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Digestive systems in Radclyffe Hall's *Adam's Breed* (1926)

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Radclyffe Hall's prize-winning, now largely forgotten 1926 novel *Adam's Breed* is organised around the processes of eating, digestion, and indigestion. Depicting a community of shopkeepers and restaurateurs in the Italian expat community of London's Soho, it focuses on a waiter who, witnessing a post-WWI frenzy of hedonistic dining and consuming, becomes disgusted with food and human appetites, eventually retreating from society to become a hermit in the New Forest. In 1924, the British Medical Association had declared 'war on modern diet', condemning just such rich, luxurious, dainty, concentrated, preserved, and foreign foods as fill the shops, restaurants, and pages of Hall's novel. This article demonstrates how *Adam's Breed* interacts with and satirises such discussions about food and health occurring in the medical sphere, foregrounding food—external food networks, ecologies, and technologies, but also internal embodied experiences of eating—as fundamentally entangled with identity. In addition, it suggests that the novel's form is structured to mirror digestive processes. From tantalising descriptions of food in the early stages of the plot, the novel progresses to unhealthy forms of consuming, stages of surfeit, sickening, indigestion, and finally the expelling and 'passing' of the protagonist. The novel makes experimental use of the digestive system to chew over and break down the complex emotions around, and tensions between, self and community in the wake of the war.

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Introduction

In 1924, newspapers reported that the British Medical Association, at their annual conference in Bradford, had declared ‘war on modern diet’ (Anonymous 1924). What the British public was eating was too luxurious, too concentrated, and too rich. Speakers condemned indulgence in ‘such dainty foods as savoury duck and jellies’, and lamented that the public were snubbing fresh vegetables and ‘more substantial and sustaining diet like meat, vegetables and milk’ in favour of ‘preserves and delicacies’ (Anonymous 1924). Dr John Wynne Yorke-Davies agreed that food was ‘too rich and too varied’, arguing that following a return to a ‘plainly-cooked old English diet [...] many of our troubles would disappear’ (Yorke-Davies 1924). Dr Harry Campbell, a prominent Harley Street physician and dietary expert, had long been banging this drum, advising: ‘food should be simple. It is not good to pamper the palate’ (Campbell 1920, 406). Campbell blamed the British public’s faulty diet not only on preserves, jellies, delicacies, and dainties, but soft food, complaining in a 1926 lecture that ‘the Briton must have his pappy pudding every day’ (Campbell 1926b). His recommended alternative was a diet that aimed to approximate what was eaten by ‘primitive man’, a pre-agricultural spread of meat and raw vegetables, to promote healthy teeth and digestion, the benefits of which would far outweigh ‘the pleasure derived from the temporary tickling of the palate by unwholesome luxurious foods’ (Campbell 1926b).

There were certainly genuine concerns and productive conversations about food, health and digestion circulating in Britain in the early twentieth century. Worries about dangerous additives in food led to new public health regulations in 1925, which restricted the use of preservatives and prohibited the use of toxic colourants in food production. Research into ‘vitamins’ was increasing, as more were gradually identified between 1913 and 1948, and even before the first supplements began to be produced in the mid-1930s, there was widespread public awareness that vitamins could be sourced from food. As well as pioneering scientific research on the microorganisms found in the gut, there was burgeoning public understanding of the role of gut bacteria and maintaining healthy gut flora for holistic bodily health (see Farre-Maduell and Casals-Pascual 2019). This led to a growing market for lactic acid bacteria tablets, a precursor of today’s probiotics (Farre-Maduell and Casals-Pascual 2019). Yet we can also observe anxieties about masculinity in the war on modern diet declared by the medical establishment, in their criticism of the softness, delicacy, and daintiness of British fare. Hence the attempted revival of the primitive hunter, whose manly jaw chops through hard, firm foods with relish and disdains pappy pudding. The idolisation of ‘the primitive’ was a common theme in medical dietary discussions, an implicitly racialised medical trend of embracing primitivism in the first decades of the twentieth century. We can further infer underlying concerns about nationhood: unwholesome and luxurious foreign foods—a cypher for foreignness in general—are the cause of English troubles.

This article turns to an understudied novel, Radclyffe Hall’s *Adam’s Breed* (1926), which, I argue, is informed by and responds to these contexts and debates. Hall’s novel explores the role of digestion and indigestion in shaping individual and communal identities. It also satirises the medical war on rich, luxurious, dangerous, foreign and low-quality foods in its celebration of gustatory desire and focus on Italian imports and preserves. The novel explores a topic of public health interest at the time—the alienation of consumers from the increasingly obscured origins of food production—and thematises the overconsumption of the Lost Generation in the wake of the First World War. It can be read as a narrative of coming to vegetarianism, a practice hotly debated in the press and by medical professionals. I argue that it

also satirises the medical romanticisation of primitivism and promotion of healthy mastication and solid food, exemplified by Dr Harry Campbell. Hall’s novel engages with these discussions, which were present in the public imagination, debated over in medical halls, and reported by the press. The plot depicts the Italian expat community in London’s Soho between the 1890s and 1920s.¹ The characters are shopkeepers, restaurateurs, cooks, waiters, butchers, and tobacconists, a cast of ‘feeders’ who delight in their social role of supplying hungry British appetites and satisfying British stomachs with their preserves, delicacies, and imported luxuries. As Alison Hennegan notes: ‘the pages of *Adam’s Breed* are crammed as full as a Strasbourg goose with food selected, sold, and served, meals prepared and eaten, vines tended, grapes harvested and wine drunk, flour milled, pasta made, coffee ground and bread baked’ (Hennegan 1985, xx). The protagonist Gian-Luca, orphaned by his mother’s death during childbirth, grows up in the Casa Boselli, the salumeria owned by his grandparents Fabio and Teresa. After a childhood surrounded by the delicious offerings of the delicatessen, he becomes an excellent waiter, first at the Capo di Monte and then at a leading London restaurant, The Doric. When the First World War begins, Gian-Luca sees it as an opportunity to assert his national identity by fighting for Italy, but he is disappointed at being assigned to a kitchen, cooking for soldiers rather than fighting. Upon returning to London and his job as head waiter, amidst a post-war frenzy of hedonistic dining and consuming, Gian-Luca becomes increasingly disgusted with food and human appetites, and particularly horrified by mastication. This prompts a self-imposed retreat from society in the form of a pilgrimage to the rural, idyllic wilderness of the New Forest, where he becomes a hermit and a gentle, feminised gatherer, abstaining from meat-eating, a stark contrast to the primitive hunter envisaged by Campbell. During this retreat, he tries to find God, but in the process, he slowly starves himself to death.

Published in 1926, *Adam’s Breed* won both the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction and the Femina Vie Heureuse Prize for the best English novel.² It established Hall’s career, was popular and widely reprinted, yet it has been critically overshadowed by *The Well of Loneliness*, which was published 2 years later. Hennegan’s introduction to the Virago edition of *Adam’s Breed* observes ‘so much food, so much chewing: even the greediest reader may come to feel a trifle oppressed by a world reduced, it sometimes seems, to a ‘long vista of jaws’, champing their way to eternity’ (Hennegan 1985, vi). The novel’s working title was ‘Food’, and yet its rich descriptions of appetites, eating, and digestion are somewhat overlooked in scholarship, which primarily takes its cue from *The Well of Loneliness* to focus on gender, sexuality, and Catholic conversion. Richard Dellamora focuses on Gian-Luca’s femininity to explain why this character feels at odds with his community and cannot find his place in the world, arguing that ‘the protagonists of Hall’s novels usually occupy a cross-gendered subject position as masculine women or feminine men’ (Dellamora 2011, 6). He also reads it as her most Catholic novel, noting that themes of self-sacrifice and visual images of holy communion and transformation inspired Hall and other homosexual writers in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, providing ‘a context for experiencing, troping, and narrativizing the negativities, psychic and social, that accompanied nonconformity for these individuals’ (Dellamora 2011, 166). *Adam’s Breed* is one of several 1920s novels which depict aimless young war survivors; it was published the same year as Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, which popularised the term ‘the Lost Generation’, those in early adulthood during the war. Other scholarship looks at the novel in relation to the ‘dis-oriented, wandering, directionless’ spirit of many of the war’s

young survivors in the early post-war period. Claire Buck (1997) explored the novel's forms of service—national, communal, and personal, and building on this Jana Funke (2016) notes Hall's depiction of the tension between the rhetoric of warfare and the reality of military action, and takedown of the ideal of military masculinity as imaginary construct. *Adam's Breed* is indeed a book about gender, war, and Catholicism, but it is also a book about food and eating as they define identity and community, and the way in which appetite and digestion are gauges of happiness and well-being.

In addition to linking Hall's text to contextual debates about food and health, this article surveys the novel's thematic and formal uses of the digestive system to chew over and break down the complex emotions around, and tensions between, self and community in the wake of the war. In *Eating in Theory*, Anne-Marie Mol encourages scholars to take theoretical inspiration from eating rather than thinking; to privilege 'human metabolic engagements with the world' over 'cognitive reflections about the world' (Mol 2021, 3). Hall's text is not the most intuitive choice for such an experimental theoretical approach. *Adam's Breed* is, formally, rather conservative for its time. In 1949, Lettice Cooper, reviewing Hall's novels, criticised Hall for her 'old-fashioned prose' and for writing 'like a lesser Victorian' (Cooper 1949, 26). More obvious would be something like Joyce's *Ulysses*, and indeed several scholars (Gross 2000; Yared 2009) have demonstrated how the narrative of Joyce's 'Lestrygonians' chapter is structured as a digestive tract. Yet the realist bildungsroman is an interesting place to test and extend this analytical approach: to explore the possibilities that emerge from a metabolic reading of a narrative which is generally cast as the rigid and conservative form which experimental modernism rebelled against. Drawing on Caroline Levine's work on forms (2015), we can observe how *Adam's Breed* sustains an overlap and interaction of forms which render it more 'experimental' than the dismissive label of 'realist' (or Victorian) suggests. The structure of the text, down to the formulation of individual descriptive sentences, is in dialogue with the form of the digestive, digesting and digested body. There are multiple systems and forms at work in the settings of the novel—in the pasta factory, the restaurant, the engine of war, the winery—and the contexts outside the novel: ecologies of food import and production and medical discourse around diet and health.

My analysis explores how Hall foregrounds food—external food networks, ecologies, and technologies, but also internal embodied experiences of eating—as fundamentally entangled with identity. I have found the methodologies of recent work in modernist food studies particularly useful for this analysis, notably Catherine Keyser's method in *Artificial Color: Modern Food and Racial Fictions*—which I adapt for a British context—of reading literary texts for 'three levels of alimentary representation: direct allusions to food technologies and systems; embodied tropes of incorporation, abjection, and expulsion that structure these texts; and ambivalent cultural fantasies about cultural difference mobilised by these meditations on ingestion' (Keyser 2019, 3). The struggle and breakdown of food technologies and systems depicted in *Adam's Breed*—the lack of supplies during the war, the failure of Teresa's macaroni factory, the animal cruelty revealed as fundamentally underpinning the farming of food at the origin of production—are mirrored in the embodied experience of Gian-Luca, his loss of appetite, nausea and sickness, and ultimate starvation. Likewise, the theme of food quality is one of several ways in which Hall draws on contemporary medical discussions about healthy eating, digestion, and indigestion, suffused with just such 'ambivalent cultural fantasies about cultural difference', in order to explore associated questions around Britishness, identity, and masculinity. Hall's text is concerned

with cultural difference and cultural belonging in ways that parallel Keyser's observations about the relation between modern eating experiences and racial discourse in American novels. There are certainly some dubious or offensive cultural stereotypes in *Adam's Breed*, particularly in the section set in Italy, where Hall invokes a widespread rural peasant backwardness. As Keyser points out in relation to Ernest Hemingway and Gertude Stein, Italian identity is an ethnic classification which sits 'on the borders of whiteness' for several modernist authors: idealised and racialised, sometimes romanticised and sometimes reviled (Keyser 2019, 6; 74).

The structure of *Adam's Breed* engages in an experimental emulation of the processes of consumption, digestion, indigestion, and voiding. From the lavish, tantalising and appetising descriptions of food that characterise the early stages of the story, it moves on to unhealthy and destructive forms of consuming, stages of surfeit, sickening, indigestion, and finally the expelling and 'passing' of the protagonist who is, by the end, himself the difficult or indigestible element among the novel's cast of characters. Following the plot of the novel, I begin with the arousing of appetite and acts of ingestion that characterise its early stages, and the depiction of 'food ecologies'—the networks connecting environment, supply chain, production, suppliers, and the human bodies of consumers. I then move on to surfeit and sickening, the post-war era and gourmandism of the Lost Generation, which coincides with prevalent racialised discourse around medical dietary advice and mastication, during which we see Gian-Luca's sense of self and appetite transform into disgust as the food systems that structure his world are dismantled. Finally, the stages of expelling and purging which the text performs as Gian-Luca visits Italy, both the 'fatherland' and the origin of food production, in an abortive attempt to heal himself, and when this fails leaves London to find a simpler existence in the wilderness of the New Forest. While *Adam's Breed* is indeed about food, as its working title indicates, we can also read it as fundamentally narrativizing the unconscious processes of consuming and digesting. It explores what Jean Walton calls the 'modern 'peristaltic subject'' (Walton 2010, 245), whose identity is defined by the experience of the external world passing through the alimentary canal, the unconscious instructions, processes, and insight or perception of the gut—the 'enteric nervous system' defined by J. N. Langley in 1921 as able to make decisions independently (Langley 1921, 9)—and the food networks and gustatory relationships that unite people to each other and the nonhuman.

Appetite and ingestion. Hall awakens the reader's appetite for the gastronomic world of her characters with opulent descriptions of smells and sights. The novel begins in typical bildungsroman fashion, detailing Gian-Luca's birth, coming to consciousness, and gaining senses. The most prominent impressions of his baby years are related to eating and speaking, food and words, the significance of hunger on a par with language. The Casa Boselli, the Italian salumeria in which he grew up, forms his strongest early sensual impressions:

above all the smell, that wonderful smell that belongs to the Salumeria. The shop smelt of sawdust and cheeses and pickles and olives and sausages and garlic; the shop smelt of oil and cans and Chianti and a little of split peas and lentils; the shop smelt of coffee and sour brown bread and very faintly of vanilla, the shop smelt of people, of Fabio's boot blacking, and of all the boots that went in and out unblacked; it also smelt of Old Compton Street, a dusty, adventurous smell (Hall 1985, 27).

Hall's use of semi-colons in her prose usually verges on the profligate, yet this passage is comparatively sparing with them, in order to evoke the assault of multiple scents that define the Casa Boselli. The paralleled syntactic repetition creates a series of olfactory snapshots that combine and layer onto one another. Food smells mingle with non-food smells and human smells, and those that belong to people and place are what also locate the shop: in the heart of the Italian expat community, which Hall sets in Old Compton Street.³ The miasma created by these preserves, rich and foreign foods, and 'dusty, adventurous' expats, is a cocktail which seems calculated to make the anxious doctors of the British Medical Association wince.

From these dangerous and delectable smells, the narrator's account of the food in the shop expands for pages in opulent visual description, using carefully selected adjectives and verbs which create a disorienting effect; simultaneously reverential, sensual, and humorous, a little erotic, and grotesque. We are told that 'huge jars of plump, green olives, floating in turgid juices, stood ready to be fished for with the squat, round wooden spoons' (Hall 1985, 28). The view sweeps to 'a galaxy of cheeses, all approaching adolescence, [which] rolled or sprawled or oozed about the counter' (Hall 1985, 28). These ripening cheeses are unctuous, uncontrolled and spreading. The tinned tomatoes, too, are anthropomorphised. Preserved, altered, and transported from their foreign origin, they are having a crisis of identity: 'in every form most alien to their nature, huddled in cans along a shelf' (Hall 1985, 28). These cans foreshadow the expansion of the tinned food business expedited by war technologies, and hint at concerns about 'alien' substances that might lurk in containers, their shelf life unnaturally extended through this method of preservation. The imagery of rich abundance continues as various Italian imports jostle for space on the shelves: 'apples, nutmegs, soups and jellies, herring roes and tinned crustacea, rubbed shoulders with the honey of Bormio. A kind of garden this, a Garden of Eden, with a tree of life on whose long-suffering sides had been grafted all the strange stomachic lusts of modern Adam' (Hall 1985, 29). Echoing the medical condemnation of 'modern diet' in implying that modernity itself is responsible for unusual or unhealthy gustatory desires, the strangeness of these stomachic lusts points to the medical fear of preserves, dainties and rich foods, particularly those being imported thanks to increasingly global food networks. As Jessica Martell observes in her study of imperial foodways, 'new food trades eliminated seasonality from grocers' shelves and concealed the animal form inside a vast array of tinned canisters, while refrigerated ships laden with tropical goods and abundant protein collapsed latitude and longitude into climate-free coordinates' (Martell 2020, 5). These unfamiliar but exciting products and technologies produced new ways of eating. In 1922, Dr Leonard Williams declared at the Institute of Hygiene: 'modern dietetic practices are not based on physiology or any other kind of learning, but upon a mumbo jumbo of stupidity, shibboleths, and gluttony' (Williams 1922). Framing the salumeria as a Garden of Eden creates a parodic revision of the Fall: the temptation of not only forbidden fruit but forbidden soups, jellies, tinned fish, and cheeses, as Williams's invocation of the sin of 'gluttony' implies. The long-suffering tree groans under the weight of these grafted-on desires. Through such use of hyperbole and linguistic excess, Hall is simultaneously mocking fears of luxurious foreign food and celebrating the manifold desires of the stomach.

Walton observes that the intestine is 'a place where the world passes through us, and becomes in some sense 'unknown' to our central nervous system' (Walton 2010, 253). This understanding of the process of eating and digesting as the external world passing through the body redefines 'the question of the relationship between the subject and the social realm' (Walton

2010, 246). In 1908, George Sutherland published *A System of Diet and Dietetics*, a book which gathers together disparate (and sometimes differing) perspectives by various experts on diet and nutrition. In a chapter on 'the physiology of digestion, absorption and nutrition', Dr E. I. Spriggs describes the continual motion of the gut during digestion as observed under X-ray, which divides the small intestine, as he terms it, into 'short sausage shaped pieces', in which the food materials and the digestive juices are 'thoroughly mixed, and every part of the whole is brought into intimate relation with the absorbing wall of the gut' (Spriggs 1908, 87). It is interesting that he uses sausages to analogue this unseen interior, whose behaviour he finds both 'intimate' and 'absorbing', suggestive of a fascination with the processes which go on inside our bodily walls. Returning to the interior of the Casa Boselli, the association of rich food and opulent language remains key to both the plot and the prose. The shop is, of course, a salumeria:

From the ceiling were suspended innumerable coils of what looked like preserved intestines. They may possibly have been intestines at one time, but when Fabio sold them, they had beautiful names: 'Bondiola' 'Salsiccie', 'Salami di Milano', in other words, they were sausages. The sausages varied as much in figure as they did, presumably, in taste; there were short, stumpy sausages; fat, bulging sausages; sly, thin sausages; anatomical sausages. There were regal sausages attired in silver paper, there were patriotic sausages in red, white and green, and endless little humble fellows hanging on a string, who looked rather self-conscious and shy (Hall 1985, 27-8)

Waddington designates the sausage as the ultimate symbol of dangerous food at the end of the nineteenth century, due to the growing awareness of 'the dangers of diseased meat to health' (Waddington 2015, 65). Conversely, Hall deploys the sausage to emphasise the role of food as inseparable from both human identity and the human body. The sausages of the salumeria are given beautiful names, and, recalling the pseudo-science of phrenology, their outward shapes reveal typically human characteristics: sly, patriotic, humble, self-conscious, shy. Some are even 'anatomical', reminding us not only of the intestines that likely went into them, but also of human intestines: that our bodies contain similar innumerable and mysterious coils of intestinal matter. By possessing their own sort of humanity, the sausages remind us of our own essential meatiness.

However, the modernity of this particular Eden is reinforced by an emphasis on consumerism, commerce, and profit. It is repeatedly asserted that the survival and thriving of the Italian expat community is owed to the rampant appetites of Londoners; Gian-Luca's grandmother Teresa declares, 'it is good that they are hungry [...] we gain money by way of their stomachs' (Hall 1985, 60). This refrain is revealing of food ecologies both in the novel and in Britain in the early twentieth century. As Martell notes, by 1914, 60% of Britain's food was imported, which benefited Britain's working classes in the short term, offering cheaper food and more variety. However, it set the scene for long-term issues, as food provision became a source of funding for naval power, unreasonably pushing up prices (Martell 2020, 87). In the halcyon days of plenty, a young Gian-Luca observes the arrival of a large delivery of Italian imports:

Every case contained something that someone would eat, an astonishing quantity when seen all together, and this meant that the whole world was always hungry—incredibly hungry, preposterously hungry, ready and eager to consume every morsel that Teresa and her kind could produce. He found this thought amusing; he would look at a cheese and begin to speculate about it: 'I wonder who you will go to', he would think; 'I wonder whose palate you will

tickle'. He visualised millions of red, gaping caverns, into which must be poured something pleasing to the taste. 'We are right who take up this business', he would think; 'they could never get on without us!' And then there would come a sense of secureness, he would feel less alone in the world (Hall 1985, 97–98).

The millions of red, gaping caverns into which *must* be poured something, like the anatomical sausages, could be a grotesque or horrific vision, but it is not. For the young Gian-Luca, trying to understand his place in the world, particularly troubled by not knowing who his father is and whether he is wholly Italian or half English, this image provokes a sense of secureness, purpose, and kinship: he feels less alone. His decision to commit to this important role of feeding and serving is deeply community-minded, and diminishes his own loneliness, suggesting that food and service can represent more than just the cynical world of profit: a greater calling. His sense of self and search for stability and structure are thus tied to the modern food system he exists within, this network of mouths and eaters in which he holds an important role.

Gian-Luca progresses from helping his grandparents in the salumeria to becoming a waiter at the Doric, a grand restaurant overseen by the owner Millo, a 'life force' who sits in his office 'devising new methods of making them [customers] happy for a while through the unfailing media of their stomachs' (Hall 1985, 169). Millo 'aimed at raising the status of the palate via education, as some people aim at the raising of the working classes' (Hall 1985, 168). Gian-Luca is an exemplary waiter, with 'an instinct for perfect service' (Hall 1985, 118). During this period, he meets and marries Maddelena, who, during their courtship, 'seemed to be always patting butter, turning it into little rolls. [...] he liked to see her there by the clean, golden butter; the sight of her filled a void that was in him' (Hall 1985, 176). He is drawn to Maddelena in large part because of this sight of her preparing butter for the restaurant; Maddelena with the butter constitutes an aesthetic vision which is itself nourishing, creating a feeling of fullness. Yet at the Doric, perfect service involves self-erasure. Millo dictates that 'when clients came to feed, they should never be disturbed by emotions other than their own. Thus, no waiter dared intrude his personal feelings by so much as the ghost of a sigh. No waiter was allowed to have a headache or a backache or a legache, or even a heartache for that matter; such things ceased to exist when he came on duty' (Hall 1985, 169). Millo tells his staff: 'Here we have no hearts and no emotions; no passions—no bodies except to serve' (Hall 1985, 170). This model of self-sacrificial service takes on new significance at the halfway point of the book, when the First World War begins. Because of his experience working in restaurants, to his disappointment, Gian-Luca is posted to the battlefields of France as a chef, unable to participate aside from feeding and serving others, and is thus thwarted in his wish to finally claim Italian identity for himself as a soldier. This experience provokes a schism in his sense of self, in terms of both gender and culture: 'Gian-Luca, held in leash at the Officers' Mess, had fretted for his outraged manhood' (Hall 1985, 369). The war signals a shift in the narrative style, from delicious, indulgent, appetising description, to anxious, stomach-churning tension and despair. It also instigates a break from the comfortable, familiar networks and exchanges that structure the characters' lives, communicated through the war's long-reaching effects on both food systems and individual appetites.

The first and most pressing impact of war for the characters is its effect on food supplies. Millo, an oracle of the restaurant business, tells his staff that he foresees a shortage of food, but that they must dress up and disguise what they have so their customers will still eat it. The Casa Boselli, meanwhile, is described as 'denuded [...] as though by the passing of an

impious swarm of locusts' (Hall 1985, 202). The shop is thrown into a lasting state of struggle, its shiny glass cases stacked with 'mendacious tins—mendacious, because they were completely empty [...] anything was better than the heart-breaking void in those acquisitive glass cases' (Hall 1985, 224). The void of the millions of gaping mouths awaiting feeding, the void that the sight of Maddelena churning butter filled in Gian-Luca, is now a void that cannot be filled, empty tins mocking empty stomachs. The shop is a victim, not only of the war, but also of its own pre-war success, having recently invested in a badly timed expansion: the modern, mechanised, first fresh macaroni factory in England. The only flour they can obtain is 'a dreadful, grey mixture of wheat, barley, maize, and Heaven alone knew what other disgusting adulteration; a gravelly, husky, unpalatable outrage. Why, the very machines spewed it forth' (Hall 1985, 226). The pasta machine becomes itself a disordered stomach, vomiting out what it cannot process.

The personification of war as a universal stomach with an endless appetite for consuming men is related through the effect on the business of the Casa Boselli:

One by one, the men employed by Teresa had been consumed by the war; like the food—the salami, prosciutto, mortadella, parmesan cheeses and decadent tomatoes—they had ceased to contribute to individual stomachs. For now, there was only a universal stomach, whose size and capacity no man could gauge; the stomach of a horrible, greedy modern Moloch, for whom the armies must be fattened (Hall 1985, 224).

The narrative voice cannot help but indulge in a nostalgic list of delicious, now unattainable, food items alongside this realisation, and in doing so both uncomfortably align human bodies with edible products and communicate the breakdown of food ecologies during wartime. The healthy appetites of individuals are transformed, perverted into a single universal Molochian stomach. Soldiers are 'scourged and tormented by vile engines of war, by terrible, nerve-breaking, soul-sickening noise, by the smell and the sight and the slime of blood-crowding, thrusting, yelling, retreating, in a welter of maimed, half-demented men' (Hall 1985, 239). Death itself is described as 'the glutton' for whom the 'great tide of blood' was 'not nearly enough' (Hall 1985, 241). The mechanisation and mass scale of death and injury—what Edward Juler refers to as the 'profoundly dehumanising trauma of the First World War and its mechanised mutilation of bodies' (Juler 2016, 358)—recalls the mechanisation of industrial farming and slaughter which occurred in the same period, in great part due to the accelerated development of internal combustion engines. The comparison is echoed later, after the war ends, as Gian-Luca finds himself walking in New Oxford Street feeling 'sick with disgust' at the contact with the bodies of other people that jostle him as he walks, and particularly oppressed by motorcars:

The stench of the traffic was heavy in his nostrils, the hot, greasy smell of engines; of monstrous engines, all spewing and belching up oil and petrol, and poisonous fumes from the pipes of their filthy exhausts. He hated these engines as though they had life, as though his hatred could harm them. They were foul, greedy feeders, and they stank of their food like creatures with rotting stomachs (Hall 1985, 281).⁴

During this episode, the monstrous engines of the motorcars in London's streets recall the 'vile engines of war' described earlier. While we could view this as a significant instance of post-traumatic stress, in which Gian-Luca's trauma is responsible for making the connection, it also gestures to the fact that the

development and mass production of motorcar engines was accelerated as a direct result of the technologies of war. The modernity that Gian-Luca becomes attuned to and disgusted by in his state of nervous breakdown is characterised by mass production, industry, and rampant overconsumption.

Hall is also critiquing mechanistic ideals of the human body, which arose in response to the war, a perspective which viewed the body much like a combustion engine, a thermodynamic machine, converting nutrients into energy (see Rabinbach 1992). This image suited the political arm of the engine of war, invested as it was in keeping the visceral realities of conflict and its effect on the human body and mind hidden. Juler discusses the Surrealist rejection of ‘hygienist theory’ in the interwar period, which, he says, ‘recommended complete bodily control over the viscera and sanctioned a mechanistic form of physical regimen’ (Juler 2016, 358). The deliberate messiness of Surrealist art’s depictions of bodies with organs externalised was, he argues, a rebellion against the pure, clean, contained, managed, mechanical body idealised by the hygienists. Here we see Hall performing a similar rejection in a realist context, insisting on exposing what the fantasy of the mechanisation of the human body attempts to conceal. The human, organic, meaty, hungry body that is celebrated in the early passages of the novel is substituted by the hungry motorcars. Yet rather than streamlined, well-functioning, controlled machines, these mechanical stomachs are messy, foul, stinking and putrefying. The text weaves together these descriptions of the engines of war, gobbling tides of blood, the greasy belching motorcars, and the steel wheels and leather bands of the pasta machine spewing forth the inedible and poor-quality fodder. Hall draws connections between these machines, the ecologies and economies they exist within, and the bodies that build and are destroyed by them. As the well-oiled system of British food ecology breaks down under the pressures of war, so too do the bodies of individuals: Gian-Luca with his talent for waiting and ‘long years of training behind him’, is considered ‘the implacable, the perfect machine’, and yet his experience of war changes him: ‘he had noticed lately that when he stopped working, his body ran down like a clock’ (Hall 1985, 279), and he ‘was gradually becoming a mere obstruction’ (Hall 1985, 293). The next section explores what happens in the novel in the wake of the war; how Gian-Luca becomes himself the indigestible ‘obstruction’ for the revival of food systems and communities, himself impeding the smooth functioning of the machine.

Surfeit and sickening. For most members of the Lost Generation in this novel, the post-war period is marked by a hysterical relief at survival: ‘a kind of hilarious reaction’ which results in a frenzy of dancing, drinking, and dining. We are told: ‘never before in the history of England had there been such a craze for movement; such a gliding and hopping, such a swaying and clinging; such a stamping and clapping and grabbing of food. Two mouthfuls and then: ‘come on, let’s have a turn!’ after which more grabbing of food’ (Hall 1985, 240). This behaviour seems designed to provoke indigestion, but the Doric is catering for ‘many hundred stomachs, post-war stomachs too, long deprived of their fill and now determined to get it’ (Hall 1985, 248). Keyser gestures to ‘the gourmandism of the Lost Generation’ as an important context for literary attempts to obtain romanticised foreign identities through imbibing local foods. Her example is Hemingway’s *Sun Also Rises*, in which Jake, an American expat in Europe, attempts ‘to eat and drink his way into local belonging’ among the Basque peasants (Keyser 2019, 77). In Hall’s novel, the appetites of the Lost Generation on home soil drive them towards the opposite: what Keyser calls ‘the decadence of decontextualised food’, which ‘obscures origins and tantalises the senses’ (Keyser 2019, 79). For

Gian-Luca, this social practice becomes decidedly sinister. Individual human identities are superseded by a collective of stomachs, driven by a determination to get their fill. In this conceptualisation, the gut is inherently *social*, both in terms of an embodied communion with the outside world as it passes through the body, and in terms of social networks and communities of food, feeders, and consumers: hundreds of stomachs coming together in a collective post-war hedonism. Within this network, desires of the stomach are inextricable from consumerism and commerce. The Doric has its best season as ‘people were recklessly spending their money, eating up banknotes with every mouthful, and washing them down with champagne or spirits’ (Hall 1985, 247). This new sense of threat felt by Gian-Luca suggests the loss or erasure of individual identity involved in eating, as the stomach becomes a place where individual selfhood breaks down.

Waiting tables at the Doric again after the end of the war, Gian-Luca is more and more disturbed by appetites, hunger, and hedonism. The innocent joy of sausages and olives from his childhood, and his pleasure in serving, are replaced by disgust and loathing: ‘Food, food, food—great cauldrons of food. [...] The vastness of the thing would begin to oppress him—grotesque that it should be so vast—the vastness of the Doric and all that it stood for, the vastness of the appetites that it must appease, the vastness of that long vista of jaws’ (Hall 1985, 251). The millions of red gaping caverns and individual stomachs which were so comforting to Gian-Luca in his younger days and gave him his *raison d’être* are transformed into an oppressive vastness of appetites, and a long vista of jaws. He develops a hyper-acuity to the small behaviours of people as they eat, watching in horrified fascination as manifold unconscious dining habits reveal themselves. Customers crumble bread and roll it into small bread pills: ‘the cleanest of hands would leave the pills dirty, and there they would lie on the spotless linen, an indictment against human skin’ (Hall 1985, 269). He also notices ‘the habit of relieving the teeth with the tip of a surreptitious tongue’ (Hall 1985, 269), a sentence which, in its consonant repetitions, draws the reader’s attention to the dually ingestive and linguistic import of teeth and tongue. He is most disturbed by ‘the perpetual chewing of food’, the numerous different methods of chewing exhibited by the diners:

There were so many methods of chewing, since everyone came there to chew. Gian-Luca would watch with a kind of fascination, and their busy moving jaws would make him want to scream at the ugly absurdity of it. Some people would chew with their mouths slightly open; if you faced them, you know the condition of a cutlet about to enter Nirvana. Some people would chew with their lips firmly closed, and this kind occasionally made a small noise, a rhythmical clicking connected with saliva, or their tongues, or perhaps their false teeth. Some chewed with a thoughtful, circular motion that suggested an aftermath of grazing, while others nibbled their food very quickly, like rabbits devouring a lettuce. But the thing that Gian-Luca detested most was a species of ball-bearing jaw-bone, you could see it rotating inside the cheek with the effort of mastication (Hall 1985, 270).

The level of gruesome detail—the rhythmical clicking connected with saliva, and the species of ball-bearing jaw-bone rotating inside the cheek, for example—are just as evocative as the discussion of food near the start of the novel. The close observation of customers in the restaurant is revealing of the body’s intimate relationship with the food we eat, the dirtiness of hands, the functioning of the jaws, teeth, lips, tongue and saliva, gateways to the digestive system, and the ‘absurd’ variations

apparent in their use. He finds himself amazed at the fact that people are content to openly chew in public and in front of each other. Close attention to the bodies of consuming customers reveals the inherently animalistic nature of bodily needs, and the contrived social arrangements of eating practices which disguise and facilitate the public fulfilment of those base needs. Hall's careful prose transmits Gian-Luca's obsessive, monomaniac focus onto the reader, making us suddenly aware of our own mouths and tongues and teeth and saliva, bringing us with Gian-Luca from temptation and appetite to disgust.

Dr Harry Campbell was very concerned with encouraging 'good' mastication, and like Hall, he uses disgust as a rhetorical device; his imagery is particularly evocative. In response to the British Medical Association's condemnation of modern diet, Campbell added that the British public 'have also got the most deplorable teeth', due to the 'pappy' food favoured by the English which hardly called for any chewing: 'boiled vegetables are all soft, and most of our farinaceous food takes a liquid, pappy, pultaceous, or spongy form' (Campbell 1908, 53). These pultaceous foods 'slide down into the stomach with pernicious ease, and afford little or no exercise for the jaws or salivary glands. From the point of view of dietetics the present age may, in this country at least, be characterised as the 'Age of Pap' (Campbell 1908, 53).⁵ His condemnation of these soft British foods seems in tension with the BMA's critique of rich, luxurious, and foreign foods, a tension embodied by Gian-Luca, whose disgust plays out the warnings about modern diet as it manifests in an inability to stomach rich or luxurious foods. At the Doric, the head waiters can feast 'like kings' on the remains of the expensive dishes; Gian-Luca 'would scrape off the rich yellow sauces and soft white billows of cream, but everything he ate would have too strong a flavour' (Hall 1985, 272). He comes to prefer plainer and plainer food, and what Campbell would designate 'pap': 'cooked as the English cook most things, in water, and never a touch of good butter with the beans or the dreary-faced boiled potatoes' (Hall 1985, 279).

Eventually, Gian-Luca cannot bear to eat at all; his throat closes up and he is unable to swallow, the food left filling his mouth. He is diagnosed as suffering from a bad nervous breakdown and the doctor's advice is, ironically, to eat plenty of nourishing food. The linking of his condition to 'overstrained nerves' is telling; as Walton observes, in the early twentieth century, 'the discursive distinction between organic and psychological concepts of the 'nerve' had not yet solidified' (Walton 2010, 246). She sees great potential in exploring 'the modern concept of the nerve and the persistent history of its ambiguity as at once a physiological, a 'mental', and even a cultural phenomenon, especially with regard to its role in peristaltic processes' (Walton 2010, 246).⁶ Initiated by observing the animalistic bodily functions of customers during the post-war feeding frenzy, Gian-Luca's nervous response is also profoundly bodily. He tells Maddelena: 'it is horrible, all this eating. I hate them for it, they are pigs at a trough, they wallow, they make horrid noises. [...] do you know the meaning of hatred? Of a hatred so enormous that it chokes a man's breath and jerks the heart out of his body? [...] I see them exactly as they are, pigs at a trough with their noses in food, and when they are not gorging they are swilling!' (Hall 1985, 271). While relating this to Maddelena, he catches sight of his uneaten breakfast, and all of a sudden he was violently sick' (Hall 1985, 271). His system responds as if the gorging he has witnessed has been absorbed by his own body, experiencing the dyspeptic disordered effects of the collective overconsumption. This is suggestive of the intimate connection between digestion, gastrointestinal health, and emotion, which, as Emilie Taylor-Brown has shown (2018), was well established throughout the nineteenth century. But it also allegorises the communal functioning of the internal

gastrointestinal world in a way that is more specific to a 1920s awareness of the delicate balance of 'good' and 'bad' microorganisms in the gut. This was an era that had witnessed epidemics of dysentery and other bacterial disorders amongst soldiers (see Farre-Maduell and Casals-Pascual 2019), medically-informed public health messaging around eating with a mind to improving your gut bacteria, and a new consumer industry for vitamin supplements and lactobacillin pills. Gian-Luca's response also evidences the strength of the invisible communal and emotional bonds that unite those who serve and feed with those who eat. His condition has a particularly negative impact on his relationship with his community, the social network of feeders who simply cannot comprehend his rejection of both the food-based system they live by, and the needs of his own body.

Reporting on the BMA's condemnation of 'the modern diet', most newspapers chose to quote medical authorities like Campbell. The *Western Gazette* offered an imaginatively different perspective, printing a riposte from the head chef of London's Savoy restaurant, who pointed out that the doctors' own statistics showed that the British race is one of the healthiest, strongest, and 'longest-lived in the world' (Anonymous 1924). He goes on to argue that:

'Food to-day is better than it was even only twenty years ago; it is prepared with less destruction and elimination of vitamins [sic], and there is a greater variety of fruits and vegetables than we have ever been able to command. The doctors say that the teeth of the British people are deteriorating. But surely teeth were at one time weapons of offence, and used for the eating of raw meat. I trust the doctors do not suggest a return to either of these practices' (Anonymous 1924).

This medical debate foregrounds the way in which food is inextricable from identity, both national and individual. The chef's response offers a sarcastic rebuttal to Campbell's idealisation of a primitive diet, pointing out that the nostalgia for the primitive is inherently romanticised. Such discussions of civilised versus primitive diet also play out in Hall's novel, in two phases, each of which involves Gian-Luca playing out different fantasies of cultural difference. First, when he travels to Italy, and second, as he determines to eschew civilisation and live in the wilderness. Both events also build on the structure of the digestive process, following embodied tropes of incorporation, abjection and expulsion.

Expel and purge. When Gian-Luca's condition becomes critical, Maddelena takes him on a trip to Italy, his first visit to the idealised 'homeland'. The initial effect of the holiday is positive; Gian-Luca's health improves, he fills out and becomes tanned. Like Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*, he attempts to obtain Italian identity from proximity to the terroir—the soil, topography and climate of an environment that imparts specific taste to the food it grows—but unlike Jake, he does not try very hard to belong. He makes himself an outsider, primarily through a fastidious care over what he eats, consuming only simple vegetarian food, to the bemusement of the locals. Hall travelled around Italy herself in the early 1920s, and Dellamora views this section of the novel as a response to this experience, Hall critiquing rural Italians for a 'perverse use of their religion to excuse everyday acts of sadism' (Dellamora 2011, xix). Yet continuing to read the novel through the stomach, through food, eating, and digesting, reveals that there is more at play here. Hall's descriptions of the traditional way of life and eating in rural Italy are marked by racial and cultural fantasies, a simultaneous romanticisation of, and

revulsion towards, rural Italian life and landscape. Keyser notes that in modernist literary texts, the countries of Europe 'become utopian spaces where the body recuperates its connection to the soil' (Keyser 2019, 76), and indeed Gian-Luca's first impressions are framed as such: 'the beauty and the wonder of this first home-coming had filled him with a kind of reverential awe' and a 'queer sense of things familiar' (Hall 1985, 299). He concludes, 'this will make me quite well, this is the thing I have been needing' (Hall 1985, 300). Yet, as Keyser adds, the 'impression of timelessness' in these settings 'supports a primitivist fiction about the peasantry and their pure racial antecedents' (Keyser 2019, 76). Gian-Luca sees children playing 'on the hot, virile soil, and whose bare arms and legs were the colour of copper, so that they seemed to be part of the soil' (Hall 1985, 300), and Gian-Luca feels a desire to 'lay his cheek close to this earth and let all the strength of it go throbbing through him' (Hall 1985, 300). The people—'peasants', as Hall calls them—are stereotypically sensual, earthy, uncivilised, their bodies at one with the landscape: 'the paths between the vines were strewn with crushed grapes, and the air was heavy with a queer, intense odour of fermentation and sweating human bodies; it smelt of fertility, virility and women, all steaming together in the sunshine' (Hall 1985, 304). For American authors like Hemingway and Stein, the 'identification between peasant body, sustaining soil, and local food' is a way of mourning 'their own deracination' (Keyser 2019, 76). There is something similar at work in *Adam's Breed*. While the protagonist's longing to lay claim to his own racial roots is at more of a distance from the text's author, the lush descriptions of soil, sun, fermentation, and coppery people indicate just such a sensuous immersion in food and soil, which might allow an absorption of Italian identity through proximity and ingestion, as well as a primitivist fiction. Yet, unlike in Hemingway and Stein, the entanglements between the body and the soil, which felt healing and nourishing to Gian-Luca at first, become more and more unsettling.

The trip provides the opportunity for a series of encounters with the origins of food and drink production, a tracing back of roots that parallels Gian-Luca's search for his own identity. Far from the tinned preserves in the Casa Boselli, and the elaborate dishes of the Doric, here we see the farm, the grape harvest and poultry on its way to market. Gian-Luca and Maddelena visit the winery to see grapes being processed:

in each vat a man was prancing and stamping, raising his knees with a rhythmical motion grotesquely suggestive of dancing. The cellars were full of the soft, slushing sound made by the grapes in drying; a sound half solid, half liquid, that mingled with the grunts and the heavy breathing of the men, and the creaking of the age-old barrels. [...] Then someone must pause to have a good spit—for habit will defy most conventions—and if he was dexterous he spat clear of his barrel, but if not—oh well, then the juices of the body would be mingled with the juices of the vine! (Hall 1985, 309–310).

While the pastoral setting is initially conducive to Gian-Luca's mental state and health, he is disturbed by two things: first, the evidence of the entanglement of the body with food and drink, as here in the winery, the soft slushing of the dying grapes mingling with the grunts, breath, and bodily fluids of the men. Second, the cruelty to animals he witnesses at the hands of the Italian farmers. To the incredulity of his hosts, he exhibits deep concern and feeling for the suffering of creatures: a crate stuffed full to bursting with chickens, the old mare that struggles to pull the market-wagon, the beetles and butterflies crushed for sport by the teenage son: 'never before had Gian-Luca realised the helplessness of those who cannot speak [...] Gian-Luca would lie in bed sick

with pity for the patient, enduring creatures (Hall 1985, 314–315). He chooses to eat only simple things like bread, cheese and fruit, which further alienates him from the Italian community he is living amongst. Gian-Luca's view of the Italian peasantry is fraught with internal contradictions, evidencing an idealised reverence for purer forms of life, undercut by a perception of backwardness and racial inferiority. Gian-Luca's personal trajectory demonstrates a similar duality: a backwards-looking romanticised nostalgia for older, 'purer' ways of life, and a more forward-looking engagement with 'modern', alternative ways of living and eating, such as vegetarianism and animal rights activism.⁷

These two approaches to diet and health are also encompassed in early twentieth-century medical texts. Campbell advocates studying the diet of 'healthy races living under primitive conditions' to learn about 'man's diet at the late pre-agricultural phase' (Campbell 1926a, 808), to garner what the human body requires, a nostalgic return to some sort of pre-industrial state of humanity. His linking of racial ethnography to diet is also suggestive of double-edged primitivism: the implied superiority of the white mind as scientific observer is implicit, even as he praises the superiority of native diets. The medical impulse to get back to nature and the 'natural' is mirrored in Gian-Luca's own retreat into the forest. He leaves London and sets out without a map, following his feet, but the route of his pilgrimage, which he describes as a 'tramp', is detailed clearly enough for a reader to map it out; beginning from his house in Millman Street, he walks out of London, through the boroughs of Basingstoke and Winchester, eventually coming to Lyndhurst and the New Forest. He settles into this wilderness, befriending animals and subsisting on nuts and berries. Campbell argued that 'it was the search after animal food which caused our ape-ancestor to abandon the forest' (Campbell 1917, 435), in other words, that human evolution was directly brought about by the shift to meat-eating. Gian-Luca's shunning of meat and retreat into the forest suggests a reversal of this evolutionary trajectory. Yet he is concurrently moving towards the more natural way of eating that Campbell advocates, emulating modern dietary practices. A cornerstone of Campbell's idealised diet is 'the abundance of raw vegetable foods requiring vigorous mastication' (Campbell 1926a, 808). While described by some dieticians such as Edmund Cautley as 'a charming fancy of delicate and highly sensitive women and among sentimentalists' (Cautley 1908, 196), vegetarianism was a growing movement in the early 1920s. Gian-Luca's experience in Italy, followed by his development in this forest setting, could be read as an allegory of coming to vegetarianism. Yet Gian-Luca enters into communion with the nonhuman—the forest and its creatures—as an escape from the oppressive aspects of modernity. He thus embodies the coexistence of seemingly contrary perspectives—modern and nostalgic—on food and eating.

Meanwhile, Gian-Luca's retreat is the next logical phase in the digestive structure of the text, which has brought us from appetite and ingestion, through surfeit and sickening, now to expulsion. Gian-Luca has ejected himself, expelled his own body from society and civilisation: 'a great longing for freedom of movement possessed him; he wanted to be quite untrammelled' (Hall 1985, 347). His journey is also a psychogeographical escape, the city like an intestinal tract 'stretching out its coils, trying to trip him, impede him' (Hall 1985, 348), while the trees are 'tramping beside him' (Hall 1985, 350), pointing and sweeping him along, directing his route, and when he passes the last town 'the greenness clamoured more loudly; he could hear that clamour in the beating of his heart' (Hall 1985, 357). The embodied trope of abjection and expulsion is succeeded by incorporation, as he becomes one with the forest. The people he encounters along the way and

builds affinity with are fellow outcasts, the discarded waste of society. During his ‘tramp’ he befriends an actual tramp, and in exchange for pork pies and beer is taught the mystical ways of the ‘Brothers of the Road’—another fantasy of cultural difference, a cosplaying of poverty which the tramp is alert to, mocking Gian-Luca as ‘one of them crackbrains wot wants ter live simple’ (Hall 1985, 352). This designates Gian-Luca’s eccentric behaviour as in fact part of a wider cultural phenomenon, a counterculture ‘crackbrained’ movement defined by a desire to return to nature and simplicity. Responding to the British Medical Association’s attacks on modern diet, a *Nottingham Evening Post* article entitled ‘The Lucky Tramp!’ quotes Dr John Wynne Yorke-Davies commenting that ninety-nine per cent of the public eat ‘three times too much food’ (Yorke-Davies 1924). Gian-Luca echoes this medical belief as he struggles to eat, as ‘his stomach had grown unaccustomed to food’, that ‘it must be that I do not need it [...] everyone eats too much!’ (Hall 1985, 373). Dr Yorke-Davies continues: ‘probably one of the most obvious examples of the results of the two different kinds of fare can be seen by studying the plain-living tramp, who is usually a sturdy, bronzed, almost perfect specimen of manhood, in comparison with the motor-car lounging, overfeeding magnate’ (Yorke-Davies 1924). This naïve idealisation of the tramp’s way of life is reflected in Gian-Luca, who sees the tramp as an aspirational antithesis of both the motor-car lounging, overfeeding magnate and the ‘greasy’, ‘greedy’ motorcars themselves.

Gian-Luca’s starvation in the forest seems to be satirising the fears of the medical profession about rich and foreign foods, a thought experiment in which a character embodies medical fears about diet to their most extreme in order to demonstrate that excess, immoderation, prodigality in *all things*, food or ideas, is where the danger lies. The results of this extremism are tangible in the novel’s language. In this section of the text, any details about what Gian-Luca eats are suddenly absent, a stark erasure in a text whose early passages are built around potent descriptions of food. Its early accounts of gustatory delight are replaced by spartan prose, which drifts and loses sense of time without the organising thread of food preparation and mealtimes, which give a clear structure to life. As Gian-Luca loses his appetite, absent-mindedly forgets to eat, and ultimately begins to starve, the reader too feels an absence, an emptiness, as the presence of food is all but removed from the narrative. This amnesia reflects the forgetfulness inherent in the nostalgia for a misunderstood past: the romanticisation of ‘the primitive’, the assumption about and appropriation of other cultural identities, and a rose-tinted overlooking of lessons learnt from history. In Gian-Luca, the forgetfulness of nostalgia is physicalised in his forgetting to eat. Nostalgia is thus shown to be both socially and physically dangerous, and an ineffective cipher around which to structure one’s life.

This section of the novel could have formed a pastoral narrative of retreat and revelation, but for Gian-Luca, there is no enlightened return. He has taken on in his own body the indigestion, sickness, and fast that follows the post-war frenzy of consuming, like Christ taking on the sins of mankind, and ultimately dies of starvation. His community cannot comprehend this manner of death; Teresa looks down at the wasted face of her grandson and keeps repeating incredulously: ‘so much food in the world [...] and they think that he died of starvation!’ (Hall 1985, 382). In his final days, his weakness and exposure prompt visions, the most striking of which occurs just as he dies. An overwhelming despair at all the suffering in the world gives way to the sudden, powerful awareness that the world’s suffering cannot be escaped but must be joined and embraced, and he comes full circle to his original calling of serving or service to others, a duty to help the helpless. Gian-Luca’s

decisions in the latter half of the book are, on one level, an exploration of asceticism that follows the importance Hall placed on the ascetic practices of Catholicism and alternative spiritualism. Yet while fasting and retreat are suggested to have some positive benefits, Gian-Luca’s starvation and death seem to critique an extreme version of asceticism which results in neglecting community and service to others. I prefer to interpret Gian-Luca’s final days through the lens of what David Shuttleton defines as the modernist ‘queer pastoral’: ‘a return to a lost primitivism, or a reversion to a polymorphously perverse, pre-oedipal imaginary, queer pastoral can be read as personally ennobling and culturally restorative’ (Shuttleton 2000, 127). While this ill-timed revelation about social responsibility and community comes tragically too late for Gian-Luca, it does point to an ennobling and culturally restorative moral: that meaning is found through involvement and hope rather than retreat and despair, facing and addressing the realities of suffering rather than avoiding them, and supporting and serving your community. It is important that food and digestion are the vehicles Hall chose for this message; it is told in and through our most fundamental needs and bodily processes: hunger, eating and digestion. The novel navigates questions of base needs, higher callings, and the self, via a surfeit of rich descriptions of food preparation, consuming, enjoyment, indigestion, and disgust. It works its way through numerous (mis)understandings of hunger and sustenance, and moments of despair and longing, which eventually prove to be—at least potentially—productive and galvanising.

Conclusion

Hall combines the physiological and the philosophical, writing about community, society, gender, sexuality, love, religion, war, and service through the medium of digestion. The novel weaves together descriptions of food systems and contexts (the external) with embodied experiences of eating (the internal) demonstrating the interconnected nature of bodies and food ecologies in the early twentieth century. The evocative descriptions of food, in moments of both enjoyment and disgust, satirise medical crusades against rich, exotic, and foreign foods, concerns about preserved foods, and foods which are too soft and ‘pappy’, and the medical fetishisation of primitivism. The novel depicts the over-indulgence of the stomachs of the Lost Generation following the war, the increasing detachment of consumers from the origins of their fare, and the growing popularity of counterculture food movements like vegetarianism. The book is not interested in food alone, but the internal body and its digestive system: what happens to that food once it passes out of sight and is absorbed by the body, becomes part of the self. At the start of the novel, when Gian-Luca is a baby and suffering from colic, we are told: ‘of course, one’s stomach being nearly the whole of one, it is apt to have very large pains’ (Hall 1985, 21). Hall is experimenting with the idea that the stomach is the self, or at least a significant portion of the self; a holistic view that encompasses the physiological body and speaks to an understanding of digestion as fundamental to shaping selfhood. Yet this is held in productive tension with a view of the stomach as a site where individual identity breaks down. While Gian-Luca’s inability to assimilate back into his community and previous role marks him as an indigestible obstruction which must be ejected, his resistance to being swallowed up by post-war social appetites constitutes a stand for individuality, a refusal to be absorbed into a collective social body. Hall recognises the gut and processes of digestion as both a defining aspect of the self and a barometer of the social tensions of a modern society grappling with issues of identity and community in the wake of the war.

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Notes

- 1 There were upwards of 20,000 first-generation Italian expats in the United Kingdom in 1915, many of whom made their living in the food trades.
- 2 *Adam's Breed* was one of only two books to win both prizes; the other was *A Passage to India*. The following year, Virginia Woolf won the Femina prize with *To The Lighthouse*. The Femina Vie Heureuse prize was a post-war British offshoot of the French Prix Femina, running from 1919 to 1940. (Archive of minutes and papers held by Cambridge University Library).
- 3 London's real Little Italy is (and was) located in Clerkenwell, about a mile and a half away from Old Compton Street.
- 4 This passage recalls Manon Mathias's (2018) discussion of Zola's association of food with dirt and putrefaction in *Le Ventre de Paris* (*The Belly of Paris*, 1873), though Hall's source of foulness and stench is the modern motorcar rather than the food market. Much of the description through Gian-Luca's disgusted perspective post-war seems to mimic what Mathias observes as Zola's shift from a focus on the stomach to 'privileging instead the life of the mind' (Mathias 2018, 162). Indeed, rather than a privileging of the spiritual over the bodily, Hall's conclusion implies, as Mathias observes of Zola's novel, that the body cannot be transcended, reiterating the 'paradoxical co-dependence between the body and the mind' (Mathias 2018, 173).
- 5 Campbell provides a list of these commonly eaten pappy foods, which incidentally offers a glimpse—however biased—into everyday British diet in the early 1920s: mashed potatoes, soft bread, rusks soaked in milk, porridge, gruel, milk puddings such as tapioca, butter, suet and plum puddings, caraway seed cake, scones, buns, muffins, crumpets, and pastry.
- 6 See also Kristine Lillestøl's essay for a detailed discussion of nervous disorders of the gut: how 'neurasthenia in its heyday in many cases was perceived as a disorder which was closely associated with the gut' (Lillestøl 2018, 1). She details how some doctors even believed that neurasthenia was caused by gastric derangement, rather than the other way around.
- 7 Hall's interest in food and the discourse of primitivism in dietary and dental medicine can be more broadly applied beyond *Adam's Breed*. While the role of primitivism in *The Well of Loneliness* has been discussed (see Doan and Prosser 2001), fewer scholars have examined Hall's work from the perspective of modernist food studies, for example drawn attention to protagonist Stephen Gordon's sweet tooth. Furthermore, Gian-Luca's affinity with the animal kingdom and refusal to eat meat also reflects broader themes at work in Hall's oeuvre: Hall was an animal lover (see D'Stair 2020; Bauer 2022), and *The Well of Loneliness* incorporates discussion of animal rights, as do her short stories 'Bonaparte', 'The Legend of St Ethelflaeda', and 'The Scarecrow'.

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Ethical approval was not required as this article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent

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Additional information

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