

## The Bitter Taste of Meat Extract and Labels in 'An Anarchist'

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【要旨】 Donovan によれば、「無政府主義者」(1905)における肉エキス B.O.S.の描写は実在の肉エキス製造会社 Bovril を想起させるもので、コンラッドは大量生産された肉エキスを誇大広告で売りさばく現代的商法に懐疑的だった。彼の懐疑は、同じく世紀転換期の英国で人気を博した特許医薬品にも向けられており、それを本作の解釈に援用することは可能だろう。本稿では、まず妻ジェシーの料理本に寄せた彼の序文と、それに関する Tanner の論考に基づき、食が人間性を形成すると考えていた彼の、特許医薬品への批判的態度を確認する。次に「無政府主義者」においてポールを「騙されやすさ」の犠牲者として描く語り手の動機を、作者の特許医薬品論に照らしつつ論じる。

'An Anarchist' (1905) is the story of an escaped convict named Paul who finds shelter in a South American cattle estate and who is described by the manager as 'un citoyen anarchiste de Barcelone'. The cattle estate is owned by the B.O.S. Co., Ltd., a meat-extract manufacturing company well known for its powerful and telling advertisements.

In discussing this short story, which is not a central concern to studies of Conrad, it will be of help to look at how Conrad treats, and with what his contemporary readers associated, the meat-extract business that exploits Paul. Stephen Donovan points out that Conrad directed contemporary readers to recognize the real-life meat extract manufacturer Bovril, and that he was sceptical of manufactured patent foods, as well as the modern business system involving advertisements.

Conrad's scepticism about contemporary patent foods, including meat extracts, can also be associated with that of patent medicine, which still

maintained popularity at the turn of the 20th century. An examination of Conrad's scepticism toward patent medicine can supplement Donovan's discussion on how patent food is treated in 'An Anarchist'. Both patent medicine and meat extracts involved labelling, with connotations being created through advertising. In the story, a man called Paul is also labelled, in this case as an anarchist, and the distorting effect has a profound influence on his life.

The aim of this paper is two-fold. In the first part, to find clues to the way meat extract is implicated in 'An Anarchist', Conrad's preface to his wife's cookbook, *A Handbook of Cookery for a Small House* (1923), and Tony Tanner's discussion on the writing are examined. In the second part, in light of how Conrad's sceptical views of contemporary patent foods could be associated with those of patent medicine, an analysis of 'An Anarchist' is attempted with a special focus on the ultimate shallowness of the narrator, who in the last instance, also labels Paul as an anarchist. This is reflected in the narrator's consumption of meat extracts despite his scepticism of the advertising.

### **1. 'Good cooking is a moral agent': Morality and Advertisements for Patent Medicine and Meat Extract**

In the preface to his wife Jessie's *A Handbook of Cookery for a Small House*, Conrad says that '[g]ood cooking is a moral agent' and that 'the conscientious preparation of the simple food of every-day life' (146) makes good cooking. The preface was written in 1923, when Conrad's fame as a novelist had been well-established and just one year before his death. Although written in a lighthearted manner to assist his wife with her maiden voyage as a book writer, one can imagine how Jessie engaged in her family life with her own 'conscientious preparation of the simple food of every-day life'. The preface can be read as Conrad's personal appreciation for Jessie as an old-fashioned but ideal Victorian housewife

who had been supportive of his difficult life as a novelist. Tony Tanner is one of the very few critics that mention and discuss the preface: '[I]n relating cooking to the whole matter of how we live, Conrad indicates his awareness that what we eat is intimately connected to what we are, in a more than alimentary way' (19). For Conrad, food carried moral implications and played an essential role in forming human nature. In fact, Conrad mentions 'North American Indians' in the preface and maintains that the 'ill-cooked food' and the 'gluttony of their indigestible feasts' led them to 'unreasonable violence' and to be '[v]ictims of gloomy imaginings' (147). Given Conrad's lighthearted manner in the preface, it is difficult to judge if he seriously thought that his remarks on Native Americans here had any scientific or factual basis. However, he then turns his eyes on his contemporary Anglo-Saxons, whom he asserts have fallen victim to worsened dietary conditions caused by the popularity of patent medicine:

It is to be remarked that the quack of modern civilization, the vendor of patent medicine, preys mainly upon the races of Anglo-Saxon stock who are also great warriors, great orators, mighty hunters, great masters of outdoor pursuits. (147)

To stress the importance of the 'conscientious preparation of the simple food of every-day life', patent medicine is criticised as its antithesis. One might consider how Conrad associated patent medicine with nationalism. As Toru Nakayama points out, this was a time when patent medicine enjoyed popularity among British people as a casual weapon to fight against so-called 'national decadence'. However, in light of Tanner's discussion mentioned above, let us just say here that Conrad's criticism of patent medicine was not merely about physical malnutrition; rather, it was based on how the spread of patent medicine would undermine the character and morality of contemporary British people.

Just as popular as patent medicine were patent foods, such as meat extracts. In his book on patent medicine advertising, A. Walker Bingham considers meat extracts in relation to patent medicine, saying that the products ‘that promised to supply physical strength through nutrition’ were ‘on the edge of the medicine category, but nonetheless popular items worthy of note’ (71). As with other contemporary meat extracts, B.O.S. in ‘An Anarchist’ was an efficiency-oriented product that was mass-produced with cheap labour on a South American cattle estate; its producer claimed it would grant physical strength to those who drank it with hot water. Conrad must have seen patent foods like B.O.S. in a similar way to patent medicine and as the antithesis of the ‘conscientious preparation of the simple food of every-day life’. He would have been sceptical of people like the narrator of ‘An Anarchist’, consumers who do not resist moral malnutrition caused by these products.

In the next part, ‘An Anarchist’ is read as a story narrated by a consumer of B.O.S. who nevertheless tries to detach himself from other gullible consumers, and yet ultimately indulges in the labelling of a man.

## **2. Meat Extracts and the Unreliable Narrator in ‘An Anarchist’**

In the beginning of the story, the narrator comments on the B.O.S. business as follows:

Of course the capital of a country must be productively employed. I have nothing to say against the company. But being myself animated by feelings of affection towards my fellow-men, I am saddened by the modern system of advertising. Whatever evidence it offers of enterprise, ingenuity, impudence, and resource in certain individuals, it proves to my mind the wide prevalence of that form of mental degradation which is called gullibility. (135-36)

The meat extract company takes advantage of people’s gullibility by making full use of the ‘modern system of advertising’. Here it might be

worthy of note that the narrator calls the gullibility of people 'mental degradation'. It reminds us of the way Conrad denounced patent medicine, which is used to exploit people gullible enough to want it and which brings about moral malnutrition as a form of 'national decadence'.

Meanwhile, as a lepidopterist, a naturalist who collects rare and gorgeous butterflies, the narrator himself swallows B.O.S. as he travels around the world:

In various parts of the civilized and uncivilized world I have had to swallow B.O.S. with more or less benefit to myself, though without great pleasure. Prepared with hot water and abundantly peppered to bring out the taste, this extract is not really unpalatable. But I have never swallowed its advertisements. Perhaps they have not gone far enough. As far as I can remember they make no promise of everlasting youth to the users of B.O.S., nor yet have they claimed the power of raising the dead for their estimable products. Why this austere reserve, I wonder? But I don't think they would have had me even on these terms. Whatever form of mental degradation I may (being but human) be suffering from, it is not the popular form. I am not gullible. (136)

Here, the narrator seems to emphasize the difference between himself and the gullible people by reluctantly admitting that he has 'had to swallow B.O.S.' He is concerned about being labelled as one of those gullible B.O.S. consumers and expresses his dissatisfaction toward 'the austere reserve' of the advertisements that never claim extreme benefits like 'everlasting youth' or 'raising the dead'. No matter how he defends himself, however, he is making a vain attempt to distinguish his swallowing B.O.S. from those who swallow it because they are gulled by the advertising. For Conrad, perhaps he is no different from those gulled by patent medicine, who lack moral strength.

My position on the narrator is in agreement with Daniel D. Schwarz and Jennifer Shaddock, who read him as imperceptive and unreliable;

both critics, however, seem to overlook the narrator as a consumer of B.O.S., as mentioned above.

First, let us look at the implications of the title. ‘An Anarchist’ is not so much a story depicting anarchists as one playing with the image of anarchism and its connotations. Harry Gee, the manager of the cattle estate explains to the narrator why he is advertising Paul as ‘un citoyen anarchiste de Barcelone’:

“Is he really an anarchist?” I asked, when out of ear-shot.

“I don’t care a hang what he is,” answered the humorous official of the B.O.S. Co. “I gave him the name because it suited me to label him in that way. It’s good for the company.”

“For the company!” I exclaimed, stopping short.

“Aha!” he triumphed, tilting up his hairless pug face and straddling his thin, long legs. “That surprises you. I am bound to do my best for my company. They have enormous expenses. Why—our agent in Horta tells me they spend fifty thousand pounds every year in advertising all over the world! One can’t be too economical in working the show.” (139-40)

In another part of the story, Harry says that he rescued the escaped convict because he was a ‘Mécanicien’(143). By labelling him as an anarchist of Barcelona, of which the popular image was ‘particularly murderous’ (143), he successfully confines Paul in the estate and exploits him as cheap labour. Hiding an escaped convict, not to mention an anarchist, would be a crime that nationalists would denounce. Harry here is prioritising the economic interests of B.O.S. over the law and national interest of the South American country. In this respect, one might even want to see a *homo economicus* in him that anticipates today’s global capitalism.

In any case, one may be interested in how Harry intuitively labels Paul as ‘an anarchist’, though he appears to know nothing of Paul’s past that could be reasonably associated with the term. Harry’s love of

labelling people around him not only encompasses Paul, who is also called 'Crocodile' (138) since he works on a launch and so is connected with both land and water. It is also turned towards the narrator himself. It is important to note how the narrator reacts to Harry when he is called a 'desperate butterfly-slayer':

But the most interesting characteristic of this island (which seems like a sort of penal settlement for condemned cattle) consists in its being the only known habitat of an extremely rare and gorgeous butterfly. The species is even more rare than it is beautiful, which is not saying little. I have already alluded to my travels. I travelled at that time, but strictly for myself and with a moderation unknown in our days of round-the-world tickets. I even travelled with a purpose. As a matter of fact, I am—"Ha, ha, ha!—a desperate butterfly-slayer. Ha, ha, ha!" (137)

Here he sounds boastful of his travels as a naturalist 'with a purpose' of collecting rare butterflies around the world by differentiating these travels from the round-the-world trips of his contemporaries. And, by injecting the label 'a desperate butterfly-slayer' at the end of the climactic sentence, 'As a matter of fact, I am—', he impresses onto readers that his pride as a lepidopterist has been unjustly damaged by the business-oriented Harry, who lacks any empathy with the narrator's work.

The narrator's displeasure with Harry can also be found in the following part:

His chaff would have been harmless enough if intimacy of intercourse in the absence of all friendly feeling were not a thing detestable in itself. Moreover, his facetiousness was not very amusing. It consisted in the wearisome repetition of descriptive phrases applied to people with a burst of laughter. "Desperate butterfly-slayer. Ha, ha, ha!" was one sample of his peculiar wit which he himself enjoyed so much. And in the same vein of exquisite humour he called my attention to the engineer of the steam-launch, one day, as we strolled on the path by the side of the creek. (138)

In the second half of this quotation, the narrator introduces Paul as another target of Harry's 'exquisite humour'. Here the narrator is juxtaposing himself with Paul in that each one is unjustly labelled as 'a desperate butterfly-slayer' and 'an anarchist', respectively. However, this makes us wonder if the narrator and Paul are really in the same situation in relation to Harry's judgement of them.

On the one hand, Paul's status as a quiet mechanic is different from the image of 'an anarchist' that played with his fate. He has committed a number of crimes. As a result of bad behavior while drunk he was sent to prison. Subsequently, there was also an attempted bank robbery, a gaolbreak, and the murder of two anarchists. However, in France he was displaced from his trade by being convicted on the basis of a night of stupid drunken activity, and on the cattle estate has returned to this trade. On the other hand, 'a desperate butterfly-slayer' accurately denotes what the narrator does. For Harry Gee, who does not see any value in lepidopterology or natural history, the narrator is nothing but a 'desperate' hobbyist who is just engaged in pointless butterfly killing. Thus it is unjust to juxtapose the narrator with Paul.

One could also point out that the act of naming in natural history was once one of the means of ruling the world. According to Shunya Yoshimi, Christopher Columbus believed that things must have the names that correspond to them, and was tenaciously engaged in naming and classifying things he 'discovered'. The Age of Exploration and Imperialism gave momentum to the development of natural history, which aimed for the systematization of every creature around the world. A negative effect of such systematization is a dominant labelling within a controlling European outlook. Jennifer Shaddock points out the politics of naming in 'An Anarchist', saying that language and naming act as 'the primary social tool used in the systematic oppression of the individual within a capitalist economy' (59). The narrator, as a naturalist, looks



closer to Harry Gee as a capitalist than to Paul, in that he is driven by the same desire of labelling and controlling things in the world, and ultimately he supports the labelling of Paul as an anarchist. 'Classifying' is as much the target of the story as exploitative business methods.

The narrator is trying to associate himself with Paul by showing that they are both labelled ones in order to underline his displeasure with Harry. He hates Harry, not only because the manager is trying control him by the act of labelling, but also because the capitalist is unjustly degrading his actions as a naturalist. Also, his displeasure may have been increased by the capitalistic greed of Harry when he was charged two dollars a day for his stay on the estate, for a 'purpose' that the narrator was proud of.

Norman Sherry discusses two aspects of the term 'gullibility': on the one hand, 'the gullibility of mankind in the face of modern devices of advertisement which in the story are used to sell the meat-extract Bos', and on the other hand, 'the gullibility of the working man in the face of anarchist propaganda' (219). Based on Sherry's reading, Paul should be a gullible target of anarchist propaganda that leads him to a tragic life. However, can his gullibility be found anywhere in the story?

Recalling how he became a compagnon after being released from gaol, he says: 'All the same, there's something wrong in a world where a man can get lost for a glass more or less' (149). He cried 'Vive l'anarchie! Death to the capitalists!' because of his alcohol intoxication, and he joined the anarchist group because of his dismissal. His downfall was thus caused by forces beyond his control, not by his gullibility 'in the face of anarchist propaganda'. If gullibility is 'moral degradation' as the narrator puts it, humans can just resist it with their own will.

In discussing whether or not Paul is gullible, one can refer to the 'warm heart and weak head' with which the narrator describes him. This first appears in the story when Paul is explaining to the narrator how he felt when he was in the same boat as the two comrades during the

gaolbreak: 'I looked at them and thought that while they lived I could never be free. Never. Neither I nor others like me with warm hearts and weak heads. For I know I have not a strong head, monsieur' (158-59).

Paul's impressive phrase here might well be compared with a well-known quote from one of Conrad's contemporaries: Alfred Marshall. The economist wished the Cambridge graduates to face the social suffering with 'cool heads but warm hearts'.

It will be my most cherished ambition, my highest endeavour to do what with my poor ability and my limited strength I may, to increase the numbers of those, whom Cambridge, the great mother of strong men, sends out into the world with cool heads but warm hearts, willing to give some at least of their best powers to grappling with the social suffering around them; resolved not to rest content till they have done what in them lies to discover how far it is possible to open up to all the material means of a refined and noble life. (57)

Marshall's words in 1885 here became popular thanks to the later writings by one of his students, John Maynard Keynes, and no biographical connection can be found between the economist at Cambridge and our sailor-turned-novelist. Still, one might be inclined to compare the two similar phrases that referred to poverty in Europe at the turn of the century. The 'cool heads', according to Marshall, meant economics. He is warning students of economics not to ignore warm feelings towards people in their society, while Paul's warm feelings towards people's suffering exceed his ability to put them into words. However, his lack of words, or his lack of power to label things that the narrator and Harry Gee have, is different from being gullible. When he says that he knows he has not 'a strong head', he is aware of his own ignorance. The story supports Paul's 'warm heart', and forgives him his 'weak head' because he is aware of it and regrets it—he knows it without any of the narrator's haughty knowingness.

Paul says that he has no freedom to escape from anarchists because of

his warm heart and weak head. Later he achieves freedom at last by killing the anarchists and putting them out of the boat, even if he is to be exploited by Harry Gee. Throughout his life, it is not Paul who is gullible, but the people around him who see him as an anarchist. One can say that, in the end, he is paradoxically exploiting the gullibility of these people to gain freedom from anarchists.

Seeing Paul getting worn, frail, and livid, the narrator suggests that he flee to Europe with him.

He was more worn, still more frail, and very livid indeed under the grimy smudges of his calling. Evidently the meat of the company's main herd (in its unconcentrated form) did not agree with him at all.

It was on the pontoon in Horta that we met; and I tried to induce him to leave the launch moored where she was and follow me to Europe there and then. It would have been delightful to think of the excellent manager's surprise and disgust at the poor fellow's escape. But he refused with unconquerable obstinacy.

"Surely you don't mean to live always here!" I cried. He shook his head.

"I shall die here," he said. Then added moodily, "Away from them." (161)

Some might see here the narrator's compassion for Paul's tragedy, where a harmless mechanic was gulled by the propaganda of anarchism and is now exploited economically by B.O.S. They might also see the depth of despair in Paul, who rejects the compassionate narrator's offer to rescue him from the tragic life. However, the narrator's offer does not come from compassion for Paul at all. He actually wants to take advantage of Paul to get his own revenge on Harry Gee, with whom he is displeased. Paul then says to the narrator, 'I shall die here—[a]way from them.' Here the 'them' not only means the anarchists, but also the gullible people who view him as an anarchist. For Paul, going back to Europe means letting go of his freedom from them. It is interesting to note that the narrator retains the label of anarchist for Paul. He has retained Harry's label:

On the whole, my idea is that he was much more of an anarchist than he confessed to me or to himself; and that, the special features of his case apart, he was very much like many other anarchists.

Consequently, one of the gullible people may be the narrator himself, a classifier of butterflies, who has swallowed Harry's classification of Paul. This gullibility is reinforced in the light of Conrad's views on food and patent medicine that we saw earlier; the narrator sounds comical when he says seriously that '[e]vidently the meat of the company's main herd did not agree with him at all.' His gullibility makes him believe that B.O.S. in the concentrated form is superior to the meat in its unconcentrated form. For Paul it would not be acceptable to be in the same boat with the gullible man who mistakenly labels him as gullible.

### **3. Conclusion**

In this story, we see how acts of labelling can distort both products and people, and how the narrator, while attempting to separate himself from the Harry and the gullible consumers of meat extract, is blind to his own gullibility. He is also a consumer, both of the meat extract itself and of labels. While attempting to separate himself from Harry and the B.O.S. enterprise, he reveals his own acceptance of the established order and categories. As a classifier of butterflies, ultimately he fails to see that he has swallowed the label placed upon Paul, who is by nature no more an anarchist than B.O.S. is a drink that can achieve wonders. Ultimately, the narrator is unreliable, a swallower of labels and potions who still maintains that he is 'not gullible'.

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