THE
CAMBRIDGE EDITION OF
THE WORKS OF
JOSEPH CONRAD

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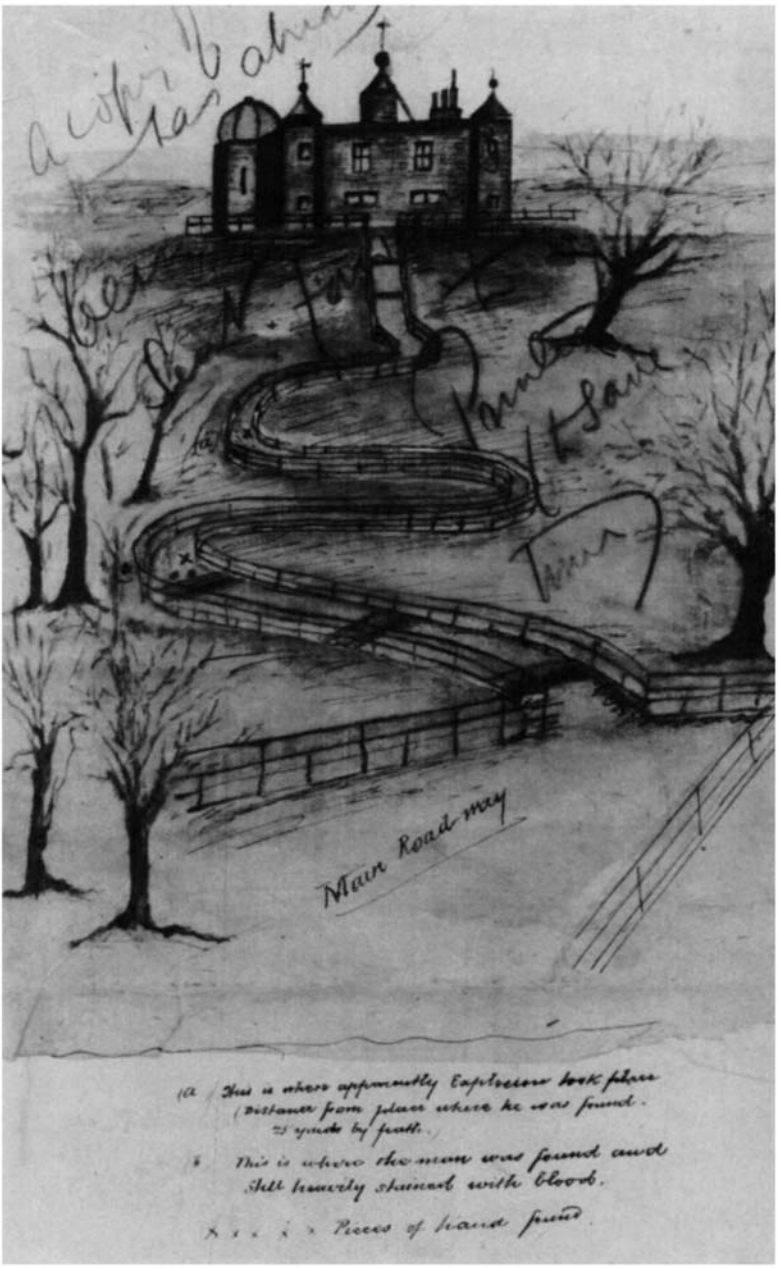
THE SECRET AGENT



The official police artist's rendering of the Greenwich Observatory outrage. The explosion apparently took place at the upper bend in the pathway (a); the man was found at the lower (b). Reduced approx. 50%. Original in color.

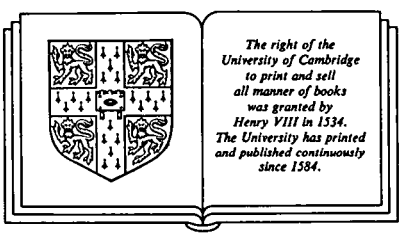
JOSEPH CONRAD

THE SECRET AGENT

A SIMPLE TALE

EDITED BY
Bruce Harkness
AND
S. W. Reid

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Nancy Birk



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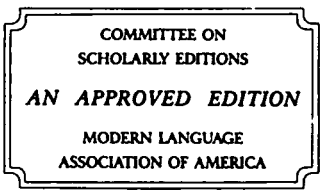

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PREFACE

JOSEPH CONRAD's place in twentieth-century literature is now firmly established. His novels, stories, and other writings have become integral to modern thought and culture. Yet the need for an accurate and authoritative edition of these works remains. Owing to successive rounds of authorial revision, transmissional errors, and deliberate editorial intervention, Conrad's texts exist in various unsatisfactory and sometimes confused forms. In his last years he attempted to have his works published in a uniform edition that would fix and preserve them for posterity. But though trusted by scholars, students, and general readers alike, the received texts in the British and American collected editions published since 1921 have proved to be at least as defective as their predecessors. The Cambridge Edition, grounded in thorough research on the original documents, is designed to reverse this trend by presenting Conrad's novels, stories, and other prose in texts that are as trustworthy as modern scholarship can make them.

The present volume contains critical texts of *The Secret Agent* and of the 'Author's Note'. The Cambridge text of *The Secret Agent* is based on the first English edition but incorporates readings drawn from the incomplete holograph manuscript as well as editorial emendations. The text of the 'Author's Note', which also incorporates emendations and variant readings, is based on the extant revised typescript. The 'Introduction' provides a literary history of the work focused on its genesis, development, and reception and its place in Conrad's life and time. The essay on 'The Texts' traces its textual history and that of the 'Author's Note', examining the sources of the texts and explaining the policies followed in editing them. The apparatus records basic textual evidence, documenting the discussion of genealogy and authority in 'The Texts' as well as other editorial decisions, while the 'Notes' comment on specific readings that require glosses or involve special textual problems. Although they may interest the great variety of readers, the 'Introduction' and 'Notes' are written primarily for an audience of non-specialists, whereas the textual essay and apparatus are intended for the scholar and specialist.

This volume follows certain policies and conventions observed throughout the Cambridge Edition. Notes are not signalled in the text, but for the reader's convenience the headlines in the 'Notes' refer to the

pages of the text under consideration. Conrad's other works are cited from volumes of the Cambridge Edition already published, or else from the Doubleday collected edition in its Sun-Dial printing (1921) or in the Dent printings (1923 and subsequently). Superior letters (e.g., 'Mr') in the original documents have been lowered (i.e., to 'Mr'). The beginnings of paragraphs are represented by standard modern indentation regardless of the various conventions of these documents, and Conrad's '—„' is reduced to simple inverted commas. Long dashes of variable lengths are printed as one-em dashes. Other typographical elements in the texts and titles of the original documents (e.g., display capitals, chapter heads, running titles) have been standardized.

The texts and apparatus in this volume were prepared by computer. Those interested in data and documentation not published here should contact the General Editors.

In addition to those named in the Acknowledgements, the editors wish to thank the Trustees and beneficiaries of the Estate of Joseph Conrad and Doubleday and Company and J. M. Dent and Company for permission the publish these new texts of Conrad's works. The support of the institutions and individuals listed on p. vii has been essential to the success of the series and is gratefully acknowledged.

THE GENERAL EDITORS

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We also wish to express our gratitude to present and former administrators of Kent State University, including, in alphabetical order, Robert D. Bamberg, Rudolph O. Buttlar, Cheryl A. Casper, Alex Gildzen, Charlee Heimlich, Dean H. Keller, Gordon W. Keller, Hyman Kritzer, Terry Kuhn, Thomas D. Moore, Glenn A. Olds, Terry P. Roark, Michael Schwartz, John W. Snyder, Don L. Tolliver, Carol M. Toncar, and Eugene P. Wenninger. Acknowledgement of special support goes to the staffs of Kent State's Libraries (Don L. Tolliver, Director) and Computer Services (William E. McKinley, Jr., Director).

The facsimiles of MS pages of *The Secret Agent* are reproduced by courtesy of the Rosenbach Museum and Library; the frontispiece is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Special thanks goes to Edgar F. Harden, James B. Meriwether, and Peter L. Shillingsburg.

CHRONOLOGY

Joseph Conrad's life may be seen as having several distinct stages: in Poland and in Russian exile before his father's death (1857–69); in Poland and the south of France under the care of his maternal uncle (1870–79); in the British merchant marine, mainly as junior officer sailing in the Far East (1880–early 1890s); after a transitional period (early 1890s), as writer of critical esteem (1895–1914); as acclaimed writer, though perhaps with his greatest work achieved (1914–24). After 1895 the history of his life is essentially the history of his works. Publication dates given below are those of the London editions, unless otherwise specified.

1857 December 3	Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski (Nałęcz coat-of-arms) born in Berdichev, or vicinity, in the Polish Ukraine to Apollo and Ewelina (or Ewa), née Bobrowska, Korzeniowski
1862 May	Korzeniowski, his wife, and son forced into exile in Russia
1865 April	Ewa Korzeniowska dies
1868	Korzeniowski permitted to leave Russia
1869 February	Korzeniowski and Conrad move to Cracow
May	Korzeniowski dies
1870	Conrad, under care of uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski, begins study with tutor, Adam Pulman
1873 May	Visits Switzerland and northern Italy; first view of the sea
1874 October	Takes position in Marseilles with Delestang et Fils, bankers and shippers
1875	Apprentice in *Mont-Blanc*
1876–77	In *Saint-Antoine*
1878 February/March	Attempts suicide
April	Leaves Marseilles in British steamer *Mavis*
June	Lands at Lowestoft, Suffolk; first time in England
July–September	Sails as ordinary seaman in *Skimmer of the Sea* (coastal waters of British Isles)

1878–80	In *Duke of Sutherland*, *Europa*
1880	Meets G. F. W. Hope, Adolph Krieger
June	Passes examination for second mate
1880–81	Third mate in *Loch Etive*
1881–84	Second mate in *Palestine*, *Riversdale*, *Narcissus*
1884 December	Passes examination for first mate
1885–86	Second mate in *Tilkhurst*
1886	Submits perhaps his first story, 'The Black Mate', in *Tit-Bits* competition
August	Becomes a British subject
November	Passes examination for master; receives 'Certificate of Competency as Master'
1886–87	Second mate in *Falconhurst*
1887–88	First mate in *Highland Forest*, in *Vidar*
1888–89	Captain of barque *Otago*
1889 Autumn	Begins *Almayer's Folly* in London
1890 February–April	In Poland for first time since 1874
May–December	To the Congo as second-in-command, then temporarily as captain, of *Roi des Belges*
1891	Manages warehouse of Barr, Moering, London
1891–93	First mate in *Torrens*
1893	Meets John Galsworthy, Edward L. Sanderson
Autumn	Visits Bobrowski in Polish Ukraine
November	Signs on as second mate in *Adowa*, which never makes voyage
1894 January	Ends career as seaman
February	Bobrowski dies
	Meets Edward Garnett, Jessie George
1895 April	*Almayer's Folly* published
1896 March	*An Outcast of the Islands*. Marries Jessie George; honeymoon in Brittany
	Settles in Stanford-le-Hope, Essex
1897	Begins friendship with R. B. Cunninghame Graham; meets Henry James
December	*The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*
1898	Meets Ford Madox (Hueffer) Ford, H. G. Wells, and Stephen Crane
January	Alfred Borys Conrad born
April	*Tales of Unrest*

October	Moves to Pent Farm, Stanford, Kent, sub-let from Ford
1899	Begins association with J. B. Pinker
1900 October	*Lord Jim*
1901 June	*The Inheritors* (with Ford)
1902 November	*Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories*
1903 April	*Typhoon and Other Stories*
October	*Romance* (with Ford)
1904 October	*Nostromo*
1905	At work on *The Mirror of the Sea* and the 'old manuscript of *Chance*'
June	*One Day More* staged in London
1906	Meets Arthur Marwood
January 24	'An Anarchist' accepted by *Harper's Magazine*
February	On Continent to economize. At work on 'The Informer'
February 13	Begins 'Verloc' at Montpellier, southern France
March 22	'The Informer' accepted by *Harper's Magazine*
April 9	Has completed 14,000 words of 'Verloc'
April 16	Returns to Pent Farm with approximately three chapters of 'Verloc' completed
May 11	Begins fortnight's stay at Winchelsea (Ford's house)
May 12	Robert Anderson's *Sidelights on the Home Rule Movement* published
July 10	Begins stay in London (Galsworthy's house) for Jessie's confinement
August 2	John Alexander Conrad born; 'Verloc' still called a story
September 10	First third of book form of *The Secret Agent* completed, about one-half of manuscript, or serial, version
September 12	At Pent working on second half of serial version
October	*The Mirror of the Sea*
November 2	Completes extant MS of *The Secret Agent* – the truncated serial version, two-thirds of book form
November 7	Writes Methuen about publishing *The Secret Agent*, requesting galley proofs

December	Family leaves for Paris/Montpellier/Geneva
1907 January–March	At work on *Chance*; Borys ill
March	Typesetting of *The Secret Agent* begins; proofs inadvertently kept at post office in Kent
May 18	Page-proofs of *The Secret Agent* finally reach Conrad in Geneva; John ill
June–July	Geneva/Champel, sons ill. After 'correcting' Methuen proofs, writes last third of book form
August 2–5	Corrects Methuen proofs of last third
August 10	Returns to Pent Farm
September 12	*The Secret Agent* published in London. Moves to Someries, Luton, Bedfordshire
1908 August	*A Set of Six*
1909	Moves to Aldington, Kent
1910	Moves to Capel House, Orlestone, Kent
1911 October	*Under Western Eyes*
1912 January	*A Personal Record* (*Some Reminiscences*)
October	*'Twixt Land and Sea*
1913 September	*Chance*, with 'main' publication date of January 1914
1914 July–November	Visits Poland with family; delayed by outbreak of First World War; returns via Austria and Italy
1915 February	*Within the Tides*
September	*Victory*
1917 March	*The Shadow-Line*
1919 March	Moves to Spring Grove, near Wye, Kent
August	*The Arrow of Gold*
October	Moves to Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury, Kent
1920 June	*The Rescue*
1921	Visits Corsica. Collected Editions begin publication in England (Heinemann) and in America (Doubleday)
February	*Notes on Life and Letters*
1922 November	*The Secret Agent* staged in London
1923 May–June	Visits America, guest of F. N. Doubleday
December	*The Rover*
1924 May	Declines knighthood

August 3	Dies at Oswalds (Roman Catholic burial, Canterbury)
September	*The Nature of a Crime* (with Ford)
October	*The Shorter Tales*
1925 January	*Tales of Hearsay*
September	*Suspense* (unfinished)
1926 March	*Last Essays*
1928 June	*The Sisters*

CUE-TITLES AND ABBREVIATIONS

[London is the place of publication unless otherwise indicated.]

Bacon	G. W. Bacon, ed., *Bacon's New Large-Scale Atlas of London and Suburbs*. 1907
Baedeker, 1885	K. Baedeker, *London and Its Environs*. Leipsic, 1885
Baedeker, 1897	K. Baedeker, *Great Britain*. Leipsic, 1897
Baedeker, 1901	K. Baedeker, *Great Britain*. Leipsic, 1901
Baedeker, 1908	Carl Baedeker, *London and Its Environs*. Leipsig, 1908
Baines	Jocelyn Baines, *Joseph Conrad: A Critical Biography*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960
Blackburn	*Joseph Conrad: Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum*, ed. William Blackburn. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1958
Brewer	*Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, rev. Ivor H. Evans. New York: Harper and Row, 1981.
CEW	Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Eastern World*. Cambridge University Press, 1966
CH	Norman Sherry, *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973
CHW	Norman Sherry, *Conrad and His World*. Thames and Hudson, 1972
CWW	Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Western World*. Cambridge University Press, 1971
Curle	*Conrad to a Friend. 150 Selected Letters from Joseph Conrad to Richard Curle*, ed. Richard Curle. Sampson Low, Marston, 1928
Garnett	*Letters from Joseph Conrad, 1895–1924*, ed. Edward Garnett. Nonesuch Press, 1928
Gee and Sturm	*Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, 1890–1920*, trans. and ed. John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940
Gordan	John Gordan, *Joseph Conrad: The Making of a*

	Novelist. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1940
Harrison	Michael Harrison, *In the Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes*. Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971
Jessie Conrad, 1926	Jessie Conrad, *Joseph Conrad: As I Knew Him*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page, 1926
Jessie Conrad, 1935	Jessie Conrad, *Joseph Conrad and his Circle*. Jarrolds, 1935
Karl	Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979
Letters	*The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies. 3 vols. Cambridge University Press, 1983–
Lincoln	Kenneth Robert Lincoln, 'Joseph Conrad: The Comedy of Perception'. Unpublished dissertation, Indiana University, 1969
LL	*Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, ed. G. Jean-Aubry. 2 vols. Heinemann, 1927
Morf	Gustav Morf, *The Polish Shades and Ghosts of Joseph Conrad*. New York: Astra Books, 1976
Najder	Zdzisław Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
Sherry	Norman Sherry, 'Notes' to *The Secret Agent*. Dent, 1974, pp. 312–33
Smith	Roslyn Walls Smith, 'The Dates of Composition of Conrad's Work', *Conradiana*, 11 (1979), 63–64
Smith / Thompson	*Street Life in London*, text by Adolphe Smith, photographs by John Thompson. 1877; rpt. New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1969
Stallman	R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes, eds., *Stephen Crane: Letters*. New York University Press, 1960
van Marle	Hans van Marle, 'Conrad's English Lodgings, 1880–1886', *Conradiana*, 8 (1976), 257–58
Watts	*Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunninghame Graham*, ed. C. T. Watts. Cambridge University Press, 1969

Locations of Unpublished Documents

Berg	Berg Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations
BL	The British Library
Colgate	Colgate University Library
Princeton	Firestone Library, Princeton University

INTRODUCTION

NOW CONSIDERED the second best novel by one of this century's greatest writers, *The Secret Agent* has yet been undervalued. Coming after *Nostromo*, it apparently lacks that novel's great sweep. *Nostromo* is a novel about the historical process, showing on a grand scale the ways in which individual and economic forces operate like a vector to produce a future and a direction for an entire society which none of its constituent parts wants. *The Secret Agent* works by opposite methods. Its realist surface symbolically demonstrates the moral equivalences of individual and domestic secret motives with those of European society as a whole. And this by what Conrad called his 'purely artistic purpose, that of applying the ironic method to a subject of that kind'[1] – a purpose and mode which, though commonly recognized, has yet to receive its due place in literary history. For sustained irony nothing can touch the novel's magnitude and achievement. Compared to *The Secret Agent*, Fielding's *Jonathan Wild the Great* is child's play. In its irony and symbolism, its realism, its conjunction of the mainstream novel and the detective story, *The Secret Agent* may well be *the* modern novel, where every word counts and reverberates not only through the entire novel but in our very consciousness. Like 'Heart of Darkness', it has become a touchstone of modern memory.

In his 'Author's Note' Conrad gives an account of the roots of the *The Secret Agent* that makes the reader question to what extent he is artistically reporting the creative process and to what degree he is deceiving himself, or his readers. To some critics he has seemed unusually open, but in fact the 'Author's Note' requires careful interpretation. Although Conrad's remarks provide critical insight – as when he explicitly states that Winnie is the protagonist, just as he had emphasized to his American readers that the crew, not Wait, is the protagonist of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* – he often exhibits ambivalence in this preface.[2] On the one hand, he wishes to ground the novel in actual fact –

[1] See p. 7; previous editions read 'an ironic method'. Subsequent references to the text of this edition appear in round brackets.

[2] And elsewhere as well. Conrad misled readers well into the 1940s with his statement that he knew nothing of some of the main sources of the novel. See his letter to Ambrose J. Barker of 1 September 1923 (*LL*, II, 322), where he states inaccurately that 'as a matter of fact I never knew anything of what was called, if I remember rightly, the

the incident involving anarchists in London recounted by Ford Madox Ford, the 'inside knowledge of a certain event in the history of active anarchism' which he boasted of to Algernon Methuen.[3] His delight with reports from America as to its literal accuracy is apparent (p. 8). On the other hand, he is arguing that the novel is not essentially about anarchism as a social movement or a philosophy. He wishes it to be read as the story of Winnie, a domestic tragedy (as, in the novel itself, only the Assistant Commissioner perceives).

Initially Conrad seems to have conceived of the novel as the husband's story, and to have written the material through Chapter 4 as a short story about him. As we begin our initial reading, its title still refers to Adolf Verloc, not Winnie. Only as we proceed does reflection reveal that she, too, like virtually all the characters, is acting in secret. Perhaps it was only on reflection that Conrad himself discovered the true center of his 'tale' as his creative imagination transformed his sources into Winnie's story.

The Sources

By now the basic facts of the Greenwich Bomb Outrage are familiar to the reader of Conrad. On 15 February 1894, Martial Bourdin, a French anarchist, apparently attempted to blow up the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park. As a result of an accidental explosion, Bourdin, a youth who in physique resembled the novel's victim, fatally injured himself in the Park before reaching the revered buildings. Horribly mutilated, he was discovered by a Park official, who had him rushed to a nearby hospital where he survived only half an hour. The next day *The Times* reported that 'the sound of the explosion was heard as far away as the Chatham and Dover Railway station in Stockwell-street on the west and Maze-hill station on the South-Eastern Railway on the east' (16 February 1894, p. 5).

"Greenwich Bomb Outrage." I was out of England when it happened, and thus I never read what was printed in the newspapers at the time.' As many have pointed out, notably Norman Sherry (*CWW*, pp. 228–29), Conrad had returned to England and must have read newspaper accounts, talked to Ford, and perhaps knew some of the historical personages himself. Conrad was essentially concerned to convince Barker of the novel's artistic fidelity: 'All I was aware of was the mere fact – my novel being, in intention, the history of Winnie Verloc.' (Quotations from published letters reproduce the texts of the originals whenever practical, though references are to the printed volumes.)

[3] *Letters*, III, 371.

The initial public reaction was shock and dismay. The police's response was swift by the day's standards, and once investigation had begun, the incident was the focus of general public attention and outrage. According to the *Morning Leader* 'Scotland Yard was communicated with by telegraph. ... One of the chiefs of the Criminal Investigation Department proceeded at once to Greenwich' (*CWW*, p. 236). Although officials connected the explosion with an attempt on the Observatory buildings themselves, Bourdin's motives remained mysterious to the general public and the incident itself thus unexplained. It was Ford who in discussing the Greenwich Outrage with Conrad supplied him a clue: 'Oh, that fellow was half an idiot. His sister committed suicide afterwards' (p. 5). It was essentially out of such detail that Conrad developed the whole story of Verloc and Winnie.

The Greenwich bombing was perhaps the most outrageous of numerous incidents in late Victorian England that would now be called acts of terrorism. Dynamite was invented in 1866 and was promptly put to this use. In 1883, for instance, there were attacks on the Local Government Office, Charles Street, Whitehall, as well as on the *Times* offices, the tunnel between Charing Cross and Westminster stations, and the Praed Street Station; and in 1884, on Victoria Station (underground), the original Scotland Yard, the Junior Carlton Club, the Nelson Monument, and London Bridge. In 1885 there was a bombing at the Metropolitan Railway (underground) near Gower Street, and 24 January saw three attempts partially blocked – on the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Hall, and the Tower. Abroad there was the 1886 explosion at Chicago's Haymarket, and three days before Bourdin's attempt at Greenwich, the anarchist Émile Henry had bombed the Café Terminal in Paris. The Greenwich Outrage was by no means without precedent.[4] But its peculiar nature made it especially shocking, and the novel grew out of Conrad's attempt to find some motive beneath this act of madness and despair.

The other strand of the novel – the ironic portrayal of the forces of law and order – came to Conrad through the memoirs of Sir Robert Anderson, which concern Scotland Yard's efforts to protect the realm. The precipitating incident bore on secrecy. According to Conrad, Sir William Harcourt criticized Anderson for dealing with an unexpected

[4] In *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (1985), Barbara A. Melchiori has extended discussions of dynamite terrorists and the Irish Question, as well as specific analysis of the irony and background of *The Secret Agent* (pp. 74–82).

outrage thus: 'All that's very well. But your idea of secrecy over there seems to consist of keeping the Home Secretary in the dark' (p. 6).[5]

Anderson's volume contained something that particularly intrigued Conrad. He tells us 'there must have been however some sort of atmosphere in the whole incident because all of a sudden I felt myself stimulated', and that was the catalyst for the story. Anderson, who was not talking about anarchists as such but about Irish Fenians (the forerunners of the IRA), focused his memoirs on 'Henri Le Caron', a double agent reporting directly to Anderson, much as Verloc reports to Heat, not the Yard. Double Agentry is what stimulated Conrad – private double agentry.

These are the two external sources Conrad specifically cites in the 'Author's Note'. But another source of inspiration, an internal one, has not received its due critical attention, though he mentions it there (p. 7). 'I had to fight hard to keep at arms-length the memories of my solitary and nocturnal walks all over London in my early days, lest they should rush in and overwhelm each page of the story as these emerged one after another from a mood as sincere in feeling and thought as any in which I ever wrote a line.' This recalls the Conrad of the early 1890s: isolated, a transplanted Pole lately escaped from the Congo, with *Almayer's Folly* not completed, he tramped the gloomy streets of the world's largest city, a man newly driven into the contemplative and introspective life, having only one decent berth at sea between the Congo fiasco and the *Adowa* fiasco, from which he had just returned when the newspapers became full of the Greenwich bombing; plagued by jungle fever or 'gout', nervous, exhausted, bearing Kurtz's ghosts, which would not be laid till he wrote 'Heart of Darkness' at the end of the century. In these days Conrad had but one or two friends in England; he scarcely knew the language, was often out of work (the uncongenial warehouse managing job was an exception), and had only one London friend, Adolf Krieger, himself half a foreigner.[6] Writing the 'Author's Note' in 1920, Conrad recognized that his vivid memories of London had threatened to destroy the psychological and creative distance so necessary to the composition

[5] Anderson (1841–1918) describes how disagreement grew out of his 'methods of dealing with informants. This was always a sore point with Sir William Harcourt. "Anderson's idea of secrecy is not to tell the Secretary of State," he once said to one of his colleagues, fixing his eyes on me as he spoke. And it was quite true.' Anderson goes on to relate how his first informant was murdered because of an unintentional leak by high officials (*Sidelights on the Home Rule Movement*, 1906, pp. 88ff).

[6] Sherry (*CWW*, pp. 325–34) speculates on Adolf Krieger as the source for Adolf Verloc. The contrast between Conrad's London and sea lives ran deep: see Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (1979), pp. 18–21.

of his novel, even though they had been its underlying dynamic. Packed, isolated life in the monstrous town is the essential creative pressure of *The Secret Agent*.

In addition, there were incidental sources for minor aspects of the novel. It must have been in the 1890s also that Conrad learned of the actual Charity Home to which Mrs Verloc's mother secretly gains admission; founded in 1827, it remained in Peckham till moving to Denham Garden Village in 1957 and was well known and well run – much more so than Conrad's macabre picture suggests.[7] In the 1890s Conrad had lived in a village east of Greenwich on the Thames, and Verloc's travels to Michaelis' cottage doubtless parallel Conrad's own (see 81.31–34). The tensions of Conrad's own family life are reflected in those of *The Secret Agent*. During the period of its composition, Conrad was troubled as usual by financial difficulties and family illness, and the birth of his second son, John, brought added strain.[8] Perhaps Winnie's mother partly finds her source in his wife Jessie, whose legs, by the time of writing, were also terribly swollen. Conrad once called the mother the novel's heroine, writing Edward Garnett on 1 October 1907: 'I am no end proud to see you've spotted my poor old woman. You've got a fiendishly penetrating eye for one's most secret intentions. She *is* the heroine' (*Letters*, III, 487). One suspects Conrad of irony here, though she may be the heroine in the sense that secret motives for open acts are the essential isolations at the dark heart of the book.

Other 'suggestions for certain personages of the tale' (p. 8) came from without. To some extent the then famous Chief Inspector Melville provided the model for Chief Inspector Heat, and Baroness Burdett-Coutts the model for Conrad's Great Lady. Sir William Harcourt's physique is echoed in that of Sir Ethelred, and both Howard Vincent (CID director from 1878 to 1884) and Sir Robert Anderson lend their

[7] The site on Peckham's Asylum Road (now known as Caroline Gardens) was more attractive than Conrad depicts it, though clearly he must have seen the buildings and known something of its Board's policies, which were ahead of their time. See 124.27n (cross-references to the 'Notes' in this volume take this form). See also Bruce Harkness, 'The Last Cab Ride of Death – An Extended Footnote' in *Joseph Conrad Today*, 9 (1984), 257. See also Hans van Marle, 'Of Lodgings, Landladies, and *The Secret Agent*', *The Conradian*, 12 (1987), 138–49 for further discussion of the Asylum and Conrad's early days in London lodging-houses.

[8] See pp. xxxii-xxxv. Many would not be so reductive as to identify the Verloc, Winnie, Stevie triangle with that of Joseph, Jessie, and John, but elements of his family experience are no doubt reflected in Conrad's novel; see Dr Bernard C. Meyer, *Joseph Conrad, A Psychoanalytic Biography* (1967), ch. 10.

personal history and habits to the Assistant Commissioner.[9] Although Jessie Conrad once identified W. M. Voynich as the original of Vladimir,[10] Conrad told Cunninghame Graham that 'Mr Vladimir was suggested to me by that scoundrel Gen: Seliwertsow whom Padlewski shot (in Paris) in the nineties. Perhaps you will remember as there were peculiar circumstances in that case. But of course I did him en charge'. According to Cedric Watts, 'the general opinion appeared to be that Seliwertsow had been a director of the secret police, had been responsible for recent arrests of Nihilists in Paris, and had therefore been killed on orders from the "Central Nihilist Committee"' [11] Conrad would have read accounts in *The Times* and *Figaro* (beginning on 18 November 1890, the date of the killing) later, as he was in Africa at the time. There were rumors of Seliwertsow's spying on fellow civil-servants, lending money to fellow officers on usurious terms, marrying for wealth and abusing his wife till a scandalous separation, and even being guilty of a murder which was blamed on a servant. Yet *Figaro* (1 December 1890) says he was 'très homme du monde' – 'très talon-rouge avec les dames'.[12]

Various actual anarchists were the originals of Conrad's group. Thus Michaelis' physique owes something to that of Bakunin, the Russian anarchist, and his ideas somewhat parallel those of Prince Kropotkin, a Russian emigré of the kind taken up by Ford's family. Perhaps not strangely Michaelis' background (pp. 84–85) reflects 'the then famous and now century-old event of the Manchester Martyrs, which involved an attack on a police van by Fenians in Manchester' (*CWW*, p. 261). The ringleaders were hanged, and, like Michaelis, one man received a life sentence. And like Michaelis another Fenian, Michael Davitt, became a ticket-of-leave celebrity and author, publishing *Leaves from a Prison Diary, or Lectures to a Solitary Audience* (1885).

[9] On these topics see the Notes (esp. 83.1n, 6.10n, 68.22n, 5.40n) and *CWW*, pp. 286–313.

[10] For a discussion of Jessie Conrad's identification of the Polish-born bookseller and bibliographer as the basis of Vladimir, see Bruce Harkness, 'Conrad's *The Secret Agent*: Texts and Contexts', *The Journal of the Joseph Conrad Society (U.K.)*, 4 (February 1979), 2–11; E. L. Voynich, the bookseller's wife and the author of *The Gadfly* (see below, p. xxx), rejected the identification in a 1958 personal letter.

[11] *Letters*, III, 491; Watts, p. 171.

[12] That is, a great man of the world, very dashing with the ladies. A peculiar circumstance was reported a year later in *The Times* (10 February 1892; see also the *San Antonio Light*, 2 February 1892, pp. 1–2). Padlewski had committed suicide, or perhaps had been killed by tsarist agents, in Maverick Park, San Antonio, Texas. Conrad was then in Falmouth, waiting while the *Palestine* attempted to put to sea on the voyage which was to become the basis of 'Youth'.

All these details were grist to Conrad's mill. He could not dream up events themselves. As Norman Sherry argues, '"invention", in the sense of making up or devising themes, plots and characters, had never been his method, which was ... one of close and imaginative analysis of his own experience ... or the experiences of others' (*CWW*, p. 337). With *Nostromo* and *The Secret Agent*, he came to new and more painful methods, even involving 'research'. But 'this movement away from his own experience still does not turn him towards "invention", but towards an extension of the faculty of "imagination". More and more he is involved in an immersion of the mind and spirit in the experiences of others' (ibid.) – until he all but becomes them. In such immersion Conrad found his art.

Other correspondences can of course be found. For instance, the Autonomie Club where anarchists debated and plotted may have been represented by Verloc's shop and the dialogue in Chapter 3. Sherry goes on to see characters like Winnie, Stevie, and Verloc as having been portrayed from life, and even the shop itself as based on a jeweler's shop in London (*CWW*, pp. 314–22; see 101.10n). No matter what one's theory of creativity, Conrad's 'borrowings' are striking. He even lifted verbal details from contemporary events or accounts (see 72.24–25n). Although Ford must have told Conrad something, one is not at all sure just what, and it almost seems that Conrad knew more about the Greenwich incident than did Ford himself.[13] Whether Conrad depended on Ford for his information, on first-hand knowledge, on newspaper accounts, on common opinion, or on an anarchist pamphlet entitled *The Greenwich Mystery*, certain parts of the story reflect actual events and personages of the time. Yet as Sherry and others have argued, the significant thing is the way Conrad's imagination brooded

[13] Ford got his facts confused when writing *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (1924), pp. 230–32 as well as *Return to Yesterday* (1931), pp. 134ff. Perhaps he worked backwards from Conrad's 'An Anarchist' and 'The Informer' as well as *Under Western Eyes*, for he seems to have confused Natalia of that novel with Winnie and with his cousins, Helen and Olive Rossetti, who wrote part of their 'auto-biography', *A Girl Among the Anarchists* (1903), under the pseudonym Isabel Meredith, and were youngsters in William Michael Rossetti's family at the time of the bombing. That family, their friends, and their forebears were generally sympathetic with radical movements on and from the Continent. The Rossetti sisters had a printing press in their basement and, aged twelve and sixteen, published Ford's first (non-political) poem in their 'anarchist' journal *The Torch*, but it is hard to believe that they were involved in the doings of senior Continental radicals. Conrad's use of the *The Torch* in the opening of *The Secret Agent* simply lends color. For a quiet corrective of Ford's views, see *Chapters From Childhood* (1921), by his sister, Juliet Soskice, who speaks of these activities as play-acting.

over and transformed them into a novel which is very much a personal as well as an artistic statement.

Finally, the novel draws on sources that are primarily literary. Given his interest in European literature, Conrad doubtless had in mind certain ancestors of Verloc. The name itself suggests the two most important, Vautrin and Vidocq. Vautrin appears in more than one Balzac novel. In *Père Goriot* he is virtually the archetype of the criminal turned policeman. Vidocq (1775–1857), criminal turned head of a special police section, putative author of 'The Personal Memoirs of The First Great Detective', began publishing his fictionalized life in 1829, and others continued it. He is generally credited with introducing the informer and the double agent in police work. Conrad must have known something of this flamboyant figure who led two lives. Both Vautrin and Vidocq are doubtless among Conrad's sources, and color our understanding of the double / triple agent, Verloc.

The most obvious analogues to *The Secret Agent* in recent English literature would probably have been fictions of popular 'Dynamitards', which were spawned by the bombings of the 1880s. But Conrad does not seem to have been influenced by that series of sensational novels.[14] Instead, it is Charles Dickens' London that re-appears in the London of *The Secret Agent*. More specifically, Inspector Bucket, the detective in *Bleak House*, is a forerunner of Conrad's Inspector Heat, with *his* stolid physique.

As for spy stories, that sub-genre of the detective story and mystery, Conrad's tale appears surprisingly early in the history of the form. Indeed so early, that it initiates a style rather than capstones it. There were some romantic spy stories, like Baroness Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905) and E. L. Voynich's *The Gadfly* (1897), and the first realistic spy story, Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands*, had appeared in 1903. Conrad may have read it, as he certainly did *The Gadfly*, but none of them seems to have any significant relationship to *The Secret Agent*. Rather, Conrad's novel seems to be the first in the long line of that mixed genre which Graham Greene at one time called the Entertainment. By that is meant the suspenseful story which combines the pace of the thriller with the psychological, social, political, and moral

[14] Even Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886) is not mentioned in his published letters. It was the historical acts of terrorism with dynamite which captured his imagination.

overtones of a work which is essentially a novel and not escapist.[15] *The Secret Agent* and *Crime and Punishment* in their various ways are the finest achievements of the form which M. D. Zabel, in describing *The Secret Agent* as a pioneering work, characterized as the 'tale of political intrigue, espionage, and moral anarchism in modern Europe which has become a typical mode of fiction in our age of *Machtpolitik*, scientific violence, and "international evil".'[16]

The Growth of the Novel

This seminal and well-wrought work, drawn from diverse sources, was the product of a creative process both convoluted and fragmented. The analogy of 'crystallisation' given in the 'Author's Note' no doubt represents a kind of poetic truth. But the process was not nearly so straightforward as Conrad's comments imply, nor did the various pieces fall into place quite so readily. *The Secret Agent* was but Conrad's second full-fledged departure from his customary reliance, for the source of his novels, on incident directly or indirectly autobiographical. To complicate matters, Anderson's *Sidelights on the Home Rule Movement*, one of his major sources, was published only after Conrad had written the first three chapters of his tale. And the actual composition was interrupted several times – once for a period of six months – as the family moved around both England and the Continent plagued by personal problems.

When he began *The Secret Agent* on the Continent in February 1906, Conrad had fallen into what had become a customary pattern of composition for him: he conceived of it as a short story, accompanied its composition with that of other stories ('An Anarchist', 'The Informer'), and proceeded with another work (*The Mirror of the Sea*) much of the time. While this last harked back to his earlier life and career, the two stories dealt with the subject that was to occupy Conrad for much of the next two years.[17] These two stories date from the end of 1905 and the

[15] For additional sources of *The Secret Agent*, especially the police and Verloc, see James H. Walton, 'The Backgrounds of "The Secret Agent" by Joseph Conrad: A Biographical and Critical Study', unpublished dissertation, Northwestern University, 1966. See also his 'Conrad and "The Secret Agent": The Genealogy of Mr. Vladimir', *The Polish Review*, 12 (Autumn 1967), 28–42.

[16] The memorable phrasing comes from his 'Introduction' to the Anchor edition of *Under Western Eyes* (1951), p. xvii.

[17] 'An Anarchist' is a careless tale of an engineer with bourgeois values who is arrested for shouting anarchist slogans while on a drinking spree and victimized by his politically radical defense lawyer, his former employer, a group of true anarchists, and by the manager of a cattle estate. The story focuses on his isolation, and its narrator associates

beginning of 1906, a time of personal desperation and of a lull in Conrad's career. He had achieved critical esteem amongst the reviewers and intellectuals – Arnold Bennett, Edmund Gosse, William Rothenstein – as well as with fellow novelists like H. G. Wells, John Galsworthy, and Henry James, but not the popularity that would alleviate his financial difficulties. And he had just completed, at great cost in nervous energy, the magnificent *Nostromo*, whose ambiguous ending, like that of *Lord Jim*, may well owe as much to psychic exhaustion as to aesthetic causes. The ending of *The Secret Agent* itself was to be perfected only by a two-stage composition that involved wholesale revision of the last third of the novel subsequent to the American serial publication.

The serial version of the novel ended with a plot summary. But the work began, as often, with a puzzle. Although Conrad could not 'invent' the 'whole lie' of plot and character necessary to a novel, he did invent, over and over, the reason for an act, the explanation of a character, the cause of an essential mystery which was initially known only from the outside. He became the apostle, not of the Everlasting Yea or Everlasting Nay, but of the Eternal Why? Out of the question *why* did 'one of us' desert the *Patna* / *Jeddah* carrying hundreds of pilgrims, for instance, comes the novel *Lord Jim*.

So also *The Secret Agent*. After *Nostromo* Conrad had worked now and then on what were eventually to become *Chance* and *Victory* and more consistently on *The Mirror of the Sea*, while also writing his two anarchist stories. But it was not until he really took hold, in various ways, of the mystery of nihilism that his creative impulse fired. Reminded by Ford of the incident which became the germ of the story, his imagination set to work on an old mystery: how could and *why would* anyone attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory? 'For [even] perverse unreason has its own logical processes' ('Author's Note', p. 5). It took some time before all the pieces fell together and Conrad was able to unite his various sources – the Greenwich bombing; the ironic view of secrecy and its consequent hollowness of purpose within the forces of law and order; and the memory of his own isolated life in 'the great wen' of London in the 1890s.

Early in 1906 Conrad had, largely for financial reasons, taken his

anarchism with a 'warm heart and weak head'. The narrator of 'The Informer' is a polished man who in his contempt for the bourgeoisie advocates terror and violence. This story concerns an anarchist journal called *The Torch* and a police agent masquerading as a revolutionary. It not only condemns anarchism, violence, and the 'idle and selfish class' that in its ennui supports it, but also suggests that political action and ideology are simply disguises for hidden personal motives.