinforced by the ‘thrill of delicious fear’. As they ‘pass many a delicious and fast fleeting hour under the mango trees’, (64) the narrative begins to indulge in the sumptuous description of food, driven, simultaneously, by a narrative which is at times both Eurocentric and sympathetic to the Oriental. Even Mrs Almayer enjoys a transformation when her ‘shrill voice’ is heard through the ‘friendly curtain of bushes’ warning Dain and Nina they must separate (64). At the beginning of the novel, Mrs Almayer’s shrill voice is an unwelcome intrusion into Almayer’s European dreams. Now, from an Oriental perspective, her voice offers protection. The mango bush also offers a comparison between the relationship that Nina had with the ‘bank clerk’ in Singapore and that which she has with Dain, ‘a man totally untrammelled by an influence of civilized discipline’ (64). In the environs of the Vinck household, Nina cannot be made ‘white’ but within the protection of the mango bush, she discovers her identity as a ‘Malay girl’ (64). Later, before Dain departs, Nina takes what she has learned from the ‘forgotten civilization she had only glanced at in her days of restraint, of sorrow, and of anger’ and finds the ‘sign of love, the fitting expression of the boundless felicity of the present.’ Nina ‘threw her arms around Dain’s neck and pressed her lips to his in a long and burning kiss’ (72). Dain ‘tasted for the first time’, the ‘sensation of intoxicating delight’ (74). There are obvious parallels here with the Garden of Eden and the forbidden fruit, but within this narrative landscape of taste[[38]](#endnote-38) sensations, the Oriental ‘splendid future’ (72) promised through a kiss, reduces Almayer’s splendid future to the shallow trappings of material wealth. The intoxicating spell, however, is suddenly broken by Almayer’s ‘heavy step’ and ‘querulous clamour for food’ (65) which brings the narrative back to the harsh present of Almayer’s life. In contrast to the timeless environment of the mango bush, Almayer’s mode of eating – ‘he pushed his plate away with an impatient gesture on rising from the table’ (65) – acts as a temperate rhythm for his life and a narrative of his mood.

Almayer’s presence in the novel becomes increasingly insignificant with Dain giving his reasons for coming to Sambir partly because ‘there was no Dutch resident on the river’ (81), a perspective different to that of Almayer who tells the Dutch soldiers, ‘I believe I am the only white man on the east coast. That is a settled resident’ (122). Ironically, unlike Abdulla and Lakamba who have engaged in agricultural rice production, Almayer has not. Settled residency in this case is dependent upon the ability to grow food rather than trade it. The food of the Other dominates the narrative with the Western perspective all but gone. The divide between ‘savage’ and ‘civilized’ has also diminished with Babalatchi described as having a ‘savage and much sophisticated breast’ who found ‘shelter’ under the roof of Lakamba ‘in the modest rice-clearing of early beginnings’ (86). ‘Savage’ and ‘sophisticated’ sit comfortably together while the narrative reminds the reader that Lakamaba who now holds Dain’s life in his hands, was once a poor trader whose success is down to ‘Babalatchi’s wisdom’ and ‘white men successfully circumvented’ (66). When it occurs to the two men that Almayer must die for fear he will reveal the location of the treasure to the Dutch soldiers, that ‘easy and final manner of solving the social, political, or family problems in Malay life’ (27) is returned to the narrative. ‘“He drinks much coffee”’ Lakamba comments with ‘seeming irrelevancy’ (88). The narrative now invites the reader into the subtleties of Malay discourse, in this instance, the administering of poison. In addition, any Eurocentric judgement about this means of dealing with problems is immediately undermined by Lakamba’s call for ‘the box of music the white captain gave me’ upon which ‘the Travatore fitfully wept’ as he ‘bade goodbye to his Leonore’ who swallows poison from her ring in order to avoid marriage with Count Di Luna (88-89). Once again, the division between East and West disintegrates.

Death, either by poisoning or accident can only momentarily disrupt the daily life of Sambir. When Banjer Mahmat,[[39]](#endnote-39) Almayer’s neighbour, discovers a corpse on the bank of the river outside his house, the ‘kindling’ of fires and the ‘husking of the morning rice’ (92) is temporarily brought to a standstill and the day’s structure, based around the cooking of rice, is upset. The women ‘neglect[ing] their domestic duties’ go and see about the dead body, ‘disregarding the possibilities of domestic discontent’ (93). As such, the preparation of rice is an event as important as death in Sambir, a fact confirmed by Babalatchi who demands, ‘“Go away ... send your women to their cooking fires, which they ought not to have left to run after a dead stranger”’ (93). The command not only reinforces the preparation of rice as women’s work but it also demonstrates how food, within the midst of death, can restore order, routine, normality and stability.

In contrast, Dain’s reported death brings disorder and chaos to Almayer’s house with the preparation of dinner adding to the disintegrating structure of Almayer’s life. Almayer offers the Dutch soldiers who come to his house looking for Dain, something to eat: ‘“Eh! what about dinner? You have got a cook with you. That’s all right. There is a cooking shed in the other courtyard. I can give you a goose. Look at my geese – the only geese on the east coast – perhaps the whole island’” (122).[[40]](#endnote-40) The idiom ‘your goose is cooked’, is a metaphorical and subconscious acknowledgement by Almayer of the complete collapse of his life and his dreams. The realization that he is to blame for this collapse is emphasized by the recriminations of the Dutch soldiers who, while Ali lays the table, accuse Almayer of providing Dain with gunpowder. As the conversation continues, Ali moves ‘noiselessly laying the table, ranging solemnly the ill-assorted and shabby crockery, the tin spoons, the forks with broken prongs, the knives with saw-like blades and loose handles’ (124). These implements of eating – which Ali takes great care in placing even though he ‘had almost forgotten how to prepare the table for white men’ – indicate Almayer’s dogged insistence in hanging on to dreams of the West (124). The point of emphasis is not on the accusations of the white men but on the implements for eating, trappings of western civilization that now look decayed, out of place and almost useless in their purpose.

Almayer further cooks his own goose by misleading his own countrymen. When the soldiers insist that Almayer hand Dain over to them he reacts with ‘“Steady gentlemen ... in my own time and in my own way. After dinner, gentlemen, you shall have him”’ (125). The juxtaposition of ‘gentlemen’ with Almayer’s insistence on eating dinner before handing over a corpse, affords a satirical bias to the proceedings and an element of the macabre with both corpses – that of Dain and that of the goose – being metaphorically handed to the soldiers on a plate. Almayer ‘walks to the table ... “On my word of honour … And now let us dine”’ (125). The dialogue suggests some ceremony to the proceedings and with the knives and forks and the goose, the scene becomes a shabby charade of the ‘splendid banquet’ of which Almayer dreamed. The only person who has any respect for the broken Almayer is his cook, the faithful Sumatrese Ali. Almayer’s inability to appreciate Ali’s respect for him or have any respect for the Malay people – ‘if the master afterwards is angry and swears’ (124) – adds to the notion that Almayer is entirely responsible for – as the saying goes – cooking his own goose.

By chapter nine the narrative perspective has shifted again. A feeling of impending doom pervades over Sambir promoted by the supposed death of Dain and the arrival of the Dutch soldiers. This ominous mood is reflected in the ‘taint of drying fish’ and the ‘acrid smoke from cooking fires’ (132). This is notably in direct contrast to the ‘delicious thrill’ of the mango trees and the banana plantation and the busy routine of Almayer’s ‘domestic rice pot’ which has now been taken over by ‘a strange Chinaman’ who ‘had possession of the kitchen fire and was noisily demanding another saucepan’ (134). The threat of ‘violence’ from the Chinaman forewarns of danger as Babalatchi, fearing that Dain is going to kill him, hurries down to Almayer’s Kampong wondering ‘with a sinking heart when and how would it be given to him to return to [his] house’ (132). The Chinaman,[[41]](#endnote-41) no more than a paid labourer, takes ‘possession’ of the kitchen fire, the heart of the home, undermining Almayer’s household – and Eurocentric dominance – and Babalatchi who has been displaced by the cook’s overbearing presence. The movement between the ‘front verandah’ where the ‘white men’ are eating and the ‘back verandah’ where Babalatchi and Mrs Almayer are ‘engaged’ in ‘earnest conversation’ (135) provides a simultaneous narrative perspective. Almayer’s drunken conversation is interrupted through Mrs Almayer, placing Almayer and the soldiers as the Other, on the margins of the main plot. This Othering is reinforced by Almayer overturning ‘the table with his foot in a great crash of smashed crockery’ (144). Unlike Mrs Almayer who destroys the ‘signs of civilization’ (26) out of necessity – to provide fuel for the domestic rice pot – Almayer’s act is done out of lack of restraint. The failure of Almayer to take control of his own life is reflected in the ‘wreck of crockery and broken bottles’ and ‘the appearance as of traces left by a desperate struggle was accentuated by chairs, which seemed to have been scattered violently all over the place, and now lay about the verandah with a lamentable aspect of inebriety in their helpless attitudes’. The ‘desperate struggle’ is the one that Almayer has with himself. The words ‘wreck’, ‘broken’, ‘scattered’, ‘inebriety’ can be applied as easily to Almayer as to his ‘demoralized furniture’ (157) which is as irreparable as Almayer’s own life.

Neither Almayer nor the furniture that symbolizes white civilization, have any substance left in them while the disorder of Almayer revises the description of Mrs Almayer at the beginning of the novel: ‘Almayer thought with dismay the meeting of his wife and daughter, of what this grave girl in European clothes would think of her betel-nut chewing mother, squatting in a dark hut, disorderly, half naked, and sulky’ (29). Almayer’s ‘dismay’ is ironically refocused so that it is Mrs Almayer and Babalatchi who are dismayed at Almayer’s behaviour. Food related references allow the narrative to become revisionist, constantly changing and amending the perspective. When Nina leaves to find Dain in Bulangi’s rice clearing, Mrs Almayer revises Lingard’s narrative of her life with her own story, that of a ‘slave’ who has ‘cooked rice for a man who had no courage and no wisdom’ (148). In her eyes, her status as a wife has been belittled and undermined by her husband’s inaction. Even with knowledge of her suspected affair with Lakamba, Almayer does nothing to claim back his wife. This perspective renders Almayer indifferent and impotent. Meanwhile, Mrs Almayer’s consideration of Lingard as a ‘chief and a warrior’ as well as a ‘terrible old man’ (150) appropriates him through her version of events told to Nina in the cooking shed. In comparison, Almayer’s immobility is duplicated by the lizard which comes out ‘in short, nervous rushes and, pleased with the white table-cloth, stopped on it in breathless immobility’ (158). The overwhelming image is of stasis and myopia. In contrast, the narrative movement is situated around the cooking shed where Mrs Almayer and Babalatchi make plans for Dain’s escape. This is now the focal point of the novel with the action moving in its periphery. To confirm the importance and dominance of food in this novel, the climactic chapter in which Dain and Nina escape is conducted in a rice-clearing, in ‘the middle of a shadowless square of moonlight, shining on a smooth and level expanse of young rice shoots’ (165). Where death, destruction and ghost-like apparitions have pervaded Almayer’s house, now fertility and the prospect of wealth and a new life in Bali – all represented by rice, the daily bread of Sambia – dominate the surroundings in which Dain takes shelter, enjoying the sunlight of the ‘green paddy-field’ (169). When Nina arrives in the clearing, Dain describes his Bali homeland, ‘of its terraced fields, of the murmuring clear rills of sparkling water that flowed down the sides of great mountains, bringing life to the land and to its tillers’ (174). Rice represents life, daily routine, wealth and stability and is the tangible ‘splendid future’ that Dain promises Nina, embedded in growth, fecundity and lush, fertile ground. This is in stark contrast to Almayer’s intangible and sterile dreams of ‘immense wealth’ which will dilute the shame of her ‘mixed blood’ (3).

After Nina and Dain have left, Almayer and Ali make their way back to Sambir. Their exhaustion ‘kills hunger, thirst, all feeling’ (196), in other words, the foundations of life. And Almayer rejects all three. Returning to the Kampong, ‘Almayer walked straight to the house, and Ali followed, paddles on shoulder, thinking that he would like to eat something’ (196-197). But the heart and life of the house is dead: ‘In the cooking-shed the fire was out and the black embers were cold’ (197). The basis of all structure and daily routine is now gone along with Almayer’s burning desire for a different life. Even ‘the flock of geese – “the only geese on the east coast” – departed somewhere’ (203).The implication being that Almayer, even if he wanted to, cannot make his life worse if he tried. Walking ‘out of the banana plantation’ where Dain and Nina once hid, and where fruit pickers once worked, there is now a ‘vagabond’. He is one of many that are ‘without a master’ and look upon ‘Almayer as their patron’. These vagabonds ‘prowled about his premises and picked their living there’ (197). Almayer, instead of finding himself respected by the rich and wealthy of Amsterdam, is leader to a band of homeless wanderers – a reflection of Almayer in his dereliction – who in their ‘prowling’ live no better than animals. Almayer’s only responsibility is a monkey who ‘hungry and unnoticed for the last two days, began to cry and complain in monkey language as soon as it caught sight of the familiar face’ (197). Far from surrounding himself with ‘civilized’ Europeans Almayer is reduced to communing with the animals. Ordering Ali to ‘bring in some bananas’, Almayer picks up the table that two days previously he had kicked over in a fit of anger. Now, instead of taking a chair and sitting under it in the ‘civilized’ manner, he ‘sat on it’. He and the monkey ‘had their breakfast together; both hungry, both eating greedily and showering the skins round them recklessly, in the trusting silence of perfect friendship’ (197). Food becomes a measure of human superiority. Thus the manner in which Almayer eats with his monkey indicates his reduction to a new, lower level. He loses the human quality of sagacity and desires only to meet his base instinct of hunger. Almayer eats, ‘greedily’ and ‘recklessly’ reflecting the negligent way in which he has contributed to his catastrophic downfall. Language – the instrument of social life[[42]](#endnote-42) which separates animals from humans – is abandoned and by sitting on the table, Almayer subverts the ‘signs of civilization’ – the tables and chairs which were used for dinner with the Dutch soldiers – reflecting not just a rejection of the white culture that did nothing to make him ‘loyal’ (138) but also his descent into something less than human. The familiar objects become unfamiliar, contributing to a feeling of ‘unhomeliness’, which, ‘more than a simple sense of not belonging; it was the fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners, suddenly to become defamiliarised, derealised, as if in a dream.’[[43]](#endnote-43) Ironically for Almayer, the table and chairs upon which a western meal should be enjoyed, are no longer familiar and this realization renders Almayer isolated, both from the Malaysian society which he has refused to embrace and the Western mechanics of commensality which he will never enjoy.

In contrast to Almayer’s abandonment of ‘civilized’ behaviour, Ali, ‘grumbling’ goes away to ‘cook some rice himself, for all the women about the house had disappeared’ (197). Food now becomes the signifying factor between Almayer who loses all sense of himself and Ali, who retains his sense of humanity. The absence of women to cook the rice collapses the structure of Almayer’s kampong and where food once established gender divisions, these have now broken down. Food becomes a register for the abandonment of Almayer. Ironically, although Almayer has ‘no business now’ his monkey ‘industriously’ ‘shreds’ a banana skin in a manner which reflects the futility of ‘years of strife, of weariness, of discouragement’ that Almayer has suffered for no possible profit. In addition to this, the solipsistic manner in which the monkey is ‘absorbed’ in the shredding of the skin symbolizes the myopic shredding of Almayer’s life as he picked away at the things which he should have held dear but did not (198).

Babalatchi realizes his dream of buying Taminah from Bulangi but like all dreams, the reality falls short. He gives fifty dollars to the ‘thief’ and ‘pig-eater’ and sends her ‘amongst my women to grow fat’ (207). Food continues in the narrative as a measure of wealth, but it also denotes the source of prejudice between the different cultures in Malaysia; those who eat pork and those who don’t. The narrative voice has shifted away completely from the Occidental and is ensconced in the intimate Oriental distinctions between the factions of ‘us’ and ‘them’ within Sambir. For Almayer and Taminah, the desire for food dies with the lack of desire for life. The novel opens with a Malay call to ‘Eat’ and closes with a Muslim prayer, ‘Allah! The Merciful! The Compassionate!’ (208) spoken in English. As such the narrative evolves to straddle cultural perspectives that are embedded in food references and produce simultaneous narratives that denote the shifting focus of the text. Food appears in a minor key but when the novel is read through its prism, politics, gender divisions, trade, wealth, colonial tension, are all magnified. Conrad exploits the food metaphors that are central to Western culture and places them within the Eastern sphere. As a result, food creates that ‘bond between us and that humanity so far away’ (viii) not only in its role as a commodity to be traded between nations but as a universal language that represents the ‘shared impulses’ that drive human beings; that of hunger and love.

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**Cannibalism and ‘Falk: A Reminiscence’**

Hunger and love are also the two driving forces which motivate the protagonist of Conrad’s novella, ‘Falk: A Reminiscence’. Published in 1903 in the *Typhoon* volume, it was one of only two stories that did not achieve serial publication.[[44]](#endnote-44) Knowles & Moore suggest that this may have been because ‘Edwardian editors were either offended by its subject matter or disliked the fact that the young unnamed girl in the story was not allowed to utter a single word’ (2000, p.107). The ‘subject matter’ was that of cannibalism, specifically, the moral dilemma in which a man is forced to eat a fellow human being in order to survive. Within the story, Conrad juxtaposes the elemental desire to eat with the elemental desire for love. Metaphors of cannibalism are implicitly woven into a consuming passion which sits neatly alongside a struggle for survival. However, as I will show in this chapter, ‘Falk’ remains, as Tony Tanner points out, ‘the one piece of fiction by Conrad in which literal cannibalism is at the centre of the action’ (1976, p.19). Jessie, Conrad’s wife, famously wrote that typing out the manuscript of ‘Falk’ made her feel ‘physically sick ... Sick with disgust at the idea of human beings having been cooked’ (*As I Knew Him* 1926, p.118).

More important to this discussion is the way in which literal cannibalism undermines nineteenth-century notions of how ‘the primitive and the civilized might be distinguished’ (Vlitos 2008, p.435). To begin therefore, I will look at the colonial context of cannibalism through Conrad’s novel, ‘Heart of Darkness’ (1899) to impress how this taboo subject came to define – within the Victorian consciousness – the image of the savage other. This context will then provide the impetus for an investigation into the tales of cannibalism at sea which littered the nineteenth-century press and how ‘Falk’ resonates with these accounts. By looking at these stories and one in particular, the Greely Arctic Expedition, it becomes clear that Conrad was concerned with demonstrating that the reality of cannibalism was a deed carried out not in foreign and savage lands, but amongst white Europeans who based their notion of civilization on abstract codes of morality.

Falk’s action takes place in what Seamus Deane terms as the ‘criminal interval’ in which man, when separated from society and the social codes that are the foundations of ‘civilisation’ reverts to ‘savage’ behaviour as a means of survival, disregarding all the codes dictated by ‘civilized’ society. Cedric Watts sums up the concept when he writes, ‘Decent conduct, it seems, is largely a social artefact, a product of myriads of social sanctions, and where these sanctions no longer apply and the individual has no inner moral defences, he can succumb to any form of corruption, from theft to cannibal­ism’ (1977, p.112).

**Cannibalism and the savage other**

The subject of cannibalism is one which features in much of Conrad’s fiction, albeit mainly through allusion or metaphor. During the nineteenth century, cannibalism was at the heart of ‘discussions of difference and identity’ (Kilgour 2001, p.vii); it separated the savage from the civilized and gave authority to the colonial mission: ‘the definition of the other as cannibal justifies its oppression, extermination, and cultural cannibalism (otherwise known as imperialism) by the rule “eat or be eaten”’ (Kilgour 1990, p.148). In Conrad’s fiction, specifically ‘Heart of Darkness’, this metaphorical cannibalism underpins Conrad’s depiction of the colonial mission. Jerry Phillips describes it as ‘capitalist anthropophagy’ in which ‘men and women [are] devoured as expendable commodities’ (1998, p.188). This sentiment is neatly vocalised by King Leopold II who, during the Geographical Conference of Brussels in September 1876, at which he claimed the Congo as his own personal kingdom, declared, ‘“I do not want to miss the opportunity of our obtaining a share in this magnificent African cake” (cited in Simmons 2002, p.86).

Leopold’s use of a cannibalistic metaphor to sum up the colonial mission is ironic. Not least because accusations of cannibalism were directed at the indigenous people rather than the colonial administrators. Reports of cannibalistic activity among Africans reinforced and manipulated the image of the savage other, securing in the Victorian consciousness the difference between ‘them’ and ‘us’. However, this distinction was wholly unstable. Accounts of atrocities committed against the Congolese by King Leopold’s *Force Publique* were making their way back to Europe. One such example can be found in E. J. Glave’s ‘Congo Diary’, published in *The Century Magazine* in 1897. Glave was a Swedish missionary commissioned to report on the brutality of the colonial administration. In one diary entry, which went on to be reprinted in *The Saturday Review* of 17 December 1898, he reported on how Léon Rom, the *Force Publique* officer, ‘ornamented the flower bed in front of his house with twenty-one human skulls’ (Simmons 2002, p.87):

‘The state soldiers are constantly stealing, and sometimes the natives are so persecuted, they resent this by killing and eating their tormentors. Recently the state post on the Lomani lost two men killed and eaten by the natives. Arabs were sent to punish the natives; many women and children were taken and twenty-one heads were brought to the Falls and have been used by Captain Rom as a decoration around the flower bed of his house!’

There are two interesting aspects of this passage to consider: first is that Rom’s ‘decoration’ bears a striking resemblance to the description of Kurtz’s house in ‘Heart of Darkness’ around which Marlow observes a ‘dozen slim posts… ornamented’ with ‘round carved balls’ (52). On closer inspection, they turn out to be ‘not ornamental but symbolic … these heads on stakes’ (57). In Conrad’s novel, the insinuation of a cannibalistic Kurtz is emphasised by the metaphorical allusion to the heads being ‘food for thought’ (57). Secondly, as Simmons points out, the absence of literal cannibalism ensures the Europeans are always one step removed from the act itself (2002, p.87).

This distancing from ‘savage’ acts is more shockingly demonstrated by a British Officer, James Jameson who, wishing to observe cannibalism, paid the chiefs of a tribe at Riba-Riba to kill and eat a child while he made sketches of the deed. The following account was recorded in 1888 by an interpreter named Assad Ferrau who was commissioned to accompany Henry Morton Stanley on a relief mission through the Congo:

Mr. Jameson wished to see how the natives eat each other and asked whether he could see it there, the chiefs tried to put this question out of the way, but he pressed them very much that they told him to pay 1 piece of handkerchief (6 single) and they will get him a boy and he should do with him what he liked, he consented and went and brought the handkerchiefs and paid them for which he got a girl about 10 years old, the girl was led to the native houses where she was tied to a tree with one hand and immediately stepped [sic] with a knife twice in the belly she fell down dead and presently about 8 of these natives rushed with knives and began to cut their victim, all this time Mr. Jameson was making scatches [sic] of every thing going on, and when all was over he went home and painted it on water coulors [sic].

Despite the horrific and voyeuristic nature of his request, Jameson is removed from the act of cannibalism while the sketches and watercolours serve as evidence of the cannibalistic practices of the Africans. In ‘Heart of Darkness’, it is only the Africans who are spoken about as cannibalistic, although there are no accounts of cannibalism being committed. In contrast, the ‘unspeakable rites’ in which Kurtz indulges, are implied to be cannibalism but never named as such. As Simmons suggests, literal cannibalism cannot be associated with the white European: there is a ‘kind of resistance to the act which will trouble the European sense of self as civilized’ (2002, p.96). In ‘Heart of Darkness’ Conrad alludes to the cannibalism of the white European but never explicitly states it. At the beginning of the novel, the frame narrator makes reference to ‘the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled – the great knights-errant of the sea’ (4). The insinuation remains unspoken but historical fact suggests that these representatives of the British Empire had all resorted to cannibalism. The case of Sir John Franklin had, in the 1850s, received significant public attention. When Dr John Rae of the Hudson Bay Company returned from his mission in which he had set out to find Franklin’s lost expedition, his report of July 1854 claimed that the crew had ‘been driven to the last resource, – cannibalism – as a means of prolonging existence’ (*Household Words Narrative* 1854, p.226). The act of cannibalism amongst white civilized men was so abhorrent to the European sense of self that Charles Dickens, writing in *Household Words* (2nd December, 1854), dismissed the report. He argued that the verbal evidence of cannibalism Rae had taken from the Esquimaux was of a ‘loose and unreliable nature’. Furthermore, Dickens declared, ‘it is in the highest degree improbable that such men as the officers and crews of the two lost ships would, or could, in any extremity of hunger, alleviate the pains of starvation by this horrible means’ (361).

**‘Falk’ and Cannibalism at Sea**

Despite Dickens’ refusal to entertain the possibility of European men eating each other, newspaper reports of cannibalism filled the nineteenth-century press. The majority were those that carried headlines such as, ‘Terrible Suffering at Sea’[[45]](#endnote-45) where sailors, shipwrecked or stranded, cannibalised each other to survive. Every decade brought a new scandal such as that of the brig *George* in 1822 which caused enough excitement to warrant a ballad being written about it. The song tells the story of one of the passengers, Joyce Rae, whose flesh and blood was shared amongst the surviving crew, one of which included her husband (Simpson 1986, p.117).

Unlike stories of anthropophagy that came out of the Congo, cannibalism at sea was seen in a broadly sympathetic light. Shipwrecks were a common occurrence in the nineteenth century and the ‘custom of the sea’ (eating a fellow human being out of necessity), was deemed acceptable behaviour – at least by sailors – if conducted in the correct manner through the drawing of lots. As the narrator in ‘Falk’ implies, ‘And then I was a sailor too. Falk thought that a sailor would be able to understand certain things best . . .’ (1946, p.205). The custom was thought to be so rife that the matter was brought up by Samuel Plimsoll in the Commons debate on the *Unseaworthy Ships Bill* in 1875. Plimsoll regaled the Commons with the 1838 tale of the *Anna Marie* in which ‘part of the leg of a woman was found which evidently served the crew for food’ and another case in which ‘four bodies were found under the maintop, all dead, with part of one of their comrades hung up, as if in a butcher’s shop’ (Simpson 1986, p.120-121). Plimsoll’s point was that shipwrecks and the resulting cannibalism were partly down to the overloading of ships. A. W. Brian Simpson claims that suspicion of cannibalism ‘among starving castaways was a routine reaction’ (121). Indeed, cannibalising an already dead member of the crew was, if slightly disgusting, outside of criminal law: ‘cannibalism under survival conditions may simply take the form of eating the corpses of those who have died naturally. Though disagreeable and distressing, it is difficult to see any moral objection to this. As such, it has never been regarded as illegal’ (123).

The fascination is both overtly and covertly woven into Conrad’s work to show us that to engage with the sea is to engage with cannibalism. One such example is that of the ‘Euxine’ in 1874 which was abandoned after it caught fire. The crew of 30 divided themselves between three lifeboats, one of which lost contact with the others and drifted in the open sea for 22 days. When they were rescued, the survivors were quick to divulge their cannibal exploits. The case was brought before the master attendant or shipping master at Singapore, one Henry Ellis, who would later appear in Conrad’s *The Shadow-Line* (1917).

The case which attracted the most attention and brings to the fore the key defence of ‘necessity’ in cases of cannibalism at sea is that of the sailing yacht *Mignonette*. Shipwrecked in 1884 in a storm on its way from Tollesbury in Essex to Sydney, the case came to be known as ‘The Terrible Tale of the Sea’.[[46]](#endnote-46) The four crewmen, Ned Brooks, Tom Dudley, Richard Parker and Richard Stephens managed to escape on to a raft with two tins of turnips and no water. After 24 days at sea – during which time they killed and ate a turtle, caught rain water and drank their own urine – the captain, Tom Dudley came to the difficult and painful conclusion that the only way any of them were going to survive was by killing and eating the ailing and nearly dead 19-year-old cabin boy, Richard Parker. Parker had been drinking sea water and was delirious but if they allowed him to die naturally, they would be unable to drain his blood to drink it. Newspaper reports tell of Captain Dudley’s prayer before killing the boy whose blood he caught in the empty turnip tin.

The surviving men were eventually picked up by a German barque. All three were ready and willing to admit their cannibalism believing they would be acquitted on the basis that they had acted out of ‘necessity’. But to their astonishment they were arrested as soon as they reached Falmouth and charged with murder. Public opinion was sympathetic. The men may have resorted to cannibalism but they had never lost their sense of justice or morality. Indeed they believed their actions to be wholly moral and legal, ‘necessity’ being a key line of defence in their trial. Their confession and most importantly the prayer that Dudley said before he killed Parker reaffirmed this. Ned Brooks was acquitted for taking no part in the killing but Dudley and Stephens were condemned to death. Their sentence was later commuted to six months in prison as a way of publicly reinforcing that killing out of ‘necessity’ was not a legitimate action. The disparity in the sentences, however, passes its own comment.

Such stories, not least that of the Mignonette, may have contributed to the making of ‘Falk’. And Falk’s ‘savage’ reaction to the cooking of the turtle suggests a resonance with the experiences of the crew of the *Mignonette*, although their turtle meat would have been served raw. But when we look closely, the only thing these tragedies have in common with Conrad’s short story is the act of cannibalism. Nearly all the killings were done with a knife and on board a lifeboat or raft; the crews having been shipwrecked from their yachts or sailing ships. The cannibalism on the *Borgmester Dahl*, however, began with the shooting of the carpenter, the meat was cooked – Falk ‘annex[ed] all the matches’ – it took place on a steamer, not a sailing boat and finally, as Falk reminds us, this ‘was no shipwreck’ (225).

One other crucial difference, of course, is that in all these tales, either lots are drawn or prayers are said. Falk however makes no such pretence of conduct. As he says, ‘Drawing of lots? ... What lots? Do you think I would have allowed my life to go for the drawing of lots?’ (226). Conrad would have been poignantly aware of the legal issues surrounding the *Mignonette* and would therefore also have been aware that this case set a criminal precedent for future cases of cannibalism at sea. This may be one reason for Falk’s fear of the gossipy Schomberg and his ‘gastronomic tittle-tattle’ (223). In contrast, the survivors of the *Mignonette*, are more than willing to speak of their ordeal. From a moral point of view, Dudley, Stephens and Brooks do not act for themselves alone; the cabin boy is killed so that the majority may live. This is not the case in ‘Falk’ nor on the Greely Expedition – the case upon which I argue Conrad bases his story – which finds itself an item of what the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* headlines as ‘London Gossip’ (*The Royal Cornwall Gazette Falmouth Packet, Cornish Weekly News, & General Advertiser* 15 August 1884, p. 4).

There is another case of cannibalism which is relevant to ‘Falk’ and it is that of the *Thekla* in 1893 in which the Norwegian government stated that the drawing of lots ‘shows more clearly that in [these men] we are confronted not with unscrupulous criminal natures but with well brought up individuals with a clear sense of justice. They acted as highly socially conscious people’ (Simpson 1986, p.265). The commentary went on to state that the stronger had not killed the weaker. This is important both in terms of Falk’s Scandinavian origins – ‘Falk was a Dane or perhaps a Norwegian, I can’t tell now. At all events he was a Scandinavian of some sort’ (161) – and in terms of Falk’s act being outside of socially accepted codes of behaviour. His cannibalism is driven purely by the desire to survive – the ‘unerring and eternal principle’ – and this principle is stronger than all the social codes of his ‘good parentage’ (227). This point is further emphasized by the narrator of ‘Falk’ who assumes that it is guilt which haunts Falk and that his misfortune was to be ‘lucky in the drawing of lots’.

**Falk and the Greely Arctic Expedition**

Falk’s ‘misfortune’ occurring on a steamer is also key. Sailors on sailing ships did not have a reputation for being law abiding citizens. They were generally hard drinkers and womanisers. They were also often criminals and known for violent behaviour. Neill Atkinson in his book, *Crew Culture*, claims that sailors on sailing ships were considered by respectable society as ‘rough, almost savage men’ (2001, p.156). By the 1870s steamships had overtaken sailing ships. But the crews of steamships were seen as little more than ‘coffee-pot sailors’ who had ‘given up the sea’, they were no longer the hardened long-voyage seafarers of sailing ships. Therefore in public opinion, cannibalism amongst sailing ship crews would not have been particularly surprising but the crews of steamers were considered more civilized. And we know that Falk was no savage sailor. He was a respectable man: ‘this lover of life was of good parentage’ (227) who ten years after his ‘misfortune’ runs his own business, is not in the habit of drinking and gambling and wants to settle down and marry. Falk’s behaviour predominantly errs towards accepted codes of morality and civilization which makes his fall all the more scandalous and reinforces Deane’s idea of the ‘criminal interval’.

For the Victorians progress and strict codes of morality defined the meaning of civilization. If it was possible for white ‘civilized’ men to give in to inherent desires such as hunger and thirst and resort to cannibalism, the savage was proving itself more dominant than the civilized. An 1884 article in *The Standard* warns, ‘Once let any system of jurisdiction accept the pleas of necessity, and Society would drift back into a “struggle for existence” almost as brutal as that which goes on in a South American forest’ (cited in Simpson 1986, p.251). This is the anxiety that Conrad conveys in ‘Falk’, articulated by Hermann’s cry of ‘Beast’, and echoed in a *Belfast News* article which remarks of the Greely Expedition:

It is but reasonable to suppose that in circumstances such as those that fell to the lot of the unfortunate Greely expedition all that is highest in mankind must have left them long before their rescue, and their moral and general condition was but little removed above the level of famishing beasts ... the only dominant instincts were those of ‘self-preservation. (*The Belfast News-letter*, 16 August, 1884)

The story of the Greely Arctic Expedition of 1881 demonstrates the total breakdown of morality and loss of codes of conduct amongst highly respected and ‘civilized’ men. The members of the Greely Expedition were not hardened sailors with a reputation for lawlessness. They were respected members of the American establishment. One of the main perpetrators of the crime of cannibalism was a Doctor Octave Pavy, whose expertise is said to have been used in slicing off the choicest cuts of meat from the dead bodies. Differing reports have Pavy as being shot and cannibalised or committing suicide (‘The Greely Expedition’, *The Standard*, 18 August 1884, p.5). And this – as with Falk – is why their fall was so great. In both cases we witness men entering into that ‘interval in which no standard of conduct oppresses us’ (*The Nature of a Crime* 1924, p.46).[[47]](#endnote-47) This is why it is the Greely Expedition above all other stories of cannibalism that would have appealed to Conrad.

The events of the expedition occur both on a steamer and on an ice floe upon which the men find themselves drifting helplessly with little food in the same way that the crew members of the *Borgmester Dahl* find themselves ‘floating amongst detached pieces of ice’ (229). Newspaper reports abounded from July to August 1884 in America and in England about the cannibalism that was said to have taken place amongst the starving survivors. By contrast with the *Mignonette* story of four desperate English sailors that found a place in the heart of the public, by September 1884, the American authorities had closed ranks and accusations of cannibalism were muffled by cries of heroism in the name of geographical exploration and colonial expansion with Greely invited to disseminate his explorations in geographical magazines. As early as the end of August, he was elected to become a member of the British Association and enjoyed celebratory receptions.[[48]](#endnote-48) As in ‘Falk’, an air of silence surrounds the events. Greely and the United States government wanted to put an end to the press gossip with *The Standard* of August 13, 1884 reporting: ‘Everyone interested in the honour of the United States Naval and Military Services would naturally desire to hush up a revelation so revolting’ (5). Similarly, Falk ‘did not like to be spoken about’ (216).

In early July of 1884, a rescue party discovered what was left of the Greely Expedition. There were seven men found alive, one of which was Greely. Of the 17 others, 11 bodies were recovered, the rest having been apparently ‘washed into the sea’ (Belfast News-letter, 18 July, 1884). When reports of the Greely Expedition first broke in the daily press in July 1884, Conrad was Second Mate in the *Narcissus* having signed on in Bombay earlier that year. He would have had access to newspapers via passing ships as well as back copies that would have been kept in the sailor’s home on his return to England in the November. We also know from *The Mirror of the Sea* that Conrad was a keen follower of the ‘Shipping Intelligence’ column in the daily papers.

In 1881 a party of 25 men led by Lieutenant Adolphus Greely of the US Army were landed on Discovery Bay near the North End of Smith’s Sound in the ‘American Arctic region’. They were left with boats, a house and ‘sufficient provisions and stores to last them two years’ (*Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* 19 September, 1883). Their official aim was to advance scientific and geographic knowledge of the Arctic region. But Greely was intent on reaching the farthest North, a record that had been held by the English for over 300 years. The plan was that a relief ship would return in two years with extra provisions. However, when the relief ship failed in the summer of 1883 because it could not get through the ice and no news had been received from the party, it was feared that they may have starved to death. When they were eventually rescued in July 1884, reports of murder and cannibalism amongst the men filled the daily press both here and in the United States.

At first the Greely Expedition looked like a tragedy. But on 13 August 1884, the *New York Times* published a headline that screamed, ‘Horrors of Cape Sabine’ followed by a statement declaring that one of the survivors had, in a moment of delirium, revealed the ‘true facts of the case’. The most notable of these being that members of the party had been cannibalised and specifically, one of the party, an officer, had been shot for being the ‘best’ of the men and afterwards eaten by the others.

The word ‘best’ jumps out at a reader familiar with Conrad’s own use of the word in ‘Falk’. As the narrator tells us, ‘Falk liked the big carpenter. He had been the best man of the lot, helpful and ready as long as there was anything to do, the longest hopeful, and had preserved to the last some vigour and decision of mind’. The word is also analysed by the narrator: ‘“The toughest,[[49]](#endnote-49) you mean,” I said. He considered the word. Perhaps it was strange for him, though his English was so good. “Yes,” he asserted at last. “The best. It was everybody for himself at last and the ship open to all”’ (226-227). With this in mind, it is worth remembering that in all the previous cases of cannibalism, it had been the weakest that had been killed but the fact that both the carpenter in Conrad’s ‘Falk’ and the officer in the Greely Expedition were the strongest is an obvious point of connection.

In the accounts of the Greely Expedition, ‘best’ is applied to Private Charles Henry Buck.[[50]](#endnote-50) *The Freeman’s American Journal & Daily Commercial Advertiser* of August 1884 reported: ‘The belief is that Henry was shot, not for stealing but because he was a strong man, and when the cannibalism began the others feared he would be able to “best” them.’ Another newspaper article supported the suspicions of cannibalism by reporting the desperate words of one of the survivors upon his rescue, ‘Don’t let them shoot me as they did poor Henry. Must I be killed and eaten as Henry was? Don’t let them’ (*Leeds Mercury*, 16 August 1884).

In both cases, this initial act of cannibalism is not an isolated incident. As the narrator recounts of Falk: ‘He lived! Some of the others lived too – concealed, anxious, coming out one by one from their hiding places at the seductive sound of a shot’ (235). The line implies that other members of the crew were picked out, killed, cooked and eaten. Multiple cases of cannibalism also occurred on the Greely Expedition. Two bodies were exhumed weeks after they had been repatriated and received burials in American soil. One was Lieutenant Kislingbury. *The Pall Mall Gazette* of 15 August 1884 reports how his remains consisted of ‘little but bones’ while the physician’s statement ‘showed that nearly all the flesh had been stripped from the bones’ in a manner that indicated it had been cannibalised.

The manner in which cannibalism occurred in that elemental struggle for survival in ‘Falk’ and on the Greely Expedition are not the only similarities. Solidarity amongst the men is a key theme in both instances. Falk tells the narrator that: ‘The voyage had been, from the first, neither very successful nor very harmonious. There had been quarrels on board’ (228). Similarly, the Greely Expedition was fraught with disagreements. As Frank Guttridge reveals:

The second in command, Lieutenant Kislingbury, found the orders of his commander, Lieutenant Greely, objectionable, and Kislingbury was quickly relieved of duty. The expedition’s doctor, Octave Pavy, clashed with the commander as well, and both wrote furiously of the other in the journals they kept. (2006, p.xiv)

Kislingbury spent the next three years isolated from the other men and ignored by Greely.

The most serious disagreement broke out as they tried in the summer of 1883 to return from their base camp Fort Conger on Franklin Bay where they had spent 721 days and travel south to Smith Sound where they believed food stores had been left. The party had a steam launcher which they used to steam through the gaps in the ice floes. It soon became waterlogged and near to capsizing on the first day but Greely managed to navigate it through the ice and southwards towards Cape Sabine where they were eventually rescued. Falk’s own account speaks of the *Borgmester Dahl* as it ‘drifted south out of men’s knowledge’ with ‘the shocks of ice floes knocking against the ship’s side’ (229) just as the Greely Expedition team drifted southwards out of the knowledge of the relief expedition that were looking for them.

As the situation on board the *Borgmester Dahl* and in the Greely Expedition became desperate, the ‘bonds of discipline’ ‘become relaxed’ and ‘the solidarity of the men’ lost (228, 231). As *The New York Times* of 14 August 1884 reported of the Greely Expedition, ‘the minds of the men were warped and each one was naturally for himself alone.’ The phrase is echoed in ‘Falk’ with ‘each man was alone’ (235). Greely never admitted to the cannibalism. All that he would concede was the possibility of ‘individual acts ... committed by men driven to frenzy by the pangs of hunger (*Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 14 August, 1884). Again, the linguistic echoes resonate in ‘Falk’ with the ‘simple and elemental desire’ whether it is hunger for food or love. *The Morning Post* of 18 August 1884 declared that the Greely Polar Expedition ‘was driven by want and starvation to those terrible straits when all the sentiments of a common humanity are extinguished in the unconquerable craving to prolong existence.’ Or, as Falk’s narrator so eloquently puts it, ‘He wanted to live. He had always wanted to live’ (223).

In her memoir, *Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him*, Jessie writes that ‘Falk’ was a story ‘culled from a short paragraph in a newspaper which had some relation to an episode known to Conrad many years before, while he was at sea’ (1926, p.118) and we know that Conrad was indeed at sea when the Greely story broke. It is impossible to conclude exactly which newspaper article Conrad ‘culled’ but we know that he began to compose ‘Falk’ in the first few months of 1901. His letter of 8 October 1900 to J. B. Pinker reveals that he is about to start work on, ‘the other story shorter and much more horrible’ (*CL*2p*.*295). Perhaps he was influenced by an article that appeared in the *Isle of Wight Observer* on 27 October 1900. It was an interview with an ‘Englishman by birth’, one Mr Frank Hanley who was the chief fireman on the *Alert*, the ship that rescued the Greely Expedition. Hanley tells how, ‘the seamen are all afraid of Greely. You know they don’t like a crazy man, and they had a kind of fear of Greely anyhow. I don’t know exactly why, but I never liked to get too close to him myself.’ Later in the article Hanley says, ‘The Flying Dutchman is a lie’, reminiscent of the sentiment of the narrator in ‘Falk’, ‘the fable of *The Flying Dutchman* with its convention of crime and its sentimental retribution fades like a graceful wreath’ (141). Another influence on the tale, revealed by Conrad in an inscribed copy of the Typhoon volume, remains tantalizingly elusive:

Falk owes its inception to a well-known at the time (1886) fact of a broken steamer drifting for 3 weeks in the Southern Ocean. She had plenty of provisions, and the people on board of her suffered only from awful boredom. But it is the personality of a certain man whom I met the year before which suggested the psychology of the Captain of the tug – and lover of Herman’s niece. Falk’s psychology is absolutely true to my experience of certain straightforward characters combining a perfectly natural restlessness with a certain amount of moral delicacy. (Keating 1929, p.115)

Circumstantial and linguistic similarities point towards an obvious connection between ‘Falk’ and the Greely Expedition while the moral issues that surround the killing and eating of a man out of necessity still hold true today. Whether Conrad drew upon the Greely Expedition for his story cannot be proved but what is important is that by placing the two stories together, it is possible to convey the moral issues surrounding cannibalism and survival. Finally, by examining Greely’s story and that of other shipwrecks, it is clear that in the minds of the Victorian public, eating a man out of necessity was more morally acceptable than eating him as part of some ‘unspeakable rite’.

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**5.**

**Anarchy, Vegetarianism and *The Secret Agent***

Good cooking is a moral agent. By good cooking I mean

the conscientious preparation of the simple food of every-day life,

not the more or less skilful concoction of idle feasts and rare dishes.

(‘Preface’ to *A Handbook of Cookery for a Small House* 1923, p.v)

Conrad’s handling of cannibalism in ‘Falk’ deals with the base instinct of survival and how this takes precedence over social and moral codes. In *The Secret Agent*, food is politicized with meat eating employed as a metaphor for the corrupt nature of capitalism while the rhetoric of vegetarianism is transposed on to that of anarchy. Within this food-centred political arena the mythology of Prometheus – who brought man fire – is combined with Lévi-Strauss’s theories of ‘the raw and the cooked’[[51]](#endnote-51) in which binary opposites such as the cultural versus the natural are represented by the transformation of raw food through the cooking process. Finally, the political implications of meat eating, as perceived by Percy Shelley, are juxtaposed against Conrad’s ironic portrayal of this in *The Secret Agent.*

This comparison does not attempt to suggest that Conrad read Shelley or that *The Secret Agent* was composed with Romantic literature in mind. Instead it argues that there is a clear correspondence of thoughts and ideas between Conrad’s depiction of the anarchist milieu and Shelley’s use of the Promethean myth and the philosophy of vegetarianism.

Joseph Conrad was not a vegetarian – although his favourite dish was Macaroni Cheese and in 1907 he went through a ‘bout of vegetarianism’ after suspecting that his gout was made worse by red meat (Stape 2007, p.160) – but he, like Shelley, uses meat as an analogy for capitalist corruption. In a letter to John Galsworthy of June 1906, he declares, ‘I feel disenchanted – dreary. Our civilisation is like the potted chicken of the U.S.A. – corrupt sir!, Corrupt’ (*CL*3 p.335). Conrad uses a similar analogy in a previous letter to Galsworthy in which he compares an anarchist bomb to the adulterated meat of the Chicago meat packing industry as portrayed in Upton Sinclair’s novel, *The Jungle* (1906). ‘Query:’ he writes, ‘Which is really more criminal? – the Bomb of Madrid or the Meat of Chicago’ (*CL*3 p.333). The implication is, of course, that the processes of meat production reflect the duplicity of capitalism while the anarchist bomb is at least honest in its aims. There is too, the suggestion that the bomb killed twelve while adulterated meat[[52]](#endnote-52) has the potential to kill thousands (*CL*3 p.333, n 4).

The disguising of corrupt meat is an issue that Shelley addresses in ‘A Vindication’ (1813) in which he employs Prometheus as an anarchic free spirit who brings the knowledge of fire to the human race. As a result, man’s discovery of applying fire to ‘culinary purposes’ provided ‘an expedient for screening from his disgust the horrors of the shambles. After this moment’ Shelley continues, ‘Tyranny, superstition, commerce and inequality were then first known’ (1922, p.8). By combining this ‘Romantic’ angle with the irony of *The Secret Agent* it is possible to expose another layer of concealment, to unmask, as it were, the true anarchic ambitions of *The Secret Agent*. Conrad, mindful of his audience when writing, verbalised such concealment in a letter to Edward Garnett in October 1907 thanking him for his understanding of *The Secret Agent*. ‘You’ve got a fiendishly penetrating eye for one’s most secret intentions’ (*CL*3 p.487). Frederick Karl recognized Conrad’s anarchistic sentiments: ‘It appears evident from Conrad’s letters that [Cunninghame] Graham proved an educational experience for him; and that his own well-hidden anarchistic tendencies, his own sense of rage and chaos carefully buried beneath the skin, were allowed freer play because of Graham’s presence. Put another way, Graham’s insistence on forms of anarchy as part of the normal political scene struck a sympathetic note in Conrad, even as he consciously pursued order and shape’ (1979, p.395).

Placing anarchy and vegetarianism together is not as far-fetched as it may first seem. Mark Bevir (1996) explains how many of the anarchist communes set up in the last decade of the nineteenth century were primarily vegetarian. Leading anarchist thinkers such as Peter Kropotkin, George Bernard Shaw and Leo Tolstoy – all founders or supporters of ethical anarchist communes – were non-meat eaters. Up until the late nineteenth century, anarchy had been about individualism but ethical anarchy was based on communalism and humanitarianism with change evolving through example and propaganda by word. Julia Twigg, writing on vegetarianism between 1847 and 1981, points out that ‘Western vegetarianism ... is strongly associated with an egalitarian, anti-structural ethic’ and that during the 1840s, vegetarianism went hand in hand with political and social radicalism and was seen as an antidote to the degeneration caused by the rise in urban living.

Shelley was, mainly, a vegetarian and supported the anti-sugar movement; but is it permissible to call him an Anarchist? His admiration of the anarchist philosopher William Godwin – who was also a vegetarian – is well documented as is his marriage to Godwin’s daughter Mary. Certainly vegetarians and anarchists share similar ideologies and as Twigg goes on to point out, ‘Romanticism emphasizes nature as against civilisation, intuition and emotion as against intellect and rationality’, themes echoed in anarchist thought. Henry S. Salt, the author of the 1892 publication, *Shelley*’*s Principles*[[53]](#endnote-53) – and, coincidentally, friend of John Galsworthy, Leo Tolstoy, Peter Kropotkin and Robert Cunninghame Graham – maintains that: ‘The ideal anarchism of which Shelley is the herald is a state of equality founded not on the competitive or baser element of human nature, but on the higher and ultimately more powerful element, which is love’ (66-67). More recently, David Weir extensively studied ‘the politically unconscious politics’ of Shelley, suggesting that his poem, ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ ‘admonishes the populace to shake off the “anarchy” of law for the anarchy of individual liberty’ (1997, 91). Weir upholds that Shelley was nearer to the ‘anarcho-communism of Kropotkin’ and ‘believed in a society where anarchy and culture are integrated’ (91). This is a very different form of anarchy from that of the chaos, destruction and nihilistic defiance of cultural constructs espoused by The Professor and Karl Yundt – the ‘sham’ anarchists (*CL*3 p.491) – but more in-line with the unconsciously anarchic practices of Stevie in *The Secret Agent*.

Shelley believed that meat production was inherently connected to wealth, privilege and “commercial monopoly.” As he wrote in ‘A Vindication’:

It is only the wealthy that can, to any great degree, even now, indulge the unnatural craving for dead flesh. (1922, p.26)

In the early nineteenth century meat was an expensive commodity and Shelley’s concerns anticipate the historical moment of *The Secret Agent*, when the foreign meat-importing trade was controlled by the monopoly of a few large and powerful companies such as Eastman’s, James Nelsons, the River Plate Meat Company, London Central Meat, W. & R. Fletcher and the Argenta Meat Company. Between 1888 and 1910 they came to control ninety per cent of the frozen meat trade. Within this environment, following a vegetarian diet made economic and moral sense (Fraser 1981, p.115).

The use of food iconography in the condemnation of a criminally unjust society is also used by the eighteenth-century political illustrator James Gillray who published a series of drawings satirizing a decadent aristocracy. In *Monstrous Craws, at a New Coalition Feast* the King, Queen and Prince of Wales are depicted gorging on a bowl of John Bull’s blood. Penny Bradshaw describes the picture as ‘aristocratic vampiricism’ (2004, p.63) with John Bull’s blood symbolising that of the common man. It is not far removed from Karl Yundt’s ‘venomous spluttering’: ‘Do you know how I would call the present economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic. That’s what it is! They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people – nothing else’ (44). The only difference between these two images being that Yundt is attacking the middle classes who have become wealthy through capitalist-driven industry.[[54]](#endnote-54)

In Romantic thinking,[[55]](#endnote-55) ‘simple’ is linked to ‘natural’ and in the context of food and Lévi-Strauss’s theories on the ‘raw and the cooked’, natural food is that which has not been cooked or transformed through a process of culturalization. Stevie’s ‘simpleness’ or ‘naturalness’ locates him as the only anarchic character who succeeds in living within the confines of culture while upholding his sense of natural justice. In addition to this, Lévi-Strauss maintained that cooking is a language and that like language, it has an ‘unconscious structure.’ The significance of this becomes clear when considering Joseph Ritson’s ‘An Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food as a Moral Duty’ (1802) in which he suggests that ‘language was the invention of society, and rose from natural inarticulate crys’ (sic), (16). True anarchy seeks to transcend but not destroy these social constructs. Stevie, who has trouble mastering socially constructed language, ‘he could do no more than stammer’ (122) expresses injustice through an alternative means, but still within the understanding of culture, making his subversive tendencies far more effective. His circle drawings portray the vortex of social order into which man is helplessly drawn, an image first proposed by Dr Thomas Trotter[[56]](#endnote-56) in ‘A View of the Nervous Temperament’ (1807), a work which Shelley also drew upon for his essay ‘A Vindication’ (Morton 1994, p.261 n.54). Trotter writes of the ‘vortex of dissipation’ in which modern man is caught in a spiral of insatiable appetite and an ‘over-sophisticated diet’ (1807, p.44) brought on by urban life.

Stevie’s violent death reduces him to ‘nameless fragments’ (71) that become the symbol of nihilistic anarchy because there is no language to justify or give meaning to this metaphysical heap. This paradox is better explained by looking at Conrad’s scene in the ‘Silenus Restaurant’ – notably a place where cooking and language are primary occupations – in which he ironically reinforces this point in a conversation between The Professor and Comrade Ossipon. When Ossipon refers to the bomb outrage as ‘Criminal’! The Professor replies with scorn: ‘Criminal! What is that? What is crime? What can be the meaning of such an assertion?’ Ossipon, trapped within the boundaries of socially constructed language replies, ‘How am I to express myself? One must use the current words’ (59). These ‘sham’ anarchists, through their idealistic folly, are unable to express themselves without calling upon the very constructs they wish to destroy.

The nihilistic form of anarchy promoted by The Professor, exiles itself from culture and therefore language and is rendered ineffectual. Stevie becomes a victim of Verloc’s dissipation. This man whose hair is of a ‘dissipated untidiness’ and whose ‘disreputable aspect, expressive of the discomfort, the irritation, and the gloom following a heavy debauch’ (147) leads Stevie and Winnie into ‘madness and despair’ (8). When Stevie’s body is destroyed by The Professor’s bomb, the vortex it creates sucks all those around him into its chaos. Verloc’s actions lead to his own death and the destruction of Winnie, Mr Vladimir and Comrade Ossipon. But that bomb also ‘leaves disorder, remembrance, room to move, a clear space’ (*CL*3 p. 344) as well as making a ‘clean sweep and clear start for a new conception of life’ (61).

Paradoxically, the bomb cleans away the disease and disfigurement created by capitalism, a sentiment echoed in Thomas Beddoes’ *Hygëia* (1802) when he writes, ‘state-pestilence of polite luxury... contrives, unexpectedly by the multitude, to mangle and destroy whatever it meets’ (2009, p.79). Stevie becomes the ‘mangled remains’ (156) of Verloc’s attempt to protect these luxuries. Beddoes was implying that luxury disfigures or diseases the wealthy and distinguishes them from others in society. Within the context of *The Secret Agent*, hygiene becomes that which is culturally acceptable – or to use Shelley’s analogy – has been cooked or disfigured, a metaphor later used by Lévi-Strauss in the first volume of *Mythologiques* (1964), which famously identifies cooking as marking the transition from nature to culture. Mr Verloc recognizes this in the ‘opulence and luxury’ of the rich which ‘had to be protected ... the whole social order favourable to their hygienic idleness had to be protected against the shallow enviousness of unhygienic labour’ (12).

The transforming effects of the cultural on the natural in *The Secret Agent* creates an uncanny effect when Verloc observes the ‘Carriages’ that go ‘bowling by ... with here and there a Victoria with the skin of some wild beast inside and a woman’s face and hat emerging above the folded hood’ (15). In this scene, the natural – the wild beast – is not only removed from its natural environment but has been transfigured into something acceptable – a fur stole – by the culture of luxurious fashion. The whole ‘social order’ is ‘favourable’ to the wealthy.

In the Promethean myth fire transforms the raw – the unhygienic and inedible (in this case unhygienic refers to something that is in its natural state) – into the hygienic or the socially acceptable in the same way that the unhygienic labour of the masses transforms raw material into commodities. In other words, fire disguises the horrible mess of the shambles, ‘the bloody juices and raw horror’ (Shelley 1922, p.12). Fire kills germs and disease, leaving meat hygienic and safe to eat. Fire also represents capitalism in its disfiguring nature and its quest to hide the unhygienic origins of its unacceptable face. In a personification of greedy capitalism and manipulation, Conrad has the ‘inferior henchman’ of the ‘guzzling Cheeseman’ who dines ‘at his leisure’ present to the House his ‘shamelessly cooked statistics’ (162). The analogy refers to the disfiguration of the social body. In other words, the acceptable face of capitalism is a lie and a sham and misrepresents the masses.

The ‘hygienic prison’ in which Michaelis is held captive, is a capitalist institution that protects the wealthy and their property. Michaelis suffers a physical and psychological disfigurement: ‘He had come out of a highly hygienic prison round like a tub, with an enormous stomach and distended cheeks of a pale, semi-transparent complexion, as though for fifteen years the servants of an outraged society had made a point of stuffing him with fattening foods in a damp and lightless cellar’ (37). Through his imprisonment, Michaelis is transformed from raw and rebellious anarchist into domestically produced veal, kept in the dark and fed until fat.[[57]](#endnote-57) As such, his value increases from a worthless criminal to a delicacy enjoyed by the wealthy, not least the Lady Patroness. When ‘His own skin had sizzled under the red-hot brand’, he is in effect cooked or made acceptable to society (42). In ‘A Vindication’ Shelley describes the same process of transforming the natural into the domestic by pointing out that the ‘bull must be degraded into the ox and the ram into the wether’; in other words, wild animals are domesticated so that their ‘flaccid fibre may offer a fainter resistance to rebellious nature’ (1922, p.12).[[58]](#endnote-58) Michaelis, now softened up, is infinitely more appetising to society. Conrad’s ‘as though’ indicates the reality of prison food in the 1870s. The Irish revolutionary, Michael Davitt served eight years of a fifteen-year sentence in a Victorian prison.[[59]](#endnote-59) He described the diet as on the ‘scale of scientific starvation’, detailing how prisoners would eat candle ends and grease provided for their boots as well as ‘the marrow of the putrid bones they had been set to break and grind’ (Morris & Rothman 1998, p.134).[[60]](#endnote-60)

Vegetarianism is linked with humanitarianism in that a regard for animals is akin to a regard for fellow human beings. This humanitarianism is conveyed in *The Secret Agent* through Michaelis’s uninitiated ‘dreams of a world like a beautiful and cheery hospital’ (227).[[61]](#endnote-61) Stevie’s compassion is more proactive both with regard to the cab driver’s emaciated horse and its over-worked driver. Stevie, distressed at the cabbie’s use of the whip makes his protest by jumping off the bus. Angry but helpless at the true nature of this ‘bad world’ Stevie tries to ‘express the view newly opened to his sympathies of the human and equine misery in close association’. His cry, ‘Poor brute, poor people!’ (131) places man and beast side by side. The image is furthered by the action of the driver as he supports the head of the ‘partner of his labours’ (129) on his fist and echoes Thomas Taylor’s ‘A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes’ (1792) in which he looks back at a Golden Age when ‘Man walk’d with beast joint tenant of the shade’ and enjoyed a natural diet.

Stevie’s sense of injustice and immorality is inherent in his nature: ‘He can’t stand the notion of any cruelty’ (51). At fourteen he goes to work for a ‘foreign preserved milk firm’ but ‘was discovered one foggy afternoon ... busy letting off fireworks on the staircase.’ The ‘injustice and oppression’ that is related to him by his fellow ‘office-boys’ (13) is linked to the production of this ‘foreign preserved milk’, otherwise known as condensed milk. Condensed milk was marketed as healthier than fresh milk and crucially it was much cheaper but in some states of America it was adulterated through a process which extracted the cream, replacing it with coconut milk which made it less nutritious. This process was called ‘filled milk’ (Lumley 1933, p.28). After the 1870s, condensed milk became a staple food of poor working class families who fed it to their children instead of cow’s milk. Due to the high concentrate of sugar in condensed milk, the result was ill-health, diarrhoea and sometimes death in babies.[[62]](#endnote-62) In 1905 the Nestle and Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company was founded and had offices in the UK (Jones 2005, p.340). Condensed milk may not be a meat product but neither is it ‘natural’. Stevie’s protest instinctively retaliates against the profit-driven propaganda of the condensed milk companies and the injustice that sees children poisoned because fresh milk is too expensive.

From a Romantic perspective Stevie, ‘a moral creature’ (132) and a ‘badly scared creature’ (183) is not unlike the creature in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: the ‘Modern Prometheus’. Although Mary Shelley’s creation is cobbled together from a heap of body parts, while Stevie is reduced to a heap of body parts, both are formed by ‘material’. Environmental influences attempt to transform them. Using Lévi-Strauss’s analogy, there is an attempt to cook them, or bring them within the realms of culture; Shelley’s creature by the ‘spark’ through which Frankenstein brings him to life and Stevie through the Promethean influence of Verloc. When Winnie declares to her husband that Stevie would do anything for him, ‘he would go through fire for you’ (140), the metaphor implies that he is vulnerable to the corrupting influences of capitalism (in the form of Verloc) but Stevie’s innocence – symbolized by the rawness of his remains – is retained. The metaphor is used again when Winnie, agreeing to let Verloc take Stevie to the country, looks at her brother whose ‘expression was proud, apprehensive, and concentrated, like that of a small child entrusted for the first time with a box of matches and the permission to strike a light’ (144). But Conrad’s ‘Tale’ as the novel’s full title has it, is a ‘Simple’ one and as such although Verloc takes advantage of Stevie’s vulnerability, the boy remains natural, he is ‘blown to fragments in a state of innocence and in the conviction of being engaged in a humanitarian enterprise’ (200). He resists capitalism unlike the other anarchists. Chief Inspector Heat when he swallows ‘a good deal of raw, unwholesome fog’ (70) on his way to the crime scene, is gulping down the essence of Stevie, unwholesome because rawness symbolizes anarchy. But the fog is also a way of imposing a sense of ‘desubstantiation, deindividualisation, lack of stable definition’ (Tanner 1979, p.33) and as such the fog becomes a metaphor for the disintegration of Stevie’s body. It is no wonder that Heat loses his ‘inclination for food’ at the sight of Stevie’s remains because they represent to him the disintegration of an ordered society.

Likewise, Verloc, after hearing – and imagining – Stevie being blown to pieces cannot face the beef that is put in front of him. He ‘abstained from food entirely. He recoiled from it with sombre aversion when urged by Mrs Verloc’ (147) as if in the meat he sees the constituent parts of Stevie’s body in the same way that Frankenstein is ‘unable to endure the aspect of the being’ he has created (Mary Shelley 2003, p.58). In this moment, Verloc sees beyond the cooked appearance of the meat to its origins and like Frankenstein feels disgust for what he has done. The moment of empathy is fleeting, negated by Inspector Heat who devises a scheme to stop the ‘disclosure of many things – the laying waste of fields of knowledge’ (159). Inspector Heat’s role is to screen society from the ‘shambles’ – the raw truth of its foundations – the ‘force of law, property, oppression, and injustice’ (68).

Heat’s role as the man ‘armed with the defensive mandate of a menaced society’ (68) gives him the job of making the ‘raw material’ of Stevie more digestible to those to whom he must report. Stevie’s remains represent the products of the unhygienic labour force before they have been transformed or ‘cooked’ by capitalism into consumables. The bomb has reversed the process of industrialisation and Stevie, used by Verloc as a profitable commodity to finance his comfortable lifestyle, is transformed back into natural raw material.

When Conrad describes Chief Inspector Heat ‘peering at the table with a calm face and the slightly anxious attention of an indigent customer bending over what may be called the by-products of a butcher’s shop with a view to an inexpensive dinner’ (71), he is forcing home the reality that animal meat bears no significant difference to human meat. Even Conrad could not stand to have the joint placed on the table in front of him. As Jessie Conrad in *Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him* (1926) writes, ‘Once a new maid, unaware of his dislike of having the joint on the dining-table, proudly placed before him half a calf’s head. It was quite elegantly prepared but unfortunately it looked what it was. He gave one disgusted glance at it, promptly reversed his chair, and sat with his back to the dish’ (18-19). Despite the process of cooking, Conrad could still see the origins of the meat and it didn’t, as Winnie Verloc would agree, ‘stand much looking into’ (136).

Winnie herself has an ‘instinctive repulsion’ even of a ‘mere trickle of blood’ (200) and that ‘trickle’ comes from the dead meat that is the murdered body of her husband. From the moment that he walks into Mr Vladimir’s office, his fate is sealed. His association with animals, and in particular the domestic pig, situates him as food to be devoured by the ‘big capitalists’. The fly – his ‘first fly of the year’ (26) – is suggestive of death and disease and enhances Verloc’s metaphorical position as diseased meat. The manner of his death – with a carving knife – conjures the image of a stuck pig being bled out with the ‘trickle, dark, swift, thin. . . Blood!’ (199). But the carving knife has another symbolic value in culinary terms. To carve has its origins in the word ‘disfigure.’ (*Oxford English Dictionary* v. 3). The knife transforms – ‘Mrs Verloc watched that transformation with shadows of anxiety coming and going on her face’ (199) – changing ‘object into subject, the eater into the eaten’ (Morton 1995, p.85) and into something which is unidentifiable with its origins, thus making it more acceptable to mankind for consumption. Verloc in life, is animalised. It is only through the use of the carving knife that he can be transformed back to humanity. When he is no longer a domestic animal, he is liberated and freed from the laws and institutions that have ruled his life. In the moment of his death – that ‘anarchistic end’ (xv) – he is returned to nature.

The carving knife also transforms Winnie. As she silently picks it up and approaches Verloc, ‘the resemblance of her face with that of her brother grew at every step’ (197). She too returns to a state of naturalness and simplicity, she had ‘put all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns’ into the instinctive desire to vindicate the murder of her brother (197).

Before Verloc is murdered and just after Chief Inspector Heat leaves the house, having confronted him with the truth of the bombing, Verloc experiences a feeling of burning, as if he too is being cooked metaphorically: ‘turning on the tap above the sink, [he] poured three glasses of water, one after another, down his throat to quench the fires of his indignation. Mr Vladimir’s conduct was like a hot brand which set his internal economy on fire’ (181), a feeling akin to indigestion as a result of an ‘unnatural diet’. Verloc then consumes cold beef and bread, ‘laid out in the likeness of funereal baked meats for Stevie’s obsequies’. Ironically, this is not a funeral feast for Stevie, but for Verloc. ‘Standing at the table eating without the use of a knife and fork, partaking ravenously, without restraint and decency, cutting thick slices with the sharp carving knife and swallowing them without bread’ (190), the distinctions between taste and waste and sexual and physical appetite, Shelley’s ‘excess carnivorous passions’ are no longer defined. Shelley himself could not have produced a more accurate embodiment of disease, crime and madness induced by meat eating. In the split second before Verloc dies, he suffers a reflux of the meal, he ‘tastes the flavour of death rising in his gorge’ (197), in other words, the greed of capitalist consumption that eventually repeats on its consumer is the ‘flavour of death’ in the form of meat.

Conrad repeatedly protested that his novel was neither philosophical nor political. But he was famous for misleading his audience, and his friends. Robert Wilson claimed that Conrad had to make his works acceptable in Christian countries ‘because the sale of his books became his major means of supporting his family’ and as such he buried ‘his ideas so deeply in his fiction that few knew what he was saying’ (1987, p.3-4). Conrad’s use of vegetarian rhetoric, therefore, enables him to transcend or mask a political discussion in the same way that irony does. In other words, Conrad disguises the complexity of this ‘Simple’ tale.

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**6.**

**Bread and Liberty in *Under Western Eyes***

I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread.

(Miss Haldin, *Under Western Eyes*, p.135)

*Under Western Eyes* provides the third in Conrad’s trilogy of political novels, the others being *Nostromo* (1904) and *The Secret Agent* (1907). Spanning the Edwardian period, these are now widely regarded as constituting what Jacques Berthoud dubbed Conrad’s ‘major phase’ (1979). Fittingly in a novel of revolutionary politics, the action that motivates the plot is an act of violence, the assassination of ‘Mr de P, the President of the notorious Repressive Commission of some years ago, the Minister of State invested with extraordinary powers’ (*UWE*  p.7). In a letter to John Galsworthy of 6th January 1908, Conrad revealed that his source for this incident was ‘the murder’ (*CL*4 p.9) of Count Vyacheslav Konstantinovich de Plehve (b. 1846), who was Minister of the Interior and assassinated in St Petersburg on 15 July 1904. In a novel where starvation and hunger are the lot of ordinary Russians, this historical source proves to be thematically significant. As Minister of the Interior, the real de Plehve was responsible for the country’s grain stores. In 1906 there was a famine in Russia, the cause of which was blamed on inadequate administration of the grain stores spanning back over thirty years and contributing to eight separate years of famine between 1880 and 1911 (Kahan 1989, p.108). Once this historical connection is recognised it adds a new and covert dimension to the plot, linking de P to the cause of popular disaffection. Thus, the description of de P’s ‘ruthless persecution of the rising generation’ as approximating to ‘the destruction of the very hope of liberty itself’, together with his pronouncement that ‘the thought of liberty has never existed in the Act of the Creator’ (7‒8), ensure the association of liberty and food.

In December 1907, Conrad began working on a new short story, ‘Razumov’, intending, as he revealed in the same letter to John Galsworthy, to ‘capture the very soul of things Russian – Cosas de Russia’ (*CL*4 p.8). Over the next two years the tale expanded to become *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad’s relationship with Russia was a complex one, not least because although he was Polish, he was also a Russian citizen. Edward Crankshaw claims that when Conrad left his homeland as a 16-year-old boy to join the French Merchant Navy, he was not abandoning a ‘Poland helpless under an alien tyranny’ but renouncing his Russian citizenship (1979, p.91-92). In his essay, ‘Autocracy and War’ (1905), Conrad considers Russia as a ‘fantastic bulk’ which sitting on the ‘gravestone of autocracy’ cut off its people from light, from all knowledge of themselves and of the world’ and which committed its people in war to ‘fatigue, hunger, cold, and murder’ (1924, 86-87). Conrad’s first-hand experience of the tyranny of Russian autocracy is eulogized in the first piece of recorded writing by the young Korzeniowski in about 1863: ‘To my dear Granny who helped me send pastries to my poor Daddy in prison – grandson, Pole-Catholic and szlachcic, KONRAD’. Two years earlier Conrad’s father, Apollo, had been arrested for subversive activities (Najder 2007, p.19) against the Russian government. He and his wife, Conrad’s mother, Ewa, were eventually sent into exile in 1862 to Vologda in the North West of Russia. Although being transferred a year later to Chernikhiv in the North of Ukraine where the climate was better, the cold and hunger they suffered took a fatal toll on their health. In 1865, Ewa died and in 1869 when Conrad was 12-years-old, Apollo succumbed to tuberculosis. Najder claims that Apollo left a ‘formidable psychological legacy’ on his son including ‘a hatred of invaders, particularly Russians’ (p.35). This view is upheld in Conrad’s letter to Constance Garnett of 20 October 1911, in which he writes: ‘But the fact is that I know extremely little of Russians. Practically nothing. In Poland we have nothing to do with them. One knows they are there. And that’s disagreeable enough. In exile the contact is even slighter if possible if more unavoidable’ (Garnett 1928, pp.234-235).

Conrad’s depiction of Russians in his fiction prior to the writing of *Under Western Eyes* is limited to that of the Harlequin in ‘Heart of Darkness’, Mr Vladimir in *The Secret Agent* and the Russian anarchists of the same novel. In the first, the Harlequin, so called because his clothes are made up of ‘patches all over’ – an image that lends itself to the complexity of Russia – is, as Marlow recounts, ‘improbable, inexplicable and altogether bewildering’ (1967, pp.122, 126). This sentiment is transposed on to Russia in Conrad’s ‘Author’s Note’ (1920) to *Under Western Eyes* in which he writes of the ‘condition of Russia and of the moral and emotional reactions of the Russian temperament to the pressure of tyrannical lawlessness’ (viii). The insinuation is that the Harlequin represents the ‘bewildering’ willingness of the Russian people to be dominated and ruled in the same way that the Harlequin allows himself to be mistreated by the autocratic Kurtz while continuing to uphold a ‘devotion’ and ‘severe exaltation’ for an entity that is both malevolent and benevolent: ‘When he came down to the river, sometimes he would take to me and sometimes it was better for me to be careful’ (129). Most revealing of all, however, is C. F. Burgess’s observation of the Harlequin: ‘Like Marlow, he is one of those “curious men” who, Conrad tells us, “go prying into all sorts of places where they have no business’ (1963, p.191), a description that although placed within the context of British and Belgian colonialism in Africa, could just as easily allude to Russia as ‘invaders’ of Poland.

Allowing for a different perspective on Russia, the character of Mr Vladimir in *The Secret Agent* epitomizes the Russian disdain for individual liberty mocking England’s ‘absurd … sentimental regard’ for such concepts (*SA* p.29). Vladimir’s own notions of individual liberty are compromised at the end of the novel when he is barred from the exclusive ‘Explorer’s Club’, a place of ‘extreme selectiveness and social purity’ (217). The Russian revolutionaries of the novel fare little better. Michaelis, Karl Yundt, the Professor and Comrade Ossipon are variously ineffectual, ‘fat’, malevolent, and ‘mad’.

Despite these clearly biased perspectives of Russia, in his ‘Author’s Note’ to *Under Western Eyes* Conrad declares that his ‘greatest anxiety’ in writing the novel was ‘in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality’. He goes on to write that he was obliged to present the ‘truth’ by way of ‘detachment from all passions, prejudices, and even from personal memories’ (viii). *Under Western Eyes* may be a novel about the political state of Russia and the revolutionary resistance to this but it is also about the implications of the individual in the workings of the state. [[63]](#endnote-63) Conrad explicitly achieved ‘scrupulous impartiality’ but by using food as a yardstick by which to measure the political situation and its impact on individuals, Conrad implicitly condemns ‘the soul of things Russian’. Food and hunger become the vehicles through which it is possible to explore the key tensions of the novel: revolutionary politics, the mysticism of Russian Orthodoxy, the brutality of autocracy and the cannibalistic spectre of Russia as a ‘tragic mother’ (33). That food would once again serve Conrad as a central theme and metaphor for his subject is evident from the outset, where the epigraph offers a slightly misquoted sentence from the novel itself: ‘I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch a piece of bread’[[64]](#endnote-64) and informs the focus for this final chapter.

**Conrad’s Epigraph**

This connection between bread and liberty is made overtly by Miss Haldin in her claim ‘I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread’ (135). Of course, the association of bread with liberty is an old one, and goes back at least as far as the French Revolution, but Miss Haldin’s use of it here may owe something to a more contemporary source. The anarchist monthly, *Pain et Liberté* (‘Bread and Freedom’), was published in Geneva 1903–06 and in 1909. In Miss Haldin’s phrase the image of bread is employed to denote freedom from tyranny. Scholars generally agree that the slight difference between what Miss Haldin says in the text (‘snatch at a piece of bread’) and the way that this is cited in the epigraph (‘snatch a piece of bread’) is unintentional, but the discrepancy between the two sentences is provocative. While the use of the conditional tense, ‘would’, renders both formulations speculative, the use of the preposition ‘at’ in Miss Haldin’s simile ensures that the desired bread is even more unattainable. This difference becomes clear when we make the intended substitution: snatching at liberty ‒ unlike snatching liberty itself ‒ offers no guarantee that liberty is even attainable or within one’s grasp. The preposition implies the intangibility of the bread in a way that parallels the intangible and abstract nature of liberty. In other words, the claim made within the text is far less certain than that used for the epigraph, and, whether intentional or not, the difference between the two enacts something of the ambivalence that Conrad traces in the Russian attitude to and entrapment within the struggle for emancipation from autocracy. Taking this argument a step further, Avrom Fleishman contests that the mistake in the epigraph is a ‘linguistic device’ used by Conrad to emphasise the instability of conveying an historical document which has been written by another as in the case of the teacher of languages re-telling Razumov’s documented account of events, a suggestion that adds to the unstable nature of the political processes at hand.

The completed novel did more than capture the soul of things Russian, it exposed the varying constructions of Russia that Conrad optimistically perceived in ‘Autocracy and War’ to have been laid to rest. The key to revealing these constructions lies in the dissection of Miss Haldin’s statement. In the context of the second phrase – and the one which will be the focus of this study – the teacher of languages expresses his desire for Miss Haldin to go back to Russia rather than stay in Geneva amongst the influence of the revolutionaries funded by Madam de S and inspired by Peter Ivanovitch: ‘Don’t suppose I am thinking of your preservation. No! I know that you will not be returning to personal safety. But I had much rather think of you in danger there than see you exposed to what may be met here’ (133). The teacher of languages insinuates that Miss Haldin does not understand the true nature of revolution in which the ‘narrow-minded fanatics’ – an unwitting reference to her brother – and ‘tyrannical hypocrites’ incite the revolution only for it to be taken over by ‘pretentious intellectual failures’. Miss Haldin’s reply to this is that she would not think of herself and instead would ‘take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would snatch at a piece of bread’ (134-135). The illusionary nature of revolutionary utopianism is comically displayed later in the novel when Peter Ivanovitch performs what appears to be a magic trick by producing cakes ‘which he must have extracted from the interior of his hat’ (217). The relationship between cakes and bread is suggested by the setting of the Château Borel in which Madam de S eats *Les gateaux* evoking the image of Marie Antoinette and her mythologized directive, ‘Qu’ ‘ils mangent de la brioche’. Comically, the ambiguity of brioche – is it cake or is it bread? – lends an additional and perhaps unintentional satire to the ideologies of revolutionaries, autocrats and Orthodox believers in that it becomes hard to distinguish one from the other. All this collides to reinforce the notion that nothing in this novel is as it seems. More importantly, Conrad evokes the idealized status of bread within Russian culture as a means through which to expose the overlap between the religious ideals of Orthodoxy and autocracy and the spiritual ideals of the revolutionaries. In the process Conrad reveals through the symbolism of bread and the illusionary nature of liberty, ‘the very soul of things Russian’.

**Bread in Russian Culture and Religion**

In Russian the word for ‘hospitality’ translates literally as ‘bread-salt.’ In Conrad’s short story, ‘Amy Foster’, Yanko, a Ukranian emigré lands on the Kent coast after being shipwrecked on his way to America. Shunned by the inhabitants of the district in which he is stranded, he is beaten and driven away like an animal or a lunatic. When Amy Foster offers the starving Yanko ‘half a loaf of white bread – “such bread as the rich eat in my country” he used to say’ (1946, p.124), bread becomes a symbol of humanitarian kindness. With neither giver nor receiver being able to understand the language of the other, bread also becomes the universal medium through which they communicate. The importance of bread in Polish culture is also alluded to by Conrad in *A Personal Record* in which he refers to his grandmother’s estate in Ukraine as a ‘kindly, bread-giving land’ (2008, p.228). Indeed, Conrad also refers to positive literary criticism as ‘The daily bread’ that ‘is served out to us (however sparingly) with a pinch of salt’ suggesting that too much of a good thing and one would ‘get sick of the diet one prays for’ (275).

The Russian symbolism of bread goes back to the soil, territory, Mother Russia. Salt is present as the symbol of the Other: necessary but only in small quantities. Bread and salt being the essential foods, they are often complemented by vodka as the national drink. Together, the three basic food elements represent Russia’s soil and soul, her body and her spirit (Hellberg-Hirn 1998, p.164). Furthermore, rye bread is traditionally employed as a symbolic representation of Mother Russia. One Russian writer said of rye that, ‘It was this cereal which gave life and nourishment to the peasant, as is shown clearly by the name it is given in popular songs: rzhitas kormilitsa, literally, “rye, provider of mother’s milk”’ (Smith & Christian, 1984, p.256). Bread features in the *Lord’s Prayer* and can be interpreted as the substance of existence. In the Orthodox and Catholic Eucharists it is literally transfigured into the body of Christ. Bread is also central to traditions of hospitality with the peasant treating a loaf with reverence, breaking it by hand instead of cutting it.[[65]](#endnote-65) This practice reflects the Christian Bible’s interpretation of the Last Supper as recorded in Luke 22:19: ‘And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”’ Conrad playfully confirms the status attributed to bread in a letter to Doctor Mackintosh inviting him to dinner, ‘So long as there is a roof over our heads to receive you under “and a piece of bread to put before you with some salt” as the Ukranian peasant woman at whose breast I have been suckled would have expressed it’ (*CL*4 p.214).

**Food and Russian Politics**

The image of the Ukranian peasant is significant to an understanding of *Under Western Eyes* as Slavophiles and revolutionaries believed that the ‘soul’ of Russia was embedded in the figure of the peasant who lived on the ‘soil’ and it was they who would bring ‘salvation’ to a spiritually devoid West. The connection between the soul and the soil is divided into two elements. Hellberg-Hirn describes the ‘soul’ as the spiritual ‘terrain’ of Russia, and the soil as the ‘territorial’ identification (1998, p.7). Razumov’s terrifying isolation is two-fold because he cannot identify with the Russian soul because of his betrayal of Haldin, and he is exiled from ‘his native soil’, that which provides him with physical and moral sustenance.

If Haldin’s arrival in his room thrusts Razumov into the world of Russian politics, his ‘nightmare of a walk’ (55) forces him to assert the political allegiances that will map his fate. Razumov sets off intending to secure the services of Ziemianitch to help Haldin escape only to end up betraying him to the authorities. This walk also forces Razumov to define his relationship with his homeland in which his ‘native soil’ is unyielding and sterile:

Razumov stamped his foot ‒ and under the soft carpet of snow felt the hard ground of Russia, inanimate, cold, inert, like a sullen and tragic mother hiding her face under a winding sheet ‒ his native soil! ‒ his very own ‒ without a fireside, without a heart! (32-33)

The narrative positioning of this revelation has a dramatic logic: it occurs after Razumov has beaten the drunken Ziemianitch and as he is coming to the decision to give Haldin up. But even more acute is the manner in which the food-references that frame and punctuate Razumov’s walk provide a sub-text that brings his personal ratiocination into dialogue with the underlying general state of the nation, often in a manner that conveys his own myopia.

To begin with, Razumov’s journey takes him to ‘the quarter of the very poor’ and there he notices ‘an elderly woman tied up in ragged shawls’ who quickly offers an expression of Russianness: ‘She walked leisurely in the blizzard as though she had no home to hurry to, she hugged under one arm a loaf of black bread with an air of guarding a priceless booty’ (26-27). In *Under Western Eyes*, this image of beggarly stoicism embodies the idealistic notion of the Russian peasant, noble in her suffering. The stark reality to the western reader, however, is of poverty and hunger. To the idealist, this noble peasant embraces the symbolism of the soil and of Orthodoxy and hence the bread becomes a ‘priceless booty.’ For the peasant, however, this idealism does not exist. The ‘priceless’ nature of the bread is its material worth and the physical, not spiritual sustenance that it will bring. Razumov ‘envie[s]’ the peasant woman who holds the bread under her arm like a ‘priceless booty’ because he supposes that she has the liberty to walk ‘leisurely’, having accepted her fate and being certain of redemption in the afterlife through her suffering. Razumov sees the bread as a solid thing in the same way that he had considers the silver medal as the hope of a ‘solid beginning’. But these certainties have been removed by Haldin’s presence in his rooms. Razumov’s despair as he stands ‘on the point of conversion’ and feels the ‘grace enter[ed]’ into him, with the knowledge that he ‘now believed in the man who would come at the appointed time’ (34) represents the despair of the Russian people who paradoxically turn to religious tropes to relieve their hunger and suffering. Razumov projects this understanding on to the ‘elderly woman’ who ‘hugged’ her bread. ‘Who knows what true loneliness is – not the conventional word, but the naked terror? To the lonely themselves it wears a mask. The most miserable outcast hugs some memory or some illusion’ (39). Notably, the declension of the verb ‘hug’ emphasises the relationship between the material and the immaterial.

The figure of the ‘elderly woman’ and her black bread embodies the soul of Russia which is embedded in Haldin’s ‘ecstatic belief’[[66]](#endnote-66) in the figure of Ziemianitch, the notorious alcoholic, (whose very name shares etymological roots with the Polish word for ‘earth’ or ‘land’, *ziem*). Haldin describes him as a ‘bright spirit’[[67]](#endnote-67) and a ‘noble soul’ (18) but Razumov reveals the stark reality of Haldin’s misguided idolization and the image of Russian stoicism in the description of ‘the reek of spirits, the greasy rancid steam of food’ that ‘got Razumov by the throat’ in the ‘low eating house’ which ‘seemed to be’ the ‘usual haunt’ of Ziemianitch. This son of the soil having ‘got his skinful early in the afternoon’ has retired ‘with a bottle under each arm’ to the stables, there to ‘keep it up amongst the horses’ (27). To the idealist Haldin, Ziemianitch is emblematic of the spirit of the populace in search of liberty: ‘It’s extraordinary what a sense of the necessity of freedom there is in that man. And he has sayings too ‒ simple, to the point, such as only the people can invent in their rough sagacity’ (56). The inn-keeper is more clear-eyed; to him Ziemianitch is ‘A proper Russian man ‒ the little pig’. And, in his own defence, Ziemianitch merely asks rhetorically: ‘Who could bear life in our land without the bottle?’ (28).

The inn itself is presented in terms that recall Dickens’s description of ‘Tom-all-Alone’s’ in *Bleak House*: ‘The house was an enormous slum, a hive of vermin, a monumental abode of misery towering on the verge of starvation and despair’ (28). When Haldin numbers this inn among the ‘byways and hedges’ where must be sought ‘the guests for the feast of freedom’ (56), the house itself serves as a site of contestation, standing at the intersection of literal starvation and metaphorical feast, dramatizing through these food-references the gap between brute reality and revolutionary idealism, and, thus, synthesising the ‘irreconcilable antagonisms’ (*CL*2 p.348), to use one of Conrad’s phrases, that characterize the narrative as a whole. Significantly, even as he sets out on his quest, now enmeshed in Russian politics because of Haldin, Razumov imagines his youth ‘pass away from him in misery and half starvation’ and sees himself dying ‘unattended in some filthy hole of a room’ (21). This nightmare vision acquires material force through his visit to the inn. It is hardly surprising that Razumov should consider himself ‘done for,’ caught ‘between the drunkenness of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things and the true character of men’ (31). The seemingly throw-away detail about the old woman’s ‘loaf of black bread’ assumes increasing significance, both for its power to stave off hunger and for its material reality in the face of Haldin’s revolutionary mysticism.

Other food-references also frame Haldin’s ‘feast’ of freedom. First there is the local ‘provision shop’ that Razumov passes as he nears home. Kept by ‘a German woman’, it displays ‘loaves of stale bread, bunches of onions and strings of sausages behind the small panes’. As Razumov passes, it is closing: ‘The sickly lame fellow whom he knew so well by sight staggered out into the snow embracing a large shutter’. It is difficult not to read Razumov’s reasoning that immediately follows as relating, in part at least, to the provision of daily food: ‘The sense of life’s continuity depended on trifling bodily impressions. The trivialities of daily existence were an armour for the soul’ (53). The sequential progression from ‘bodily’ to ‘soul’ arranges the material and immaterial dimensions of the Russian life according to a hierarchy of needs. Then, completing the ‘frame’, once Haldin has left him Razumov returns to his studies, to normality, but this part of his existence is forever destroyed, as his inability to concentrate proves. Instead, he imagines that his home is now under surveillance: ‘The man would be disguised perhaps as a peasant . . . a beggar . . . Perhaps he would be just buttoned up in a dark overcoat and carrying a loaded stick ‒ a shifty-eyed rascal, smelling of raw onions and spirits’ (64). Here, Razumov’s paranoia, based upon fears that combine poverty and food, is directly linked to the sights and images garnered during his ‘nightmare’ walk to find Ziemianitch. In this manner, *Under Western Eyes*’ political register is consistently mapped onto a series of food-references that ground the idealism of revolutionary politics in the day-to-day reality of human suffering.

This political register is also exemplified in the character of ‘Madcap Kostia’ who embodies the hypocrisy of an individual seduced by revolutionary ideals while enjoying the fruits of the system against which he thinks he should be revolting. The only ‘idolized’ son of a wealthy government contractor, Kostia keeps the company of prostitutes, gambles and attends ‘wine-parties in expensive restaurants’ (67-68). These indulgencies are paid for by the money his father earns from the government – ‘There’s positively no getting to the bottom of his pocket’ – suggesting that the revolution is inflected by the very system it fights against. Kostia’s patronage of ‘expensive restaurants’, enhances the use of food references as a means through which the indulgencies of his decadent life can be displayed. His inability to give these up, compel him to find a less abstemious way of contributing to the revolution. ‘I would give my life … Only, you see, I am like a pig at a trough. I am no good. It’s my nature’ (259). The image conjured of an animal with no self-control, greedy and capable of following only its base instincts, places food as the most prized commodity in a country where the people are starving. Kostia encapsulates the hypocrisy of idealism by comparing his ability to give Razumov money to aid his escape with the need of a starving man for pity: ‘It would be like giving your compassion to a starving fellow’ (69). Compassion is redundant within this context as it cannot relieve hunger. Food highlights the disjoint between idealism and materialism because the revolutionaries place the importance of ideals and the ‘gestures’ associated with demonstrating those ideals above the material needs (ie, food) of the starving Russian people. As Ms Haldin’s statement expresses, however, a starving man will take bread from any hand, indifferent to the principles or politics of the giver.

**Rousseau’s ‘tiny crumb of earth’**

Immediately preceding Razumov’s walk to the Isle de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, he meets the revolutionary exile, Sophia Antonovna who tells him that Ziemianitch has been found hanged. Food sets the tone of the conversation, first with Sophia disclosing the fate of her father in terms of the ‘beggarly dole of bread’ that the ‘people’ receive for a lifetime of misery and then with the image of the low eating-house which pervades their conversation: ‘Sophia Antonovna need not have enlarged on the character of the house. Razumov saw clearly, towering at her back, a dark mass of masonry veiled in snowflakes, with a long row of windows of the eating-shop shining greasily very near the ground’ (225). The eating house serves as the place of Ziemianitch’s death, the place where Haldin recruits his followers for the ‘Feast of Freedom’ and it serves as the backdrop to Sophia’s conclusion that Ziemianitch informed on Haldin. Furthermore, the events in the low eating-house give Razumov the freedom from suspicion that he craves. After this disclosure, the narrative becomes littered with food-related metaphors. The ‘informant’ who passed on the information to Antonovna is, Razumov believes, ‘the red-nosed fellow … It was just the right sort of food for the popular gossip that gaunt busybody had been picking up’. The ‘gaunt busybody’ then becomes a ‘hunger-stricken democrat’ while Razumov’s temper is ‘fed on hate’ and is ‘gnawed by the newborn desire of safety with its independence’ (230-231). However, the safety he desires is threatened by the visit he made to the eating-house to find Ziemianitch. The point is that Razumov’s fate – directed by the idealism of the revolutionaries – evolves from his association with this eating-house, establishing food again as the reference point around which political ideology – and the material human consequences of it – are formulated.

This realization gives a satirical edge to the ‘crumb of earth’ that is the Isle de Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The revolutionaries are associated with ‘greasy, rancid food’ while Rousseau’s ideas are immortalized on a ‘crumb’ of earth, as if his great social ideologies find themselves relegated to an ‘unfrequented’ islet solely inhabited by a woman who runs a ‘refreshment chalet’. It is from this chalet that Razumov, having had nothing but tea pass his lips all day, drinks a glass of milk,[[68]](#endnote-68) an act that hints at the ‘crumb of comfort’ he takes from this deserted place. Notably, Razumov, throughout the novel, is associated with thirst. He is described on four occasions as having a ‘parched throat’, while Razumov himself describes Geneva, the ‘heart of democracy’ and a city surrounded by water, as a ‘parched pea’ (206).

Razumov’s need for material sustenance is in direct opposition to the man at the heart of revolutionary activities in Geneva, Peter Ivanovitch, whose faith in Russian women ‘sustained’ him during his years as a “heroic fugitive” wandering ‘in the forests and bogs of Siberia’ and ‘sustains’ him still (119, 125). Images of sustenance abound, now associating Peter Ivanovitch with both asceticism and with Christ ‒ ‘lived on wild berries and hunted for honey’[[69]](#endnote-69) ‒ now functioning in contrast to Razumov’s physical thirst, as metaphors: ‘thirsting for … political liberty’ (122). Peter Ivanovitch’s history is presented as an analepsis during his visit to the Haldins, where he seeks to persuade Natalia Haldin to commit herself to the revolutionary cause. He does so in terms of food ‒ in this case self-denial: ‘The luxury of private grief is not for us. Nowadays the devil is not combated by prayers and fasting. And what is fasting after all but starvation? You must not starve yourself, Natalia Victorovna. Strength is what we want. Spiritual strength, I mean’ (127-128). In his directive to Natalia to starve herself of private grief and seek nourishment in spiritualism, Peter Ivanovitch displays again the hypocrisy of the revolutionaries in their inability to understand the material needs of the people, particularly in the fight against autocracy. Natalia, in this novel about the ownership of one’s own person, reclaims her right to private grief stating that without it her brother’s death would be little more than ‘an episode in the fate of the people’. The significance of the food references are then reinforced by their close proximity to Miss Haldin’s statement about liberty and bread.

In the manuscript of *Under Western Eyes*, the teacher of languages recollects an account in one of Peter Ivanovitch’s books in which he describes being forced to eat ‘red herrings’ while having his ‘drinking water’ curtailed.[[70]](#endnote-70) Bearing this in mind, his metaphorical use of ‘thirsting’ set against the material thirst that he claims to have suffered, marks the spiritualism which he directs Natalia to embrace. However, these demands made on Natalia for ‘spiritual strength’ are endowed with comic overtones in a later scene in the manuscript where the teacher of languages observes Peter Ivanovitch walking in the ‘quays’. ‘I caught sight of him walking towards me in the distance … The heroic fugitive was dangling in his large hand by a rose coloured ribbon a small and elegant parcel wrapped in white paper, such as is made up at a fashionable *confiseur*. It looked an absurdly toylike thing to be carried around by such an enormous person …’ The teacher of languages retreats into a café and some moments later, Peter Ivanovitch enters the same café for a cup of coffee. He now has ‘two parcels dangling from his fingers’. The teacher of languages ‘summize[s]’ them to be ‘a box of French chocolates for Mme de S and a box of Russian cigarettes for himself’ bought, as observed by the teacher of languages from a ‘very high class establishment where tobacco in all its forms is sold’. As Peter Ivanovitch takes his seat in the café, he ‘shook the two little parcels off his fingers, on the seat beside him, laid his shiny hat over them not to conceal these harmless luxuries but I imagine as a device of an absent minded man against leaving them behind when he went away’.[[71]](#endnote-71) The ‘French chocolates’ are the same that he later produces from his hat during the tea between Mme de S and Razumov at the Château Borel. The French chocolates or *Les gateaux,* as they are later referred to, hint at an impression of ‘haughty imperialism’, a description which enters the head of the teacher of languages, and detracts from the ‘seriousness’ with which ‘convinced men’ should be taken. The presence of these chocolates, the manner in which Peter Ivanovitch holds them in his big hand and the curiously domestic trick of hiding them under his hat so as not to forget them, grounds the revolutionaries in the mundane habits of everyday life – that which Razumov held so dear – and further exposes their mysticism and spiritualism as mere illusion.

**A Hungry Mother Russia**

The insubstantiality of Orthodoxy, Slavophilism, autocracy, democracy and revolution is represented in *Under Western Eyes* by the perpetual hunger that dominates the novel. The use of the words ‘hunger’, ‘gnawing’, ‘gaunt’ are scattered throughout while food is ‘greasy, rancid’ and the people eat in ‘low eating houses’ and are ‘thin’ and ‘bony’. ‘Human vermin’ are on the ‘verge of starvation and despair!’ (27-28). Inevitably, amidst this hunger, cannibalism begins to punctuate the text. When Councillor Mikulin is convicted of an unknown crime and turned ‘civilly into a corpse’, the narrator condemns all political systems as being indistinguishable from one another: ‘the savage autocracy, any more than the divine democracy, does not limit its diet to its enemies. It devours its friends and servants as well’ (306).

The ‘tragic’ figure of Mother Russia is transformed into a cannibalistic ghoul as echoed in Conrad’s essay ‘Autocracy and War’ in which he writes, ‘She is not an empty void, she is a yawning chasm open between East and West; a bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge’ (*LL* 1924, p.100). This cannibalistic imagery has its roots in the reign of Ivan the Terrible during which the infamous phrase emerged, ‘We Russians do not need to eat; we eat one another and this satisfies us’ (Tolstaya 1991, p.3). The teacher of languages fears the same fate for Miss Haldin when he declares, ‘Yet I saw the gigantic shadow of Russian life deepening around her like the advancing night. It would devour her presently’ (202).

The image of the cannibalistic and ghoulish mother is recreated – this time in the form of a revolutionary – in the Baba-Iaga[[72]](#endnote-72) figure of Madame de S. The Château Borel is described by Miss Haldin as giving her an ‘intimidating impression of solitude and mystery’ (145) but it is her meeting with Tekla, that instils the suggestion of occultism and witchcraft which surrounds the Château and pins references to food, hunger and cannibalism against the ideals of revolution. When Natalia arrives at the seemingly deserted Château, she is met with the victim of Russian autocracy and the ‘disciple’ of revolutionary fervour in the form of Tekla, the ‘sallow and wrinkle[d]’ faced *dame de compagnie* to Madame de S who with her ‘slender figure’ and face of an old woman, represents the paradoxical nature of Russian politics. At first she is little more than an insubstantial, disembodied voice, an ‘impersonal, voluble voice’. When she makes herself visible to Natalia, she is carrying a small bowl of milk which, squatting, she places on the floor for a large cat. As Tekla tells Miss Haldin the sorry story of her life, the cat ‘greedily’ feeds from the bowl.[[73]](#endnote-73) The story begins when Tekla is ‘awakened to the truth’ (150) by ‘an old apple-woman who had her stall under the gateway of Tekla’s house’ (149). The association between the apple-woman and Tekla’s eyes being opened to ‘the horrors from which innocent people are made to suffer in this world’ is suggestive of the serpent in the Garden of Eden who tempts Eve into eating the apple from the tree of knowledge. More sinister is the way in which the old apple-woman comes to ‘fetch’ Tekla away ‘one evening in her quiet way’, reminiscent of the spiriting away of children in the witch-like style of Baba-Iaga. This old woman is both wise and sinister, representing the Janus faced image of a witch. Upon her recruitment by the revolutionaries, Tekla suffers hunger and destitution, resorting to begging on the streets ‘for a crust of bread’ (153). The fairy tale language compounds the mythical status of bread – ‘rzhitas kormilitsa’ – while the act of begging mocks the ‘salvation’ of Tekla whose story revolves around her devotion to a ‘lithographer’ who had ‘got into trouble in connexion with that affair of temperance tracts’ (151). By ‘fetch[ing] her away from her father who works for the Ministry of Finance – the government department that publicly supports temperance while reaping huge profits from liquor sales[[74]](#endnote-74) – the revolutionaries succeed in making her their ‘disciple’ and isolating her from her family.

Madame de S’s ‘supernatural origin[s]’ and ‘occultism’ which are ‘more fit for the eighteenth century than for the conditions of our time’ (136) also align her with the traditional folklore figure of Baba-Iaga. Razumov wondering what the relationship between this ‘grinning skull’ and Peter Ivanovitch can be asks, ‘...what was it? Witchcraft, fascination...’ (179). The Château’s image, both as a base for ‘superior plots’ by revolutionaries and a haunted castle steeped in pre-revolutionary Russian folklore serves to show the contradictions between the old Russia and the emerging new but it also insinuates that revolution – just like superstitious folklore – needs to seduce new ‘disciples’ such as Tekla. To compound the accusation of witchcraft against Madame de S, during the famines of late nineteenth-century Russia, people were routinely accused of being witches and put in madhouses, a fate that Madame de S only narrowly avoids, ‘she had come to within an ace of being spirited away, for reasons of state, into some discreet maison de santé – a madhouse of sorts, to be plain’ (135).

In Russian folklore, the cannibalistic Baba-Iaga represents not only fertility but also a malevolent and benevolent maternal figure. The description of her as the ‘Egeria’ of ‘Europe’s greatest feminist’ aligns her with Diana, the Roman goddess of fertility and again with Baba-Iaga, also a fertility figure.[[75]](#endnote-75) While Madame de S is benevolent in her support of revolutionary activities, her malevolence is represented by the sinister quality of the food in the Château. Miss Haldin tells the teacher of languages that she overhears Madame de

S and Peter Ivanovitch arguing about eggs. ‘It was unheard of; it was shameful’ Miss Haldin declares. It transpires that Madame de S ‘observes a special diet’ and that the day before ‘the eggs were not rightly prepared’ (166).[[76]](#endnote-76) The egg disagreement serves to enforce the image of Madame de S as ‘avaricious, greedy, and unscrupulous’ (135). However, rather more interestingly, the teacher of languages had previously described the Château as ‘that nest of aristocratic conspiracies’ (142) lending the impression that Madame de S is engaging in some form of cannibalistic feast on her own offspring which begs the question whether Tekla’s ‘sallow and wrinkled’ face is the result of having had the life sucked out of her. Razumov’s likening of Madame de S to ‘a galvanized corpse out of some Hoffman’s Tale’ calls to mind ‘The Sandman’ who carries children off to the crescent moon as food for his children’ who with their ‘crooked beaks like owls peck up the eyes of the naughty children’ and serves as an invite to read Madame de S in a grotesque and mythical light.

The manner in which Madame de S eats *Les gâteaux* compounds the ‘ghoulish’ scenario echoing the image of Russia in ‘Autocracy and War’ as a ‘ravenous ghoul’ (*LL* 1924: 89) and the myth of Baba-Iaga who ‘will ‘entrap and devour those who challenge her order or approach her rashly’ (Hubbs 1993, p.39). As if to appease her malevolent nature, Peter Ivanovitch produces cakes ‘which he must have extracted from the interior of his hat’ (217) like a magician produces rabbits. The cakes represent the traditions of Russia that are steeped in myth and superstition and reinforce the sense that nothing is as it seems in this novel.

Despite her ‘special diet’, Madame de S has no reservations in extending her ‘claw-like hand’ towards the ‘paper of cakes’. But she does not eat them, she ‘devour[s]’ them like a wolf, ‘displaying her big false teeth ghoulishly’ (181). The ghostliness of Madame de S serves to make the point that all ideologies are dead. All that remains is the apparition. When she calls for the extirpation of ‘one family’ she becomes rigid, ‘like the rigor of a corpse galvanized into harsh speech’ (185). Later when Razumov stops to discourse with Sofia Antonovna, she tells him that she is tired and hoping that Madame de S ‘will make an effort and conjure up some tea for us’. Razumov replies, ‘If you hurry after Yakovlitch, instead of wasting your time with such an unsatisfactory sceptical person as myself, you may find the ghost of it – the cold ghost of it – still lingering in the temple’ (247). The Russian tea, accompanied by *Les gâteaux*, served in a château which is lent an air of religious reverence through the use of the word ‘temple’ represents the insubstantial and unsavoury ideologies that have provoked revolution and destruction.[[77]](#endnote-77)

After Razumov has confessed to Miss Haldin and made himself ‘free from falsehood, from remorse – independent of every single human being on this earth’ (303), he stops being insubstantial and becomes ‘a mortal in a phantom world’ (304). In other words he is no longer part of the apparition which is Russia. In contrast, ‘there was no longer any Natalia Haldin ... It was a great victory, a characteristically Russian exploit in self-suppression’ (309). Miss Haldin returns to Russia and disappears.

The absence of food, the perpetual hunger and starvation that dominates in this novel makes Russia into a ‘dreaded and strange apparition ... a ravenous ghoul’ that, ‘stamping its shadowy feet upon the gravestone of autocracy’ (89) will never admit defeat. In Tony Tanner’s ‘“Gnawed Bones” and “Artless Tales” – Eating and Narrative in Conrad’, he considers the description of Kurtz, who ‘hollow at the core’, desiring to ‘engorge the world and transform it into self’ becomes a ‘shadow, both satiated and void’ whose desire to become the ‘one sovereign possessive personal pronoun, “my” , so far leading to any genuine growth or extension of self can only lead to a dissolution of self back into “other”, a progressive emptying of human substance’ (1979, p.32). Russia and Kurtz suffer the same fate in their attempt to ‘swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men’ in an attempt to make solid their insubstantiality.

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**7.**

**Conclusion**

In Conrad’s essay, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’ (1924) he considers the role of explorers in mapping the world. The food imagery that Conrad employs to describe how ‘worthy adventurers and devoted men’ helped expand the knowledge of mankind, underpins the role of food in this mapping. As a French speaker, Conrad would have been aware that the word ‘carte’ means both map and menu. It comes as no surprise that he should describe those who dedicated their lives to filling up the white spaces of the map as ‘nibbling at the edges, attacking from north and south and east and west, conquering a bit of truth here and a bit of truth there and sometimes swallowed up by the mystery their hearts were so persistent on unveiling’ (*LE* 2010, p.12). Conrad showed that the globe is not mapped only by the geography of its land mass but also by the food that gives a country its culture and its identity. But if food acts as a cultural signifier, the need for it outweighs any socially constructed morality. Food – in the form of cannibalised humans – becomes the greatest taboo in a white society that believed its civilization was based on an ability to show restraint, a misguided belief that Conrad collapses. The representation of food throughout Conrad’s novels and short fiction allows the reader to reconsider the world from a different perspective, one that at times is distasteful to accept.

The preceding chapters have shown that seemingly irrelevant details about what characters eat and how they eat must be newly considered as essential components of a novel. Food secures and defines cultural context and adjusts and determines the political tone of a piece of writing. Character is built, maintained and collapsed through personal and professional associations with food, while metaphorical and symbolic representations of food offer accessible insights and new interpretations on complicated literary and theoretical concepts.

The need for food shaped the European modern world and impacted on humanity’s response to industrialism and commercialism. Analysing key moments in history through food has provided an insight into practical, theoretical and cultural anxieties that were not only articulated through eating habits, customs and prejudices but also through the way that food was used as a metaphor for the tensions embedded in a rapidly developing and self-reflective society that felt a constant need to define its identity and assert its power. Food has offered a signally important means by which this identity and power is measured. It has also, ironically, become the vehicle through which the codes and values of nineteenth-century society have been interrogated.

Conrad expands the horizons of food from the streets of London in *The Secret Agent* to the sea and beyond. In his role as a merchant seaman, Conrad was not directly involved in importing food from the colonies, the merchant ships in which he served carried other freight, but his novels are rich with the symbolic and metaphorical use of food as a way to present the non-European world and, in the process, provide a critique of European colonialism. The opening words of his very first novel, *Almayer’s Folly*, introduces the reader to a strange voice in a strange land through the call to eat: ‘Kaspar Makan’. The link between language and food immediately sets the tone for a narrative which is driven and dominated by references to eating and cooking. It is the ‘cooking shed’ in *Almayer’s Folly* that is the focus of political intrigue, plotting and action with rice as the staple of Malay society used as a metaphor for the language and culture of the characters. In the environs of Sambir, rice reflects the familiarity and the routine of daily life.

Food has provided the locus for European anxieties about what it means to be civilized. But the anxiety which became a predominantly nineteenth-century phenomenon was that of cannibalism at sea in which man is not only the eater, but also the eaten. In ‘Falk’ Conrad demonstrates how hunger exposes the fragility of moral and societal codes, those that act as the foundation of ‘civilized’ society. Falk, unhindered by complexities of existence, is driven by the instinctive will to live which outweighs social conscience. If Falk had not been willing to kill another man in order to live, he would have been denying ‘a pure act of will’ (274): his unerring desire to survive. This desire supports the central argument of this book: that the representation of food in his novels – both in the cooking and the eating – is for Conrad an act of will which reveals otherwise concealed but deep rooted beliefs and intentions. The analysis of food goes beyond the metaphorical to become an index of Conrad’s anxieties about the colonial enterprise, the complexity of cross-cultural bonds, and that which was perhaps nearest to his heart: an awareness of the dangers of autocracy. The politicisation of food in *Under Western Eyes* positions bread as symbolic of liberty; the ‘unerring principle’ – the will to survive – that drives Falk to eat another human being is recast as an unerring desire for freedom; the hypocrisy of political idealism is quietly exposed by using food as an analogy for anarchy and capitalism. In *The Secret Agent* the threat of an enemy in the shape of anarchy has inveigled itself into British life and seeks to destroy it from within. That Conrad suggestively places anarchy alongside vegetarianism, and capitalism alongside meat-eating, reveals otherwise concealed concerns about the corrupting influences of twentieth-century politics and how they can be examined and analogised through references to food.

Finally, Conrad wrote in his Preface to *The Nigger of the* ‘*Narcissus*’(1897), ‘All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses … to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*’ (4-6). This book compliments Conrad’s credo, to suggest that food adds a new dimension to the conveyance of meaning in fiction: to make the reader *taste* the world too.

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**NOTES**

1. Mikołaj Bobrowski (1792‒1850) served in Napoleon’s Grand Army from 1808 to 1814. Conrad anglicizes his name in *A Personal Record*. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The volume was initially published in Britain as *Some Reminiscences*, a title that, Keith Carabine argues, is more fitting for this ‘loose, casual, informal selection of anecdotes, stories and reflections based on and arising out of the writer’s past, rather than a chronological record and an overview of life’ (*PR* p.181). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. *Eating as Narrative* has also benefited from the engagement with works such as *Cannibalism and the Colonial World* (1998) in which myths of anthropophagy are explored, notably Jerry Phillips’ chapter on capitalism and cannibalism in Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’ in which, against the backdrop of African ‘restraint’, Kurtz is identified as the most vociferous of cannibals. Similarly, Kristen Guest’s *Eating their Words; Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Identity* (2001) has provided an anthropological context for my study into anthropophagy in literature. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. *Essays*. New York: Charles Scribner’s & Sons, (1914, p. 99). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. *The Nation*, 17 October 1895, published a review of *Almayer’s Folly* expressing the same sentiments as Alice Meynell, (cited in *Joseph Conrad: The Contemporary Reviews: Almayer’s Folly to Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories* edited by Allan H. Simmons A, J. Peters and J. H. Stape. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. [essays.quotidiana.org/Montaigne/cannibals](http://www.Essays.quotidiana.org/Montaigne/cannibals) (accessed on 10th September 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Booth included England, Scotland and Wales in his statistics. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Thomas Robert Malthus published ‘An Essay on the Principle of Population’ in 1798 in which he predicted that the food supply would not be able to keep up with the growing population. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Max Nordau, German philosopher, (1849-1923). In *Degeneration* ‘Mr Nordau discusses the mental and ethical state of the upper classes, or scum of society. Minds overtaxed by the complexity of civilization and the hurry of modern life’ (J.A. in *The Sewanee Review*, 3/4, August 1895). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Conrad’s cargo on the *S. S. Vidar* was mainly resin while the *Highland Forest* contained ‘merchandise’ of chairs, nails, sheet iron as well as 100 cases of cornflour (trove.nla.gov.au). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. The sap of this tree was used in the production of rubber. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Singapore was ceded to the British Government in 1824 by the Sultan of Johore. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Singapore was a free port with no duty being paid on any goods entering it. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. In 1865 Rinderpest or ‘Cattle Plague’ was imported into England. The result was the devastation of the country’s herds (A. Hardy 1993, p.7). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. ‘The pioneers of retailing frozen food in Britain appear to have been John Bell and Sons of London and Glasgow. Already established as multiple retail butchers for some half a century, they opened their first frozen-meat shop in 1879. When they amalgamated with Eastman's in January 1889, Bell's had 330 frozen-meat shops’ (Oddy 2003, p.18). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. In reply to Rae’s suggestions of cannibalism on the Franklin expedition, the novelist Charles Dickens – himself obsessed with the subject of cannibalism – wrote an article in the publication *Household Words* suggesting that it was in fact the Inuit who had killed and eaten some of Franklin’s men. He said that it was ‘gigantically improbable’ that Englishmen and Christians would have ‘turned cannibal. Only savages did that’ (Charles Dickens, ‘The Lost Arctic Voyage’ in *Household Words* Volume X,2 & 9 December 1884, pp. 362-65 & 387-93). <http://www.djo.org.uk/household-words/volume-x/> [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. 15 October 1878 ‘Duke of Sutherland’ departs Port of London. 31 January 1879 arrives in Sydney. (Simmons 2010, p.107). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. For a full account of the numerous incidents of shipwrecks during the nineteenth century see, (Simpson 1986, chapter 5). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Conrad based this story on his experiences in Mauritius – which is in the Indian Ocean. This was a British colony, but had been a French one up to 1810, and the planters were mostly French. Slavery there was abolished in 1835. Thereafter, work on the plantations was mostly done by indentured labourers from India. On the return voyage to Australia, the *Otago*’s principal cargo was indeed sugar – Najder suggests that the potatoes were a side investment on the part of Conrad as Captain. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Pilcher notes that between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, 10 million Africans were uprooted in the trans-Atlantic trade (17). [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Rich man and chief of the tribe (Wallace 2011, p.56). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. bp.chadwyck.co.uk/articles/results. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Marlow remarks earlier in the text, ‘I came upon a boiler wallowing in the grass, then found a path leading up the hill. It turned aside for the boulders and also for an undersized railway truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air’ (1991, p.15). [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. In 1886 Professor T. H. Huxley wrote an article entitled, ‘The Proposed Fisheries Board of Great Britain’ in which he called for the nationalisation of the fisheries of Great Britain in order to protect the fish around the UK from foreign fishers and ensure that particular breeds were preserved (*Science*, 7/167 (April 16, 1886): 344-346. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. A related issue: on 21 October 1904, the Russian navy opened fire on the Hull fishing-fleet on the Dogger Bank: Conrad’s long letter to *The Times* about this incident is in *CL*3 173-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. See <https://archive.org/details/ethicsofdietcate00will> for full on-line text version. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. [www.victorianlondon.org](http://www.victorianlondon.org). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Conrad indicates that it was de Plehve who Haldin assassinates (*CL*4 9). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. ‘The Assassination of de Plehve’ in *Social Democrat*, Vol VIII, No. 8. August 1904. Transcribed by Ted Crawford. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Minister of the Interior, M. De Plehve was the man responsible for ‘instigating a “small victorious war” against the Japanese’ (Avrich 2007, p.17). [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Part of an interview conducted on Russian villagers by Soviet researchers in the 1950s. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. For a full account of the Anarchist Movement in Russia see, Avrich (2007). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. (<http://www.ricewisdom.org/recipe-malay-wrapped-rice-cakes.html> accessed 10 September 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. In contemporary thought, coldness is associated with death and the corruption of the body. However, in pre-modern medicine heat was also associated with corruption: ‘To go corrupt by this latter hot process was to turn “adust” and thus abhorrent’ (Appelbaum 2006, p.25). [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Trepang are invertebrates known as holothurians and more commonly called sea cucumbers. From the seventeenth century Makassar in Indonesia was the centre of the Trepang industry (<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0011346> accessed 10 September 2016). Birds’ nests are a culinary delicacy. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. The Balinese caste system would have made the sharing of food a problem for Dain as he would not have been able to eat food prepared by anyone outside the kitchen of his caste. In addition to this, as a Hindu, he would have adhered to strict rules of cleanliness before and after eating (Leong-Salobir 2011, pp.131-132). [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. In a letter to Joseph Conrad dated 1st November 1906 and commenting on *The Mirror of the Sea*, Henry James wrote, ‘To taste you as I do taste you is *really* thus to wander far away’ (Stape & Knowles 1996). [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. In the Dent edition of *Almayer’s Folly* Mahmet is referred to by Babalatchi as ‘thou eater of pigs flesh’ (98). In the Cambridge University Press edition, the punctuation differs: ‘thou eater of pig’s flesh’ (1994, p.75). [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. In *A Personal Record* (1912), Conrad writes of the ‘real’ Almayer who informed him that he owned, ‘The only geese on the East Coast’. Conrad continues, ‘He conferred a goose as if it were a sort of Court decoration given only to the tried friends of the house ... He did not make half enough of it. That man did not understand his opportunities’ (2008, p.82). Conrad’s record of the real Almayer’s inability to exploit the full potential of his opportunities, reflects that of the fictional Almayer who cooks his own goose through his myopic obsession with being rich and respected in the West. Interestingly, Conrad also uses the term ‘cooking the national goose’ in a letter to Spiridon in which he writes: ‘The newly enfranchised idiots have satisfied the yearnings of Mr Chamberlain’s herd by cooking the national goose according to his recipe. The next culinary operation will be a pretty kettle of fish of an international character’ (Najder 2007, p.105). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. There was a wave of Chinese immigration into Malaysia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most came as low paid labourers, ([www.huaren.org](http://www.huaren.org) accessed 10 September 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Avramescu 2003, p.73. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Anthony Vidler *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*. New York: MIT Press, 1992, p. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. The other story was ‘The Return’ published in 1898 in *Tales of Unrest*. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Headline in *Dundee Courier & Argus and Northern Warder*, 25 December 1883. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. This headline first appeared in *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette* 9 September 1884. The same headline was subsequently used during that year by *The Birmingham Daily Post* 10 September; *Daily News* 12 September; *Berrow’s Worcester Journal* 16 September; *The Essex Standard*, *West Suffolk Gazette, and Easter Counties’ Advertiser* 20 September; *The Illustrated Police News etc* 20 September; *The Penny Illustrated Paper & Illustrated Times* 20 September; *The Bristol Mercury & Daily Post* 26 September; *Western Mail* 26 December; *The Ipswich Journal* 27 December; *Reynolds Newspaper* 28 December. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. *The Nature of a Crime* (1924) a fictional collaboration between Conrad and Ford Madox Heuffer (Ford Madox Ford). [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. ‘Arctic Meeting at Chickering Hall, November 21st, 1884. Reception of Lieut. A W Greely, U.S. Army’. Published in *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York*, 16 (1884). [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. This could also be an attempt at humour by Conrad insinuating ‘toughest’ in culinary terms. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Buck joined the Lady Franklin Bay Expedition as Private Charles Henry covering up a previous dishonourable discharge and prison sentence for killing a Chinaman. It is not known whether any of the other members of the expedition knew this. If it had been known, it would have made him the most dangerous of the party (Guttridge 2006, p.252). [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Claude Lévi-Strauss defined the aim of his book, *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969) as ‘to show how empirical categories – such as the categories of the raw and the cooked, the fresh and decayed, the moistened and burned, etc., ... can nonetheless be used as conceptual tools with which to elaborate abstract ideas and combine them in the form of propositions’ (1983, p.1). [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Upton Sinclair included in his novel factual descriptions of meat handling malpractices in Chicago slaughterhouses. One reads as follows: ‘Whenever meat was so spoiled that it could not be used for anything else, they, [the packers] either canned it or else chopped it into sausage ... There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was moldy and white – it would be dosed with borox and glycerine, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption. There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had trampled and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky rooms would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poison bread out for them; they would die and then rats, bread and meat would go into the hopper together’ (1988, p.131). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Henry S. Salt was also the author of *The Logic of Vegetarianism,* 1899. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Although Gillray satirises upper class vampirism, some of his caricatures seem to call out for pity for those who can’t afford meat. He’s also fond of comparing French poverty with English plenty. One of his most famous prints, *French Liberty and English Slavery* shows an impoverished Frenchman gnawing on vegetables and an Englishman gorging on beef. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. See ‘The general introduction’ to *On Food* by George Nicholson, in *The Literary Miscellany: or, Selections and Extracts, Classical and Scientific, in Prose and Verse*. (1803). [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Thomas Trotter was also interested in diseases of seamen, having served as a surgeon’s mate in the Navy see Barry and Melling (1992, p.182). [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. For a more detailed account of veal production, read Swabe (1999), who cites C. David’s account of veal production during the nineteenth century: ‘Veal producers in Netherlands fattened calves on sweet milk in pens so small that the animals could barely move. They ... reached an average weight of 30 to 40 kilos at slaughter’ (123). [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Shelley is also referring to the castration of the animals. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. For a detailed record of Davitt’s imprisonment, see Sheehy-Skeffington (1908). [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Orr and Billy suggest that Michaelis is based on a number of ‘real-life counterparts’ including Michael Davitt (1999, p.175). [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. A sentiment that echoes Thomas Medwin’s account of Shelley’s own aspirations to be a doctor and his intention of ‘alleviating the sufferings of humanity’ (Morton 1994, p.59). [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. G. Newman records the findings of Dr Newsholme’s ‘Annual Report for Brighton’ of 1904: ‘The deaths of suckled children were about one-ninth of what ought to have occurred on the supposition of average distribution of diarrhoea ... and the deaths of those having condensed milk were about seventeen times the number that ought to have occurred on the supposition of average distribution of diarrhoea among infants fed in different ways’ (6). For more discussion about the pros and cons of condensed milk, see D. J. Oddy (2003). [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. In 1907, the Conrads spent three months in Geneva, between mid-May and mid-August, and, according to Keith Carabine, it was during this visit that Conrad had the first idea for what would later become ‘Razumov’. In a letter of 19 May 1907 to J. B. Pinker, his literary agent, Conrad wrote of his intention to address the topics of ‘war, peace, labour in general’ in a novel ‘with a sufficiently interesting story’ (*CL*3 440). [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. This is one of only two instances where Conrad uses a phrase from his a novel to stand as its epigraph, the other being ‘Worthy of my undying regard’ in *The Shadow-Line* (1917). [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. ‘The [Russian Peasant] treated a loaf reverentially, standing it upright on the table and breaking it instead of cutting it” (Matossian 1968, p.12). [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. Thanks to Keith Carabine for this phrase. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Soloviev claims that the word ‘Holy’ is etymologically linked to the word ‘bright’ (Cherniavsky 1961, p.618) which would fit in with Haldin’s appropriation of Orthodox tropes and substantiate his claim that Ziemianitch has been enlightened by Haldin’s having been ‘a good deal in that house of late. I used to take there books – leaflets’ (56) [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Rousseau considered milk ‘the simplest and most natural of foods’ (Onfray 2015, p.32). [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. See the Gospel of Mark 1:6 ‘And he did eat locusts and wild honey.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. *The Cambridge Edition of the Complete Works of Joseph Conrad: Under Western Eyes*, edited by Roger Osborne and Paul Eggert. Cambridge: CUP, 2013, p. 632, Deletion 4: MS 579.8-618.13. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. The placing of the hat over the chocolates could also be interpreted as a protective act, bringing to mind the dictate in *The Secret Agent*: ‘Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury’ (*SA* 12). [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Baba-Iaga was a witch-like figure in Russian folklore. See Worobec (1995, p.165). [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Tekla’s job to feed the cat echoes the decree of Empress Elizaveta in 1745 that cats should be housed at the Hermitage and ‘accompanied by a person who looks after their health’ (<http://rense.com/general48/cats.htm> accessed 10 September 2016). The cat therefore, adds to the charge by the teacher of languages that the occupants of the Château are more aristocratic than revolutionary. Furthermore, during the Siege of Leningrad (1941-1944), the cats at the Hermitage were eaten by starving Russians (<http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/siege_of_leningrad.htm> accessed 10 September 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. In 1904, the Ministry of Finance received a revenue of 5000,000 rubles from liquor sales. Many rural villages, fired up by grass-roots campaigns, appealed to the government to have their local state-run liquor shops closed down. Hypocritically, many such requests were denied (Herlihy 2002, p.53). [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Mike Dixon-Kennedy in *Encyclopedia of Russian and Slavic Myth & Legend* claims there are three aspects to Baba Yaga: 1. Fertility goddess/benevolent bringing new life. 2. Benevolent and Malevolent. 3. Determines the date of human death, the role of which she is most commonly associated. She also controls all riches of the earth. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Madame de S’s fury at the eggs not having been ‘rightly prepared’ may have been down to her fear of ‘chicken plague’ – better known now as ‘Avian flu’ – which was prevalent in Eastern Europe during the years 1905-1909 (Swayne 2009). [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. For a feminist consideration of the tea party in the Château Borel see Sue Jones’s essay, ‘“The dinner was indeed quiet”: Domestic Parties in the Work of Joseph Conrad’ in Kate McCloughlin’s *The Modernist Party*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press,2013. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)