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Jam Puffs and White Bread: Habits of Eating and Othering in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and Joseph Conrad's 'Amy Foster'.

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## Kim Salmons

### Jam Puffs and White Bread: Habits of Eating and Othering in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* and Joseph Conrad's "Amy Foster".

George Eliot and Joseph Conrad do not often find themselves discussed on the same page. The first is a writer of rural realism and the other a Polish born aristocrat turned sailor turned English author of transnational and political fiction who early in his career declared himself 'modern'<sup>1</sup>. When Eliot died in 1880, Józef Teodor Konrad Nalecz Korzeniowski was 22 years old and in the process of enlisting as an ordinary seaman on the steamship *Europa* which was travelling from London for the Mediterranean via Cornwall off the south west coast of England.

In 1902, twenty-two years later, and seven years after the publication of his first novel, *Almayer's Folly* (1895), the 44-year-old author of English fiction, now known as Joseph Conrad, wrote to his publisher Blackwood declaring,

I am long in my development. What of that? Is not Thackeray's penny worth of mediocre fact drowned in an ocean of twaddle? And yet he lives. And Sir Walter, himself, was not the writer of concise anecdotes I fancy. And G. Elliot [sic] – is she as swift as the present public (incapable of fixing its attention for five consecutive minutes) requires us to be at the cost of all honesty, of all truth, and even the most elementary conception of art? But these are great names. I don't compare myself with them. I am *modern*<sup>2</sup>.

Conrad's tribute to Eliot in his letter to Blackwood (not forgetting that Blackwood was also Eliot's publisher two generations before) articulates the "artistic credo" – as Conrad would put it – that primarily unites these authors. Eliot's determination to adhere to honesty, truth and art, in favour of churning out novel after novel to satisfy the reading public's appetite would have appealed to Conrad's own belief that the fidelity to truth through the artistic rendering of the pen was the job of the author. This endeavour is inscribed in Eliot's first novel, *Adam Bede* (1859) in which the narrator promises: "a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind ... I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath"<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*, London, Faber & Faber, 1979, p. 468.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick R. Karl & Laurence Davies, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Volume 2*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 418.

<sup>3</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, London, Penguin Classics, 1985, p. 177.

In setting out his ‘task’ in the ‘Preface’ to his 1897 novella, *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*, Conrad echoes Eliot’s own credo of ‘faithful and accurate observation’:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you *see*. That – and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm – all you demand – and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask<sup>4</sup>.

This fidelity to the truth is not the only common ground between these two writers. As I want to show, their philosophies not only mirror each other, but serve as an example of Eliot’s own sociologically scientific view of the universe. As she writes: “The external conditions which society has inherited from the past are but manifestations of inherited internal conditions in the human beings who compose it; the internal conditions and the external are related to each other as the organism and its medium”<sup>5</sup>. By taking the “organism” to mean the individual and the “medium” to be environmental factors (culture or society for example), I want to investigate two incidents involving the giving and eating of food as the embodiment of traditions, culture, taste, environmental factors and alienation: the first is in Eliot’s novel *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) in which food reveals the internal conditions of the characters, and the second in Conrad’s short story “Amy Foster” (1901) in which food (the medium) represents the external conditions that determine the future of the individual (the organism). Before doing this, however, I want to explore further how Eliot and Conrad find common ground not only in their personal lives, but also in their philosophical and scientific outlook.

Both writers suffered from chronic illness and bouts of depression and both found themselves ‘othered’; Eliot by the rejection of Christianity that alienated her from her father, and then by her long-term unmarried relationship with George Henry Lewes that caused a long standing and painful rift between herself and her brother, Jacob. Frederick Karl claims that Eliot and Conrad’s family backgrounds were not so different: “Conrad’s tradition, then, was heavily landed in one sense like George Eliot’s background, although hers was of course more stable and free from political radicalism”<sup>6</sup>.

Like Eliot, Conrad changed his name; but where the former’s transformation from Marian Evans to George Eliot was to seek entry into a male-dominated publishing world, Conrad’s was to forge himself a British, rather than Polish identity. Born in Berdychiv in Ukraine which was at the time part of the Russian Empire, Conrad left his homeland to join

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Preface’ to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*, London, Dent, 1946, p. x.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Pinney (ed.), *Essays of George Eliot*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963, p. 287.

<sup>6</sup> F. R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*, cit., p. 33.

the French Merchant Navy and later the British Merchant Navy, passing his exams as a Master Mariner in 1886. In 1890, while still a sailor, Conrad began to write his first novel *Almayer's Folly*. The work was extraordinary not only because the perspective of the East was privileged over that of the West, but because Conrad chose to write in English, probably his fifth language. Despite the indifference of the reading public, the novel received critical literary acclaim and heralded the beginning of Conrad's career as an English country gentleman and author. However, some of Conrad's Polish compatriots considered him a betrayer of both his native tongue and his country. In an 1899 article entitled "The Emigration of Talent", Eliza Orzeszkowa condemned Conrad accusing him of writing "popular and very lucrative novels in English"<sup>7</sup>, ironic considering Conrad had no financial success until his 1913 novel *Chance*. Simultaneously, he was never completely accepted by the literati of London, having the patronising title of "our guest" conferred on him by Virginia Woolf after his death.

Most significant to this essay, however, is the common interest that Eliot and Conrad had in scientific materialism. In 1853 Eliot translated Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christenthums*, declaring in a letter to Sara Hennell, "With the ideas of Feuerbach I everywhere agree"<sup>8</sup>. In "Amy Foster," Conrad refers to the German philosopher Jakob Moleschott (1822 to 1893) whose maxim, "Ohne Phosphor Kein Gedanke" (without phosphorus, no thought) appears in his *Lehre de Nahrungsmittel*, II, I, 4 (roughly translated as "Theory of Nutrition"), a review of Feuerbach's work on the effects of nutrients on the thought processes. This interest in scientific materialism links the authors' philosophies on the mind/matter question: Conrad would go on to quote the eighteenth-century French Physiologist, George Cabanis (of whom Eliot would have been well acquainted through Lewes's work) in his 1911 political novel *Under Western Eyes*: "Man is a digestive tube" he writes, "but 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"<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, Eliot's interest in phrenology considered the "brain as the organ of the mind"<sup>10</sup> a view that in the early 1800s undermined the fundamental belief in a soul. As such, both Eliot and Conrad would concur that the brain is made purely of matter, and matter is made from nutrients we ingest through food upholding Feuerbach's invective: "You are what you eat" and thus rejecting the spiritual in favour of the material.

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<sup>7</sup> Zdzislaw Najder, *Joseph Conrad A Life*, Rochester & New York: Camden House, 2007, p. 294.

<sup>8</sup> F. R. Karl & L. Davies, *The Collected Letters*, vol. 2, cit., p. 153.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, London, Penguin Classics, 2007, p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> Diana Postlethwaite, "George Eliot and Science", in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (ed. George Levine), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 104.

But what of their philosophy of writing? It is easy for critics to categorise Eliot within the genre of realism and Conrad within the realm of modernism. But, as Diana Postlethwaite has pointed out, the stream of consciousness elements of Eliot's novels anticipate the techniques of the late modernists, while Karl praises Conrad's "reality which is so much the source of his imaginative ventures." Conrad's realism desired a "hard reality" as well as "a blurred sense of inner and outer" and it was this "blurring of effects within a solid form [which] was close to his idea of impressionism"<sup>11</sup>. Conrad's "Preface" to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* firmly establishes his debt to realism while concurrently anticipating his experiments with "forms" and "matter":

And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential – their one illuminating and convincing quality – the very truth of their existence<sup>12</sup>.

What is striking in Conrad's "Preface" – which significantly was written in 1897, only two years after the publication of his first novel – is the reference to the "visible universe" which by studying its "forms" will reveal the "aspects of matter". In other words, by scrutinising what is visible it is possible to discover that which is not: the truth. In between the visible is that which we know is there but cannot see. Eliot makes a similar point in her novel *The Mill on the Floss* in which she considers the relations that bind objects and connect them together:

Does not science tell us that its highest striving is after the ascertainment of a unity which shall bind the smallest things with the greatest? In natural science, I have understood, there is nothing petty to the mind that has a large vision of relations, and to which every single object suggests a vast sum of conditions. It is surely the same with the observation of human life<sup>13</sup>.

This "unity" between the "smallest things" and the "greatest things" is similarly articulated by Conrad in which he writes, again, in his "Preface":

[The artist] speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation – and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity

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<sup>11</sup> F. R. Karl, *op. cit.*, p. 468.

<sup>12</sup> J. Conrad, 'Preface', *cit.*, p. vii.

<sup>13</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, Oxford, Oxford World's Classics, 2015, p. 173.

in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living and the living to the unborn<sup>14</sup>.

Both writers call upon the unity of humanity to provide meaning in a universe that apparently has none. The “binding together” suggests the link that is found not in religious belief or an after-life but in human experience. What sets Conrad apart from Eliot is the acknowledgement that despite the commonality of human aspirations, man is destined – as Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) declares – to “live as we dream – alone”, but at the same time, what brings man together is this shared experience of isolation and otherness. Eliot articulates this through “external conditions ... inherited from the past”<sup>15</sup>. Conrad too asserts that humanity is bound together through the past and present in a letter to his friend Cunningham Graham on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1897 in which he compares the universe to a gigantic and monstrous knitting machine:

There is a – let us say - a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold! – it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled ... And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself; made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident – and it has happened. You can’t interfere with it. The last drop of bitterness is in the suspicion that you can’t even smash it. In virtue of that truth one and immortal which lurks in the force that made it spring into existence it is what it is – and it is indestructible!

It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions – and nothing matters<sup>16</sup>.

At the Joseph Conrad International Conference in July 2019, Douglas Kerr presented an enlightening paper on the use of the knitting machine metaphor in Conrad’s letter emphasising the move away from religious belief and the view instead of the universe as “a relentless mechanism, not the admirable clockwork that had been adduced in *Argument from Design*”. Kerr goes on to state that Conrad’s allusion to the knitting machine secures the universe “as a bleak set of material processes indifferent to the desires or fates of individuals<sup>17</sup>”. It is interesting to note at this point that the act of knitting occurs repeatedly throughout *The Mill on the Floss*, denoting the hobby as more of a habit – a continuous process that knits together the sequence of events that lead to the final tragic outcome of the novel. More specifically, the metaphor of knitting is used to reveal Maggie’s moment of anagnorisis – the

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<sup>14</sup> J. Conrad, ‘Preface’, cit., p. viii.

<sup>15</sup> T. Pinney, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

<sup>16</sup> F. R. Karl & L. Davies, *The Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 1983, p. 424.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas Kerr, ‘Joseph Conrad and the Knitting Machine’ paper presented at the Joseph Conrad 46th International Conference, London 2019 .

recognition that Stephen is in love with her: “Of course it was palpable to Maggie’s thinking, that he had dined hastily in his own room for the sake of setting off again and finding her alone ... At this moment Maggie’s ball of knitting-wool rolled along the ground, and she started up to reach it”<sup>18</sup>. Without wishing to stretch the metaphor too far, the unravelling of Maggie’s life begins at this point while the social traditions and habits that bind Maggie to those around her are loosened.

The knitting machine metaphor reflects Eliot’s own questioning – and later abandonment – of religion and her growing interest in the natural and social sciences. Eliot’s concept of the “organism” and the “medium” suggests a teleological basis to life in which the fate of an individual is determined by a combination of inherent conditions and external forces (in other words the nature/nurture debate) which was, in its modern sense, coined by Francis Galton, the cousin of Charles Darwin.

There are numerous contexts through to explore this rationale. However, the study of food affords an opportunity to concentrate on two incidents that occur in Eliot and Conrad’s fiction. The first is the dividing of the jam puff by Tom with his sister Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* and the second is the giving of the white bread to Yanko by Amy in Conrad’s “Amy Foster”. Both Yanko and Maggie are tragic figures and both are “othered” or excluded from society through the choices they make in their lives. Interestingly, both make choices that have their provenance in food. By exploring these two scenes I want to show that food can be used as the medium between the individual and their future in that it is representative of habit (or custom), culture and the environmental factors that dictate outcomes. In *The Mill*, the Dodson family have very “peculiar tradition[s]” not least around the “right thing in household management and social demeanour”. The “superiority” of which renders the sisters unable to “approve the condiments or the conduct of families ungoverned by the Dodson tradition”<sup>19</sup>. That “household management” precedes “social demeanour” and “condiments” precede “conduct” emphasises the importance of traditions that are embedded in food practices, placing the edible as the driver of the social. However, by placing them side by side their interdependence reveals the role of food in the social order and dictates the actions of individuals which directly affects their fate. As the narrator is keen to point out, when a “female Dodson” is in a “strange house[s]” she will always eat “dry bread with her tea, and decline[d] any sort of preserves having no confidence in the butter, and thinking that the preserves had

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<sup>18</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, cit., p. 376.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

probably begun to ferment from want of due sugar and boiling”<sup>20</sup>. This precautionary measure – presented as an inherent family trait – prevents the possible unwanted consequences of food poisoning and reveals an ability to consider future consequences in present actions. This caution is less evident in the impetuous Maggie who throughout the novel consistently disregards the consequences of her actions. As such she is deemed more a Tulliver than a Dodson, a point Eliot makes at the beginning of the novel when Maggie runs away to the gypsy camp. Hungry for her tea, she asks the gypsies not only for butter on her bread, but also for treacle. Tom, on the other hand is deemed most thoroughly a Dodson, not just for his “features and complexion” but by his liking for “salt and in eating beans, which a Tulliver never did”<sup>21</sup>. Here then, are the internal conditions of Eliot’s characters represented through the medium of food in which Maggie’s lack of forethought and Tom’s more strategic view of life is manifest.

Eliot’s use of food in the novel is most apparent during the developmental years of Maggie and Tom. As children the external forces that mould them into adults and shape their destinies reveals itself through the delights of puddings and cakes. On the day before the aunts and uncles arrive the kitchen is busy with “various and suggestive scents, as of plumcakes in the oven and jellies in the hot state” and in the excitement Tom and Maggie join forces making “several inroads into the kitchen” to “carry away a sufficient load of booty”. The playful rhetoric of criminality questions the moral absolutism of Tom that has thus far been evident in his portrayal in the novel. Sitting in the “elder-tree” he and Maggie eat their jam puffs. Unfortunately, however, they have only managed to secure three, the third one “to be divided between them”<sup>22</sup>. Before finishing his puff, Tom is looking ahead at the third – such is his tendency to strategize – and considering it in a “dubitative manner”, concerned by the problem of cutting an “irregular polygon into two equal parts.” The polygon represents a problem which is not clear cut and Tom’s sense of fairness impels him to offer Maggie first choice with her eyes shut. Maggie’s attempt to peep at the puffs is not to choose the biggest slice for herself but to ensure that Tom has it. Her attempts to please him are frustrated by his determination to do what he believes is morally right, regardless of his or Maggie’s preference or willingness to sacrifice her own desires. She is caught in a situation in which she cannot win. If she cheats and looks she undermines Tom’s sense of moral superiority; but by taking the largest piece she leaves him “bitter” at the relish in which she eats her slice with “a vague sense of jam and

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>22</sup> *Idem.*, p. 42



idleness”<sup>23</sup>. Maggie’s position is one in which she must second guess Tom’s desires. Having played along with the self-righteousness of Tom’s position and closed her eyes she picks the best piece and Tom duly condemns her as “greedy”. Maggie is left with a “keen sense of unmerited reproach” and a desire to have “gone without it many times over, sooner than Tom should call her greedy and be cross with her”<sup>24</sup>.

This moment in the text which spans just over a page of narrative represents the fate of Maggie as the “organism” or the individual and the food as the “external condition” (or societal code of conduct) that renders Maggie powerless: whatever she does she will be doing wrong. The incident with the jam puff anticipates her predicament on the river with Stephen Guest in the chapter entitled “The Great Temptation” in which again she finds herself in a “dim dreamy state” as if hypnotised by her desires – first as a child for the taste of the jam puff, and then the sexual attraction she feels towards Stephen.

The tragedy of *The Mill on the Floss* lies in the entrapment of Maggie Tulliver as she is caught between personal desire and social duty, with food as the medium through which this intractable dilemma is manifested. Recognising her own natural desire for aesthetic pleasure, Maggie later attempts to go against her nature and lead an ascetic lifestyle. But recognising the impossibility of attempting to thwart nature, Phillip says to her: “No one has strength given to do what is unnatural ... you will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite”<sup>25</sup>. In other words, despite her attempt to change her habits, the inherited aspects of her nature will win out regardless, an argument that suggests her future is predetermined by the characteristics which she has inherited and which dictate the decisions she makes. At such a moment, Conrad’s knitting machine metaphor comes sharply into focus.

For the final part of this paper I want to move on to the medium of food in Conrad’s fiction. In a letter to his aunt, Madam Poradowska, on 16th October 1891, the author writes,

I have absolutely nothing to say to you. I am vegetating. I do not even think – therefore I do not exist (according to Descartes). But another individual (a scientist) has said: “without phosphorus, no thought”. From which it seems I am still there, but the phosphorus is missing. Yet in that case I would exist without thinking, which (according to Descartes) is impossible<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>24</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>26</sup> F. R. Karl & L. Davies, *The Collected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 98.

Ten years later in his short story “Amy Foster”, Conrad once again refers to phosphorus, this time in the context of the name-sake of his tale:

There are faces that call your attention by a curious want of definiteness in their whole aspect, as, walking in a mist, you peer attentively at a vague shape which, after all, may be nothing more curious or strange than a signpost. The only peculiarity I perceived in her was a sort of preliminary stammer which passes away with the first word. When sharply spoken to, she was apt to lose her head at once; but her heart was of the kindest ... Her short-sighted eyes would swim with pity for a poor mouse in a trap, and she had been seen once by some boys on her knees in the wet grass helping a toad in difficulties. If it's true, as some German fellow has said, that without phosphorus there is no thought, it is still more true that there is no kindness of heart without a certain amount of imagination<sup>27</sup>.

The German fellow to whom the narrator refers is Jakob Moleschott, the reviewer of Feuerbach's work. Feuerbach's philosophy of scientific materialism can be – for the purposes of this paper – distilled into his claim “I do not generate the object from the thought, but the thought from the object ... I attach myself only to *realism*, to materialism” (“Preface” to the second edition of *The Essence of Christianity*)<sup>28</sup>. In other words, thoughts, feelings and behaviours are shaped by external forces such as environmental or social and cultural factors such as the way that food is prepared and eaten.

Conrad's short story is framed by an unknown narrator who retells the story of Yanko Goorall which in turn is told by a Dr Kennedy. Yanko Goorall comes from the Eastern Carpathians and buys his way on to a migrant ship travelling via Hamburg and England to America. On the coast of Kent the ship is wrecked and Yanko is the only survivor. Staggering into the local community, bedraggled, muddy and speaking a language which sounds like “gibberish”, the villagers assume he is a mad man and lock him in a local farmer's wood shed. Hungry, cold and alone Yanko wins the attention of a local girl called Amy Foster who, in his pitiable dirty state, brings him a loaf of white bread to eat. Yanko later tells the narrator, Doctor Kennedy that it was “such bread as only the rich in my country eat”<sup>29</sup>. What I want to argue here is that the bread in this story represents the culture or medium through which Yanko is othered, and that the act of giving the bread by Amy has fatal consequences for Yanko. In the story he goes on to marry Amy, have a child and die in a fever calling out in his own language for “water”, a plea that scares his wife into abandoning him to die alone.

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Conrad, *Selected Short Stories*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth's Classics, 1997, pp. 97-98.

<sup>28</sup><https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/feuerbach/works/essence/ec00.htm> (accessed 22nd December 2019).

<sup>29</sup> J. Conrad, *Selected Short Stories*, cit., p. 107.

As Tania Zulli has explained in *Joseph Conrad: Language and Transnationalism*, “Conrad’s intention” for the story “Amy Foster” was to “represent the multiple perspectives emerging from the interaction of people from different countries, its consequent cultural conflict, as well as the pain and isolation experienced by a single man – the protagonist Yanko Goorall – who must adapt to an unknown and hostile world”<sup>30</sup>. Yanko’s adaption is initiated by his acceptance of the social environment he has been thrown into. This is represented through the medium of the white bread that Amy gives him. But the bread also represents Amy herself, as the embodiment of a different and strange culture that will eventually destroy him. The passage in the story reads as follows:

The girl had not been able to sleep for thinking of the poor man, and in the morning, before the Smiths were up, she slipped out across the back yard. Holding the door of the wood-lodge ajar, she looked in and extended to him half a loaf of white bread – “such bread as the rich eat in my country,” he used to say. At this he got up slowly from amongst all sorts of rubbish, stiff, hungry, trembling, miserable and doubtful. “Can you eat this?” she asked in her soft and timid voice<sup>31</sup>.

Amy’s question, “Can you eat this?” suggests that Yanko is so far removed from the culture of this Kent village that a staple such as bread would be inedible to him. Ironically, the bread that Amy offers would not be of the quality that only the rich in Yanko’s country eats. It would have been white through adulteration and the removal of key nutrients. The answer that Yanko should have given is “No”.

Yanko’s acceptance of the bread leads to his ultimate death, through a cultural clash. Digestion, like the furrows of the brain which have developed over time by external conditions, is developed through habits, traditions and locally available food. His ingestion of the bread – and his marriage to Amy – not only goes against his inherent nature and culture, but has a physically detrimental effect on him. Where once he was “agile” and “lithe” he becomes “less springy of step, heavier in body, less keen of eye”<sup>32</sup>.

Like Maggie, Yanko attempts to go against his nature and fit himself into a culture that is alien to him. Phillip’s warning to Maggie that “every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite” is played out in Yanko’s feverish last moments as he appeals – in his own language – to his wife for water. And in that lies my final connection, the moment that binds these two characters and these two authors together: Yanko

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<sup>30</sup> Tania Zulli, *Joseph Conrad. Language and Transnationalism*, Chieti, Solfanelli, 2019, p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> J. Conrad, *Selected Short Stories*, cit., p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

avoids death by drowning, only to die instead of thirst; while Maggie carried along on currents stronger than human will, succumbs to her own watery demise.

To conclude, Eliot and Conrad are knit together through philosophies, scientific endeavours and an imagination that as Frederick Karl claimed of Conrad “was developing in certain areas, while it remained stagnant and trapped by the past in others, not at all unusual in a novelist whose fictions depend on what has already occurred, rather than on freshly conceived materials”<sup>33</sup>, a declaration that mirrors the argument of this paper: that our future is determined by our past actions, and our past actions are determined by our nature. In turn that nature is determined by material factors such as food. Meanwhile Eliot’s characters are “compelled” by imagination “to engage the world, to read, to judge, to act, and the same imagination is inseparable from the compulsions that cause their characters to misread, to misjudge, to err”<sup>34</sup>. The human condition renders us all as “other” whether we come from, but that which brings us together lies firmly in the unified love of jam puffs and white bread.

### **Bio-note**

Dr Kim Salmons is a Senior Lecturer and an Associate Dean at St Mary’s University, London where she teaches in the Humanities Department and leads on Research and Enterprise. She is the author of two books: *Food in the Novels of Thomas Hardy: Production and Consumption* and *Food in the Novels of Joseph Conrad: Eating as Narrative* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Dr Salmons is co-editor with Professor Tania Zulli of Chieti University on a volume of collected essays on Joseph Conrad: *Migration, Modernity and Transnationalism* to be published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2021.

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<sup>33</sup> F. R. Karl, *op. cit.*, p. 468.

<sup>34</sup> Forest Pyle, “A Novel Sympathy: The Imagination of Community in George Eliot”, in *A Forum on Fiction*, 27, 1 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 5-23, p. 8.