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MASTER THESIS

EXPLOITATION AND TERRORISM IN CONRAD'S
THE SECRET AGENT

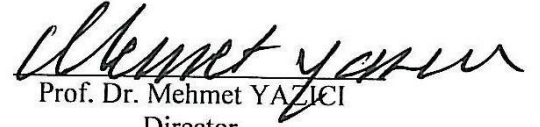
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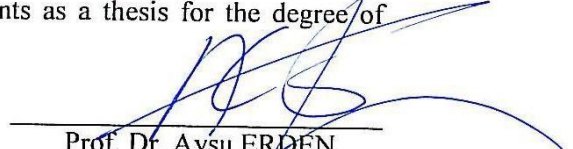
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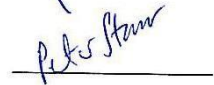
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ABSTRACT

EXPLOITATION AND TERRORISM IN CONRAD'S *THE SECRET AGENT*

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The Secret Agent is marked as one of Joseph Conrad's later political novels, which diverge from his distinctive stories of sea and life on ships. The novel, on one level, deals with the notions of anarchism, espionage, and terrorism; on the other level, it is about manipulation, exploitation and how humans become barbaric in the modern society. Besides, the novel depicts anarchist or revolutionary groups before some of the social uprisings that took place in the earlier twentieth century. The actions of the novel are set towards the end of the Victorian period. The novel reflects the social reality of London towards the end of the nineteenth century, when there were many real explosions which the press and the politicians considered as the anarchists' outrages. Through analyzing how these events are reflected in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, this study aims to explore how more important than political

conflicts for Conrad are the dehumanizing effects of involvement in violence on individuals and individual relationships.

Keywords: Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, Exploitation, Terrorism, Anarchists, Dehumanization, Isolation.

ÖZ

CONRAD’IN *GİZLİ AJAN* ADLI ROMANINDA SÖMÜRÜ VE TERÖRİZM

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Gizli Ajan, Conrad’ın alışıla gelmiş tipik denizci ve gemi hikayelerinden farklı olarak son dönemlerde yazdığı politik romanlarından biridir. Roman bir açıdan bakıldığında anarşi, terror ve casusluk gibi kavramlar içerirken, diğer taraftan manipülasyon, sömürü gibi kavramları ve modern toplumda insanların nasıl barbarlaştıklarını anlatır. Bununla birlikte; 20. yüzyıl başlarında ortaya çıkmaya başlayan anarşist ve devrimci grupları da resmeder. Romandaki olaylar Viktorya Döneminin sonlarında geçmektedir. 19. yüzyılın sonlarındaki Londra’nın sosyal gerçekliğini yansıtan romanda, basın ve politikacıların anarşistlerin gerçekleştirdiğini düşündükleri saldırılar ve patlamalara göndermeler vardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı o dönem içerisinde gerçekleşen bütün bu olayların Conrad’ın *Gizli Ajan* adlı romanına nasıl yansıdığını göstermek ve Conrad için önemli olanın siyasi çatışmalardan daha

çok romanın konu edindiđi Őiddetin bireyler ve bireylerin iliŐkileri üzerindeki etkilerini ve bireyleri nasıl insanlıktan çıkardığını göstermektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Joseph Conrad, *Gizli Ajan*, sömürme, terör, anarŐistler, insanlıktan çıkma, izolasyon.

to my Mother, and to the memory of my late Father...

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INTRODUCTION

The Secret Agent is regarded as one of the remarkable novels by Joseph Conrad, the well-known Polish-English novelist. It was published in 1907 and classified as one of Conrad's political novels, which are *Nostramo* (1905), *The Secret Agent* (1907), and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). *The Secret Agent*, particularly because of its theme of terrorism and the violence it depicts, became famous in the US after the 9/11 attacks in 2001. It was also ranked the 46th best novel of the 20th century by Modern Library.

The primary purpose of this study is to discuss the exploitation and terrorism in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and to show how violence has destructive effects on individuals and their relationships. By so doing, the aim is to provide a description of the novel which goes beyond the limitations of those descriptions approaching *The Secret Agent* in a strictly ironic or comic framework, and thereby indicating the effects of politics on the individual's life on all levels. The analysis of *The Secret Agent* in such a way which is analytical and interpretive in nature gives priority to the thematic purposes and concerns. As such, however, it is offered as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, those analyses which are descriptive in nature, such as those which attempt to suggest the structural and stylistic purposes and the effects of the narrative.

Loneliness and the need for community become dominant themes in Conrad's fiction. Also in his fiction, the questions that are explored are about the nature of social and political institutions and their influence on the history of society and on the behavior of many of his protagonists, such as in Verloc's case and what he has suffered because of the political conflicts in London. The same thing is true of

Winnie, who has been under the influence of such political struggles and becomes a victim of that violence and a murderer of her husband. Finally, she loses everything, even her life by committing suicide. Conrad manages to render human behavior in the face of suffering, for the individual and how he feels in the face of violence is more important for him. Therefore, instead of focusing on the political issues, how and why violence was supported by the politicians of the age, his novels, particularly his *The Secret Agent*, delve into the individual reactions to these events.

The three chapters of the thesis deal respectively with political disintegration, dehumanization, exploitation, and terrorism in *The Secret Agent*. The first chapter titled “Early 20th Century Europe and Political Disintegration Reflected in *The Secret Agent*”, deals with the description of the London of *The Secret Agent* and how Conrad describes it as a capital of “diffused light” (Conrad, 2011, p.7)¹. It is portrayed as a dark place where there is no brightness at all, and there is a clear disintegration in relationships among its inhabitants. Besides, there is a clear propensity to violence and its effects on the individuals which lead to the death of the main characters in the novel. The other topic that will be examined in this chapter is the way Conrad portrays the anarchists of *The Secret Agent*, which shows Conrad’s distrust of the anarchists and at the end helps us to draw our judgment on them, too.

The second chapter entitled “Dehumanization” explores the abusing and the misusing of others in *The Secret Agent* as a clear example of the problems of the Victorian era and modern society in the industrial London, and also the exploitation among characters which takes many levels, in politics, in friendships, and in family relationships. Furthermore, the theme of isolation will be dealt with in the same chapter. People are isolated even if they are living among crowds. There are no real relationships among people. The individuals themselves are self-alienated as in Stevie’s case. He is alone in this world of destructive self-alienation, and sometimes

¹ The further parenthetical references to this book will be given within the text as (SA).

speaks to himself with sincerity. Secrecy in relationships and in work among the individuals is very clear in the novel, and will be discussed in this chapter, too.

In the third chapter titled “Terrorism in *The Secret Agent*” the aim is to show the effects of terrorism on individuals, their relationships, and on the society as a whole. This can be achieved through exploring the terrorist act in *The Secret Agent*, which is the Greenwich Observatory explosion, by detecting the aim behind it, and also by examining the psychological impact of the terrorist event on the individual, the family, and the society. Besides, this chapter deals with some notions which are frequently used in Conrad’s last novels, such as political terrorism, anarchism, and nihilism.

Joseph Conrad, the Polish emigrant of Victorian England, is considered by many as one of the most skilled writers in the history of English fiction. His work contains several thematic issues and he follows a reliable approach in dealing with his subjects. It is claimed in *Joseph Conrad and His Work* that Conrad’s fiction, in general, shows that there is no single, locatable truth. The stories reveal that heroes are unlikely to be those delightful people described in books, and that the need for heroes may lead to unhappiness. It is difficult to find a historical and objective truth because all sources are subjective and all narratives are forms of reporting (Sönmez, pp.105-12). At the same time, Sandra Dodson shows in her article “Conrad and the Politics of The Sublime” how Conrad’s characters, and his audience alike, are in need of at least the illusion or fiction of an inspiring Truth, the “solace of an objective moral ground” (qtd. in Sönmez, p.112).

In his last novels written in the period between 1905-1920, Conrad shifts from writing about sea and adventures in a ship to writing about the social-political life on land and examining the life of men in modern urban civilization. *The Secret Agent* shows Conrad’s vision of modern society, as he finds that man’s social and personal life is above all a form of political being. He proposes that an understanding of this life relies on our knowledge of how social-political institutions determine the kind of

life (Wollaeger, p.122). In this novel, the criticism of morality is mainly a critique of bourgeois political morality and of the forms of ideological conflict that this morality produces. Conrad's fiction, written at that period, deals with matters in the context of a historical-political-social world, the world in which understanding of one's self and of the world around one is a problem and is doubtful. Conrad's fiction deals with the serious cultural issues which are always presented with his characteristically detached treatment of them, with a focus on individual human situations and actions. In other words, his fiction is always concerned with problems of a social, historical, and moral nature, and with institutions that establish and complicate forms of life in society, as in the case of the anarchists in his *The Secret Agent*.

In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad criticizes the morals and the intellectual poverty of the contemporary anarchist movement which brought the fear of the dynamite-throwing anarchist that disturbed European culture from the 1880s through the early part of the twentieth century. Early critics mentioned that the novel was related to a fictional genre, known as the "dynamite novel", which was widely spread throughout the thirty years preceding World War I. This genre enjoyed its highest fame in the 1880s and 1890s. Writers such as Philip May, George Griffith, E. Douglas Fawcett, and Grant Allen followed that genre in their works, which were unvaried and focused on few elements such as secret organizations, foreign spies, conspiratorial meetings, extravagant and sinister plots against society, threats of violence, and the possibility or actuality of explosions both frequent and destructive (Orr and Billy, p.175). The novel describes the prewar period around 1885 and 1886 which was a period of considerable anarchist activity in England. The Greenwich bombing (the germ of *The Secret Agent*) occurred in 1894 (Ash, p.198). The events of the novel are based on an attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory which took place on February 14, 1894. The actual doer was an anarchist, or rather a man supposed by the police to be an anarchist, named Martial Bourdin (Cox, p.28). He did not damage or reach the target but was himself killed by the bomb. In the novel, Mr. Adolf Verloc is a lazy

secret agent who gets along with a group of ineffective anarchists in London. He is informed by his employer in the foreign embassy who insists that Verloc should organize the bomb outrage in Greenwich. After he gets the bomb from the famous anarchist named the Professor, the inventor of a special detonator, Verloc takes Stevie, the half-crazed brother of his wife, with him to carry out the bombing in his place. Stevie tries to do what Verloc has ordered him, but he cannot reach the Greenwich Observatory because he falls down accidentally and blows himself up. Mrs. Verloc cares for her brother a lot, sacrificing her happiness for him by marrying Verloc, but not the man she loves. She overhears the conversation between Verloc and Chief Inspector Heat, the police officer, and learns the truth behind her brother's murder. She kills her husband with a carving knife after being alone with him in their home. Meanwhile, another anarchist comes to Verloc's house and meets Winnie who asks for help, but instead of helping her, he exploits her. He takes her money and leaves her alone. Eventually she commits suicide by throwing herself into the sea from a cross-Channel boat.

The Secret Agent presents many of Conrad's feelings and experiences, from the earliest to the most recent. He mentions in the "Author's Note" on the novel, the pain of his solitary and nightly walk all over London in his early life as a seaman, isolated and unemployed, living in gloomy housings (Tennant, p.viii). Then, his marriage to a London woman whose conditions look like those of Winnie in the story, is another cause of pain for him. Through his betrayal to the anarchists, Conrad expresses his traditional Polish hatred of the Russian tyrants of his country. As we see in the novel, they are behind the violence and the terrorist act. His father, Apollo, had been associated with the Polish anarchists or revolutionary group and the whole family suffered a lot because of that. Such actions in his early life left a bad impression on Conrad towards both the Russians and the anarchists. Throughout his life, Conrad experienced the troubles, the fears, and the frustrating failures of a revolutionary age, where there were a lot of violent acts which are reflected in his works. In many of his

novels, there are either real scenes of explosions and terrorist acts or references to such acts of violence.

Like many other writers whose life experiences are reflected in their works, Conrad's biography and his experiences have a vital role to appreciate most of his works. The three phases of his life have a big effect on his works. Jacques Berthoud, in his book *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase*, calls the second phase the major one, in which Conrad produced the best of his works, such as *Heart Of Darkness*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes* (Berthoud, p.132). Similarly, Edward Said is one of those critics who assert the importance of the autobiographical reading in Conrad's fiction. Said is different in this point from other critics who ignore the autobiographical aspect and instead focus just on the textual source. Said, in his book entitled *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, emphasizes Conrad's assumptions on the dilemma of his fiction, claiming that "his solutions always had one end in view: the achievement of character," and that "his fiction is a vital reflection of his developing character" (Said, pp.13-15). Many critics, as well as Conrad himself, inform us about the miseries he suffered during his best creative years. He suffered from health and financial problems, along with family troubles, and Conrad never lost his home sickness feeling and he suffered from loneliness because of his early experience of exile and the loss of close family relations. All these matters are reflected in his fiction through the human aspects that he includes in his works.

In his political novels, Conrad, rather than focusing on the politics itself, concentrates more on the social side of individuals and their relationships and how politics can affect their lives negatively. As Daniel R. Schwarz mentions in his "Conrad's Quarrel with Politics in *Nostromo*", Conrad's novels about politics have been regarded as nihilistic statements. While the subject matters in these novels, such as *Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo*, *The Secret Agent*, and *Under Western Eyes*, are frequently politics, their values are not political. The novels confirm the priority of

family, the holiness of individual, the value of love, and the importance of empathy and understanding in human relations. His concern for the working class comes not from his political philosophy but from his life experience as a seaman and from his creative response to the miseries of others. In other words, Conrad's humanism tells his political vision (Schwars, pp.552-3). Conrad's political fiction argues for the primacy of the individual and regards the social organizations as necessary evils. Conrad is at a distance from political parties. He opposes ideologies. His political vision is that personal relationships should be given more attention and value than ideologies and argumentation.

CHAPTER I

EARLY 20TH CENTURY EUROPE AND THE POLITICAL DISINTEGRATION REFLECTED IN *THE SECRET AGENT*

The early 20th and the late 19th centuries were the era of Victorian England, of Czarist Russia, a Europe of unsolved power struggles, and several different political and economic models such as imperialism, autocracy, totalitarianism, republicanism, democracy, socialism, and communism. The aim was the “welfare state”, the control of political power, economic stability, or a society of integrated units for serving the strong state and the individuals (Araz, p.11). Other important factors were Darwinism and the new Evolutionary Theory, which radically changed men’s dominant position in the universe. The loss of religious faith and the disintegration of the compact world were clear characteristics of the time. Such things created the main lines of the fracture. The result was that the social status was dominated by the pessimism and solipsism of existentialist thought. The growing respect of science encouraged rationalism and skepticism, besides a boredom which is so characteristic of the time (Araz, p.12). Conrad’s fictional world is in relationship with this confusion, the changing life and perspectives of his time, but his mistrust of extremism held him back from commitment to any radical belief. There is no room in his mind for the extremist ideologies.

This chapter explores the political disintegration in Europe during the early twentieth century through Conrad’s depiction of the London of *The Secret Agent* and how it is described as a dark place, the capital of dim light: “The rusty London

sunshine struggling clear of the London mist” (SA, p.18). There is an obvious disintegration in relationships among its people. Moreover, there is a clear inclination to violence and this has its effect on the individuals, which leads to death in many cases in the novel. The other topic that will be studied in this chapter is the way Conrad presents the anarchists in *The Secret Agent*, which shows Conrad’s distrust of the anarchists and the political institutions in general.

Conrad tries to give us an idea about the anarchists of the time through the character of the famous anarchist, the Professor. He shows us how they think, what they aim to do, and what their means to achieve their goals were. The Professor outlines his own political theory from which he personally starts thinking of inventing his perfect detonator, and he succeeds in making that small bomb. However, there is a conflict between the ideal of the Professor who wishes to destroy or to kill the society with that perfect bomb and the revolutionaries who pretend to be completely against the social order. They want only to change it, to replace the current system with somewhat different one, rather than destroying it. This matter can be seen in the conversation between the two anarchists, the Professor and Ossipon, as they discuss their varied political philosophies. The Professor states:

You revolutionaries [...] are the slaves of the social convention, which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as the very police that stand up in the defence of that convention. [...] You are not a bit better than the forces arrayed against you—than the police, for instance. [...] Chief Inspector Heat [...] was thinking of many things—of his superiors, of his reputation, of the law courts, [...] of a hundred things. But I was thinking of my perfect detonator only. [...] Like to like. The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical (SA, pp.47-8).

It is clear that there is an opposition in the passage between the Professor, the police and the revolutionaries. Because the revolutionaries want to change the society, they, as much as the police, need to protect it from the Professor's ideal of complete destruction. Therefore, the Professor sees a conflict between himself and both the anarchists and the police. Usually the revolutionaries and the police are presented as opposites, one good and the other bad depending on how one individually feels about them. Here, they appear to be on the same side. This is because we are shown them through the Professor's eyes. Although the protectors of society, the police and the revolutionaries, as the Professor sees them, are driven by different reasons, the central tension from the Professor's point of view is between an ideal of destruction and the reality of protection. However, the narrator knows the world cannot be destroyed. As he sees it, society will continue on its apparently endless, uncertain journey, and evil, exploitation, injustice, and suffering will continue to prevail. Those in power may not always be evil, but even their good intentions will provide little relief for those who are trapped in a system of suffering.

Also in the passage given above, the Professor tells Ossipon that he and the other anarchists are slaves to a social system that is afraid of them, and the police are also slaves of society. He sees Chief Inspector Heat as a slave of his work, hindered by many things, including the Professor himself. The Professor claims that he himself is not a slave because he thinks of one thing only, "his perfect detonator" (*SA*, p.48). The Professor sees terrorism, revolution, and legality as a game. Everyone is involved in this game, the anarchists, the police and the secret agent. In this situation, we see that it is Conrad's method to present the Professor's ideas in the character's own words, which allows us to draw our judgments about him. However, Conrad does not tell us what our judgments or our attitudes should be (*Spittles*, p.70).

1.1. London

In his *The Secret Agent*, Conrad pictures a political society and a bourgeois city where the struggle of its citizens can easily be observed. Conrad's city is described as "inorganic nature" (SA, p.9), a force which represses and oppresses men. Conrad portrays London as an "enormity of cold, black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates, and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man" (SA, p.39). That place is not good for living, and all its components are not suitable for human. In the city, the web of human relationships is corrupted and secret. The men in the city are not related to each other by friendship or community but by their common concern for protection from the worst instincts of their fellow men. It is a place of isolation, a "vast and hopeless desert" (SA, 124) which is as "lonely and unsafe as though it had been situated in the midst of vast forest" (SA 139). Even the streets of the city are depicted as a place where there is no one to be at your side or can help you if you need help. The streets of the city are "like the descent into a slimy aquarium" (SA, 102), always wet and covered with rainwater. You feel alone in that city even if there are many people around you because everyone is busy with his own business and no one cares about the other. If the city protects men from war (the war of all against all), there is yet another type of "war" which takes its place, the war of manipulation, of insanity, of domination, and corrupt desires (Spegel, p.9).

The function of that city is to provide protection for individuals, their rights, and their property, and from Verloc's observation, property does truly play a vital role in the middle-class society. This fact clearly shows the corruption of the representatives of the state and how they are there to serve the rich, not the poor.

He [Verloc] surveyed through the park railings the evidences of the town's opulence and luxury with an approving eye. All these people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury. They had to be protected; and their horses, carriages,

houses, servants had to be protected; and the source of their wealth had to be protected in the heart of the city and the heart of the country; the whole social order favourable to their hygienic idleness had to be protected against the shallow enviousness of unhygienic labour (SA, p.7).

Conrad believes that the city, instead of protecting the individual's property, is protecting the property of the rich. In this city, the poor must subordinate their rights to the rich. The classical liberal system leads to a radical distinction between those who hold property and those who are without property. Thus, the middle-class regime is unreliable; it promises equivalence in ownership, their persons and possessions, but, in practice the regime subjects them to the whims of the rich. As Winnie Verloc declares, "Don't you know what the police are for? [...] They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have" (SA, 120). She means people who are in power or the police do not follow the orders of law, but they behave from self-interest. They do not protect the poor. They are there for their benefits and to keep their position and relationships in the society.

Instead of emphasizing on the class struggle, Conrad stresses on the individual struggles for good, power, prestige and personal security; every man is in an aggressive relationship with all other men. In this city, men are not ruled by love or compassion for their companions. Conrad indicates that compassion or kindness in such circumstances may lead to violence. Conrad describes Stevie as a figure who is "easily diverted from the straight path of duty by the [...] dramas of fallen horses, whose pathos and violence induced him sometimes to shriek piercingly in a crowd," (SA, p.5). Because of his kindness, Stevie could not differentiate between acts of violence to horses and to people. In his own method "Poor brute-poor people" (SA, 118), he looks at all different things from the same viewpoint. He becomes quite upset when the cabman beats his horse. The cabdriver tries to explain that he is obliged to beat the horses through economic necessity. However, Stevie, like a

perfect idealist, does not fathom the reason. He becomes angry. He can not lock up his feelings and his passions:

In the face of anything which affected directly or indirectly his morbid dread of pain, Stevie ended by turning vicious. [...] Stevie was not wise enough to restrain his passions. The tenderness of his universal charity had two phases as indissolubly joined and connected as the reverse and obverse sides of a medal. The anguish of immoderate compassion was succeeded by the pain of an innocent but pitiless rage (SA, p.117).

Stevie is another version of idealist who is very similar to that of Michaelis. As an ideal socialist, Michaelis has a vision of the world as “planned out like an immense and nice hospital, with gardens and flowers, in which the strong are to devote themselves to the nursing of the weak” (SA, p.211). Both Stevie and Michaelis do not understand that the aim of the city which is not fairness and man’s happiness. The economic needs and endless competition between men force them towards some acts of cruelty; they require them to differentiate between what is fair and what is necessary (Spegele, p.12). This condition cannot be changed without changing not only individual acts of compassion, but universal compassion also; however, Conrad sees that this requirement is impossible to meet.

Conrad gives a clear description of the London of the novel as a capital of “diffused light” (SA, p.7) or of the “blurred flames of gas-lamps” (SA, p.68). He means even the lights are faint and they look like gas-lamps because of the fog. He also calls it the capital of darkness which is “as vast as sea” (SA, p.70) without shadows, it is indeed soulless (Rosenfield, p.94). This city looks like a big sea where there is no shelter or shadow to protect its people. It is described as something which is soulless or dead.

Conrad gives us another description of that huge city through Winnie's case after killing her husband. Winnie feels fully isolated in the city streets which are muddy and dark: "She [Winnie] was alone in London and the whole town of marvels and mud, with its maze of streets and its mass of lights, were sunk in a hopeless night, rested at the bottom of a black abyss from which no unaided woman could hope to scramble out" (SA, p.188).

It seems a hopeless dark night for Winnie. That darkness will lead to "a black abyss" or unhappy end for her which is the gallows and death. She desperately tries to get out of that trouble. Even the sun over London never sets and looks "bloodshot". It is a "rusty London sunshine" (SA, p.18). It is not bright sun; it is rusty or reddish because of the fog. In its dim night neither "wall, nor tree, nor beast, nor man casts shadow" (SA, p.7). Confusion and irrationality are the main features of this city besides the darkness which denotes the unconscious life. Even the daylight appears to be unclear because of the fog, and the sun is "bloodshot". The buildings of the city, mainly the shop of the shameful products, seem "to devour the sheen of light" (SA, p.147). When the night comes, it gives the city the aspect of that vision of darkness beyond life (Rosenfield, p.93). The following quotation shows how the nights of London are endless, especially the night of Verloc's murder, which for Winnie is a night without end:

Down below in the quiet, narrow street measured footsteps approached the house, then died away, unhurried and firm, as if the passer-by had started to pace out all eternity, from gas-lamp to gas-lamp in a night without end; and the drowsy ticking of the old clock on the landing became distinctly audible in the bedroom (SA, p.39).

The above quotation puts two important things together; eternity and the world of objective time, represented by the clock. According to the natural order, each night has an end, but in here the "night without end" in the realm beyond that order. Again

we find the image of the gas-lamp which dominates the story, presenting us with an atmosphere in which the light is derived from an artificial source, not a natural one.

Claire Rosenfield mentions in *An Archetypal Analysis of Conrad's Political Novels* that the darkness of the devilish city resembles at once death and irrationality of the unconscious life. Rain, in its relationship with nature's renewal in spring, appears in this novel as fog and mist, both of which help mask the rays of the sun or the source of the energy-giving. Verloc foresees the spring through the "faint buzzing of fly -his first fly of the year- heralding better than any number of swallows the approach of spring" (SA, p.18). There is no greenness of the season that can be seen there. While the air is filled by fog and mist, the waters cover the ground and make the street "like a wet, muddy trench" (qtd. in Rosenfield, p.94).

As we have seen, Conrad keeps giving us pictures and features of London. He does that either in his own words or through his characters' speech. He tries to show us that people do not feel safe in that city or in the modern society in general. When the Assistant Commissioner, the police officer, descends to the street to take part in investigations of the explosion, he describes the streets with the following words:

Wet and empty, as if swept clear suddenly by a great flood. It was a very trying day, choked in raw fog to begin with, and now drowned in cold rain. The flickering, blurred flames of gas-lamps seemed to be dissolving in a watery atmosphere. And the lofty pretensions of a mankind oppressed by the miserable indignities of the weather appeared as a colossal and hopeless vanity deserving of scorn, wonder, and compassion (SA, p.68).

He finds the streets filled with the blackness of a wet night in London. There are a lot of words and adjectives used to describe London which are all combined to reveal the society in which inactivity, darkness and weakness destroy any possibility of either physical or spiritual rebirth. London is the nightmare city of darkness and mist. This

city becomes metaphorically both death and evil, and stagnant like old pond water. After killing Mr. Verloc, Winnie takes a decision to drown herself:

The street frightened her, since it led either to the gallows or to the river. She floundered over the doorstep head forward, arms thrown out, like a person falling over the parapet of a bridge. This entrance into the open air had a foretaste of drowning; a slimy dampness enveloped her, entered her nostrils, clung to her hair. It was not actually raining, but each gas lamp had a rusty little halo of mist. The van and horses were gone, and in the black street the curtained window of the carters' eating-house made a square patch of soiled blood-red light glowing faintly very near the level of the pavement (SA, p.184).

After murdering her husband, Winnie acts like a despairing woman, a woman who is ready to die at any time. She does not know what to do. Then, she leaves the house in darkness. With the help of Ossipon, Winnie believes that she can escape death; she can flee across the channel to the continent, and she can leave the city of darkness and mud. Nonetheless, soon after she is left alone by him, she takes the steamer to France at midnight. Finally, Winnie's love of life is overwhelmed by misery, and she actually drowns herself in the sea.

In *The Secret Agent*, London is depicted as the city of darkness and a monstrous place where men like Ossipon wander aimlessly, or like the Professor with a destructive purpose, or like the Assistant Commissioner in search of freedom. The city does hold within itself the fog and the mists which are simply the waters of death. It encloses everything in its universal humidity, even the river which flows through it is not the fresh water representing the stream of life but a "sinister marvel of still shadows and flowing gleams mingling [...] in a black silence" (SA, p.208). London is portrayed as a place where life is subject to imprisonment in an evil city, where madness and despair replace the heroic attitudes of tragic tradition, where even

an idiot may be a hero. Conrad reveals the reality or the difficulties of life in the Late-Victorian London, showing us the corruption, the disintegration in relationships, and violence and its effects on and among the inhabitants of London.

1.2. Violence

The Secret Agent is generally based on an act of violence which is the Greenwich Observatory bomb outrage. Besides, there are other acts of violence which cause death among the characters of the novel. In all its kinds, violence leaves bad effects on individuals and on the society as a whole.

The violence of the explosion at the Greenwich Common might be seen to reflect the negative effects on western culture of the event which Nietzsche called the “death of God” with the consequent loss of unity from nature and meaning of existence. J. Hillis Miller uses the same metaphor of the explosion to describe this event in the history of ideas, mentioning: “What once was a unity gathering all together, has exploded into fragments [...] subject, objects, words, other minds, the supernatural- each of these is discovered from the other and man finds himself one of the poor fragments of a broken world” (Miller, 1965, p.2).

This description of the fragments of the broken world is very close to the description of the policeman Chief Inspector Heat who was the first person to come to the crime scene after the explosion. He describes Stevie’s destruction as: “limbs, gravel, clothing, bones, splinters- all mixed up together” (SA, p.145). That is the way Stevie disappears. A policeman, close to the scene, is reported to have seen “something like a heavy flash of lightning in the fog” (SA, p.59) which leaves the incident as a mystery for Heat who wants to trace or to pin that incident on someone else (Panagopoulos, 109-110). For Conrad, such an investigation can lead to modern man’s heart of darkness.

Generally, there are different kinds of violence, like those which cause abuse, injuries, or death; but the worst type is the one which is aimed to cause more than that. It goes far beyond death and destruction, it is planned to terrorize the individuals. This kind of violence is described as terrorism. In other words, we can say there is a clear distinction between violence and terror. Violence is a wider term which covers all illegal acts that include damage (or the threat of damage) to person or possessions. Acts of terror, on the other hand, are acts of violence carried out to create a climate of fear among individuals, and the authorities which will lead to political changes such as new policies or a new regime (Miller,1984, p.109). However, the Greenwich Observatory outrage is a terrorist act, for that, it will be discussed in details in chapter three which is entitled as “Terrorism”.

The Greenwich Observatory outrage is planned to be carried out by Verloc, but instead of carrying out the outrage himself, Verloc enlists his retarded brother-in-law Stevie. Stevie’s death is a clear act of violence caused by Verloc’s selfishness. Through the narration we come to know that for Stevie words and feelings are strongly connected to actual experience. He does not manipulate words for specific purposes. He is unable to understand that words are just random linguistic signs that allow for the infinite manipulation of themselves and of human beings. Therefore, Winnie tells Verloc that “He isn’t fit to hear what’s said here. He believes it’s all true. He knows no better. He gets into his passions over it” (SA, p.40). Winnie informs Verloc that Stevie must not hear the conversation between the anarchists who gather in his shop. When the anarchist Yundt talks about how “They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and the warm blood of the people—nothing else” (SA, p.35), Stevie hears that and he gets very nervous and starts screaming. He easily believes in what he hears, and it is his naivety which makes him an easy prey for Verloc. Thus, after getting the bomb from the Professor, Verloc goes to bring Stevie who is with Michaelis in the countryside. They come back together carrying the bomb which is inside a “varnish can” (SA, p.52). When they reach the intended target,

the Observatory in Greenwich Park, Verloc orders Stevie to take it and to plant it beside the Observatory wall. Unfortunately, while he carries the bomb, Stevie trips over protruding tree-root and blows himself up.

Later on, his sister Winnie overhears the conversation between Chief Inspector Heat and Verloc when they talk about the incident of the explosion and Stevie's death. Chief Inspector Heats describes what he has seen there:

Of course. Blown to small bits: limbs, gravel, clothing, bones, splinters—all mixed up together. I tell you they had to fetch a shovel to gather him up with". Mrs. Verloc sprang suddenly from her crouching position, and stopping her ears, reeled to and fro between the counter and the shelves (*SA*, p.145).

Heat's words reveal the dramatic scene of Stevie's death. Directly after the explosion, Heat goes there and all that he can find are pieces of flesh mixed with the gravel, limbs, bones, and a coat collar tag with an address on it. To describe the strength of the explosion, he mentions that they have to use a shovel to gather that pieces: "I tell you they had to fetch a shovel to gather him up with" (*SA*, p.145).

That dramatic representation of the explosion shocks Winnie and destroys her life. After hearing this, she keeps her silence and only the tears are coming out of her eyes like waterfalls. She is described as making "an appalled murmur that died out on her blanched lips. Might have been father and son" (*SA*, p.169). She considers Verloc as a father to Stevie, but Verloc brings Stevie to death. This experience is described as something unbearable, suggesting its significance for Mrs. Verloc. Conrad describes the deep impact of this incident on Winnie, saying "this creature's moral nature had been subjected to a shock of which, in the physical order, the most violent earthquake of history could only be a faint and languid rendering" (*SA*, p.177). As Winnie anticipates that other explosions may happen, this incident leads to two other

violent actions done by Winnie herself which are murdering Verloc and her own death (Panagopoulos, p.113).

Conrad presents a fact that is Stevie's misfortune to live in a world which does not evaluate those who live by the intensities of felt experience. In the portrayal of Stevie, Conrad listens to the talk of madness and criticizes the madness of the larger world. Conrad listens to Stevie, unlike Winnie, Verloc, Ossipon, and the narrator who pays minute attention to Stevie's stammering and the powerful observations about the life around him. Accordingly, Suresh Raval relates that in *The Secret Agent*:

Conrad involves the sympathetic reader in his radical criticism of the conventional perception of things. In the novel's world where empty oratory operates in the place of action and idealistic pretense masquerades as sincere conviction, characters are caught up in duplicity, shallowness, and calculation (Raval, p.120).

Stevie's madness does not imply the narrator's denial of the moral judgments Stevie makes; it is, rather, a rejection of the world which allows for moral judgments only at the price of madness. In the narrator's opinion, Stevie's trustfulness is a part of his madness as well. Stevie's pity and compassion are inconceivable apart from madness, as the world he lives in is like a network of expediency and exploitation that any moral feeling in it carries the imprint of a destructive sentimentality. Verloc is the best example of this corrupt world.

Conrad presents us Verloc, the secret agent, who is "as much of a father as poor Stevie ever had in his life" (SA, p.129), as Winnie mentions. Though he is not Stevie's father by birth, she asks from her husband, Verloc, to assume the role of Stevie's loving parent, but Verloc acts in the father's name only or just representing his symbolic law which does not bring Stevie into the social world. Instead, he carelessly uses the boy, stealing him from the safety of his relationship with his sister, Winnie, to serve someone else's whims. Unaware of the results, Stevie blows himself

to bits. Conrad clearly depicts Verloc's indolence and selfishness which allows him to make use of Stevie in the bombing plot. This tragic incident leads to Verloc's death exactly as Winnie's prediction about other explosions to happen.

Verloc's death is another clear scene of violence in the novel. As a result of her trauma over her brother, his wife Winnie stabs him in the chest with a carving knife after she hears the conversation between him and Chief Inspector Heat when they talk about Stevie's death. Heat tells Verloc about the evidence of Stevie's coat collar tag which is found at the crime scene with Verloc's home address on it, saying "the overcoat has got a label sewn on the inside with your address written in marking ink" (SA, p.142). Winnie hears all the conversation between the two, particularly Heat's description of the flesh mixed with the gravel and they have to use a shovel to gather the pieces. Winnie's own violent reaction, when she comes to experience her husband's betrayal, is stabbing him in the chest while he was asleep on the sofa.

The scene of the death is very terrible and horrifying. Winnie leaves Verloc lying on the sofa and the blood covers the floor with the "dark drops fell on the floorcloth one after another, with a sound of ticking growing fast and furious like the pulse of an insane clock" (SA, p.184). The night was dark and quiet; nothing can be heard except the blood drops which keep falling down making ticking noise. Winnie chooses to act because action is "the enemy of thought" as Conrad names it in his *Nostramo* (qtd. in Bivona, p.168), and she takes revenge for her brother's death. When Ossipon comes with Winnie to take the money, he sees that terrible scene, and he observes Verloc drenched in his own blood. He sees Verloc's hat and its movement when he pushes the table to get out of the house, making it fall on the floor: "A round hat disclosed in the middle of the floor by the moving of the table rocked slightly on its crown in the wind of her flight" (SA, p.184). Conrad tries to reduce the seriousness of the scene of violence by focusing on the hat rather than the dead body of Verloc.

The other explosion that Winnie has expected is her own death. By Stevie's death, she has lost her reason for living, particularly the reason for honoring the marriage promises. Verloc no longer presents the aspect of a husband for her. She begins to question the meaning of her existence as a wife: "Her contract with existence, as represented by that man standing over there, was at an end" (SA, p.172). She marries Verloc to provide a good life for Stevie. Stevie's death drives Winnie to commit two acts of violence, killing her husband, Mr. Verloc and committing suicide. After she kills her husband, she feels terrified of the gallows. She runs out of the house door. She looks for a savior. Conrad refers to her difficult situation:

Mrs. Verloc, who always refrained from looking deep into things, was compelled to look into the very bottom of this thing. She saw there no haunting face, no reproachful shade, no vision of remorse, no sort of ideal conception. She saw there an object. That object was the gallows (SA, p.186).

She is scared of the gallows and wants someone who can take her away. Unluckily, she meets Ossipon in the street in darkness, the man who was behind her death later. She begs him to take her away to France to save her. Instead of saving her, he just tricks her, taking her money and abandoning her alone in the train. Then, she takes the steamer to France, but she feels desperate "since it led either to the gallows or to the river" (SA, p.187). She throws herself overboard and is found dead in the sea the next day.

Winnie's character is very important in the novel. Conrad mentions in his "Author's Note" on the novel that "the story of Winnie Verloc stood out complete from the days of her childhood to the end" (SA, p.xii). He mentions the same thing in his letters, too, and suggests a subtitle to his novel *The Secret Agent* as a "Simple Tale" of Mrs. Verloc from childhood to death. Watt mentions that the importance of Winnie's role in the novel comes from Conrad's assertion that she is the essential character of the story which comes from "her importance in the imaginative process

which turned a public event into a domestic drama” (Watt, p.226). In spite of the fact that the Greenwich Observatory outrage is the main incident on which the novel is based and Conrad got from his source not only the aims and purposes of anarchists of that time but also the whole series of related happenings built on the secret workings of police and anarchists in London which led to the Greenwich outrage, Winnie still plays a vital role in the novel to show the reader how a female character suffers in the middle of that world of chaos. Since Conrad’s main issues in these political novels are terrorism, espionage, and violence, the world he depicts in this work is a male world. For Michael Greaney, *The Secret Agent* clearly presents a male dialogue as its linguistic model. Its *dramatis personae* include the familiar Conradian collection of male speakers: policemen, politicians, detectives, and spies have substituted the sailors, but the pattern remains the same. Like *Lord Jim*, *The Secret Agent* presents dialogue after dialogue between men about issues from which women are excluded (Greaney, p.136). In the novel we rarely find a conversation between the female characters. Winnie is neither communicating a lot with her husband, nor with her mother, they rarely talk to each other.

However, the violence and cruelty are everywhere, and such matters can be seen clearly from the beginning to the end of the novel. The reality of violence and death is a damned hole, of no use to man. As Ossipon describes, it is “a damned hole. [...] “Wait till you are lying flat on your back at the end of your time,” he retorted, jumping off the footboard after the other. “Your scurvy, shabby, mangy little bit of time,” (SA, pp.212-3). Also, the Professor’s idea to destroy mankind at the same moment as he is ready to kill himself by carrying a small bomb in his pocket, is a clear example of violence in this novel. Violence affects the individuals and their relationships and it leads to death in many situations in this novel.

1.3. The Anarchists

In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad criticizes the anarchists and their way of asking for the FP (the Future of the Proletariat). They have devoted their literature and their writings for that purpose. The anarchists of *The Secret Agent* do not have the pure idealism as the anarchists in *Under Western Eyes* or the same character as Haldin (Tucker, p.148). He is an idealistic anarchist who believes that terrorism and killing are acceptable tools in the struggle against imperialism and government oppression.

However, the anarchists in *The Secret Agent* are not men of action, and their faith in the ideology, they admit, is not enough for activating them in public actions of protest. They talk and protest a lot but do nothing. None of them would qualify for the name of a real anarchist. That name would involve real dissatisfaction, faith in a certain ideology or system that is to bring solutions to all social ills. Also it is supposed to involve courage to take an active public role in the actual structure of this ideology to defeat the established “corrupt” order. In his *The Secret Agent*, Conrad makes the following statement about the anarchists: “In their own way the most ardent of revolutionaries are perhaps doing no more but seeking for peace in common with the rest of mankind—the peace of soothed vanity, of satisfied appetites, or perhaps of appeased conscience” (SA, p.56). They look for peace but in their own way which is different from other peoples’ ways or at least to feel that they are doing something which can make them feel satisfied. These groups of the anarchists are against the government, and their literature writings are against the government, too. They gather and meet at the Verloc quarter in Brett Street, Soho, in Verloc’s house. Verloc is one of them.

The narrator refuses to give the physical descriptions of the characters even though the characters in the novel are usually described like physical objects. In short, he criticizes the materialistic principles which control the fictional world by setting human values against them (Pettersson, p.147). Especially the anarchist characters are often described on the surface level with their physical appearances.

The anarchist characters in the novel are Michaelis, Karl Yundt, Ossipon, and the Professor. Besides, there is Verloc, the agent provocateur who spies on them. Michaelis is emotional and naïve. He is described as “the ticket-of-leave apostle” (SA, p.161). He is released from prison on parole. He has become like a person who is guided and supported by an older and more experienced person who later has settled him in a cottage at the country so that he could write his book or memoirs (*The Autobiography of a Prisoner*). He feels delight at having written this book and expects it to be “like a book of Revelation in the history of mankind” (SA, p.83). Michaelis is a very strange figure in every sense. He is very fat; he hates physical exercises and the idea of violence. He is unable to do an action of any kind, much less anarchic action. He is only full of ideals, theories, and words. He believes in the gradual improvement of society and capitalism’s breakdown and he is a dreamer of false self-pride. He remains outside the society and its realities to which he pretends to be “Apostle” or the messenger. Michaelis becomes a negative image of the anarchists.

Karl Yundt is described as the most disgusting character in the story. He is old now, a “moribund veteran of dynamite wars” (SA, p.33). He is a physically and morally helpless figure. He defines law as “the pretty branding instrument invented by the overfed to protect themselves against the hungry” (SA, p.32); he proves that he is “an insolvent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses” (SA, p.33). He is just like other anarchists who are unable to do any kind of action. In his life, he depends on exploiting the loyalty of a woman whom he seduced before, he is like a parasite. He talks a lot about the necessity of the destruction which serves only to terrify Stevie when he hears it, but fails to motivate his companions, the other anarchists, since it is known that “The famous terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as his little finger against the social edifice” (SA, p.33). He represents that type of anarchist who has never done any act than can characterize him as a real

revolutionary figure. They do not do anything good for society, but they merely fuss with no action.

The other anarchist is Ossipon whose nickname is “the Doctor” (because he was a medical student who never finished his studies). He is not very different from K. Yundt except that he is young with a strong shape. He is coward and mean, and he is a contradictory figure. He is selfish, insensitive to others’ pain, trivial, greedy, dull-witted and insensible. He is described as “with a flattened nose and prominent mouth cast in the rough mould of the negro type” (SA, p.30). He aims only to serve his own interests, and he takes advantage of the women he has seduced. He addresses the necessity of emotion as the promoter of action while he is himself incapable of both.

The most convincing one among the anarchists of *The Secret Agent* is the Professor who is a real nihilist activated by a passion for killing. His actions emphasize the sense of his deep hatred toward society and individuals alike. The only feelings he is capable of are hate and contempt. Thinking of his mental superiority to the people around him serves only to motivate his “vengeful bitterness” (SA, p.56). The Professor is a moral agent and an individualist, who believes in the importance of individual action and personal prestige. To him, the world is stained with a morality that is “artificial, corrupt and blasphemous” (SA, p.55), and the only way to destroy the background of the established social order is to destroy their faith in legality through “some form of collective or individual violence” (SA, p.56). In one situation in the novel, while he replies to the questions of Chief Inspector Heat, we are told that “he beheld in that one man all the forces he had set at defiance: the force of law, property, oppression, and injustice” (SA, p.57). At least, we can say that the Professor is a figure of potential destroyer, walking among the crowds of London with enough explosive in his pocket to blow himself up together with a good many people around him. He is possessed by the idea of creating the “perfect detonator” (SA, p.46). He dares to commit an act of self-destruction, but in the end he proves to be a failure.

The Professor, however, is very much a product of a Protestant bourgeois conception of life. He works fourteen hours a day to accomplish his work. He remains strongly dedicated to the work he likes the most, which is the creation of the bomb. His criticism of the anarchists comes from his loyalty to his work. He addresses them:

You [revolutionaries] plan the future, you lose yourselves in reveries of economical systems derived from what is; whereas what's wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life. That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it (SA, p.50).

He believes that the anarchists' obsession with a new conception of life prevents them from acting in the present. What he wants is swift destruction which can lead to a clean start or to create a new world after its total destruction.

The Professor represents the critical power of logic in certain forms of radical ideology. His vision is perfectly logical, merciless, and nihilistic but he accepts its results and never escapes of it (Raval, p.115). Yet his logic is cut off from any understanding of the moral relations among human beings. In the world of *The Secret Agent*, honesty and sincerity are to be found only in the extremely crazed anarchists like the Professor, or in a retarded boy like Stevie. The Professor realizes unfairness and suffering in the present world, and desires to destroy the world in the hope that a just and perfect world will follow.

The revolutionaries, whether socialists, violent anarchists, or simply emotional dreamers of reform, dream of an ideal society which will match with their own principles. Conrad considers human institutions as imperfect institutions, and he portrays utopian dreams as completely absurd. Democracy was a general dream among nations, but in Conrad's view, it is inferior to traditional monarchy because of its electoral method and it could never act effectively. Then, it could not uphold the

unity and the quality of leadership necessary for stable existence. As a conservative in all the spheres, Conrad is in opposition to all phases of humanitarianism and shows his distaste through those features, movements and models of humanitarian principles. In his work, we can touch many matters, such as his hatred of rebellion, his disbelief in the dream of friendship and true understanding between races. He believes that charitable behavior towards one's neighbors does not ensure loyalty to the best moral law. All these matters are revealed in his treatment of both character and situation. As Conrad's philosophy is centered on man's responsibility to be controlled by moral law so that he could fit into solidarity of the community of humanity, the humanitarian's purpose is to focus on the individual's inner struggle between good and evil which is different from Conrad's treatment of character. Heist, Jim, Nostromo, and the rest find that they have to surrender to this moral law in order to conform to the norms of the community of man and therefore, find their true selves (Taylor, p.72).

Norman Sherry states in his book *Conrad, The Critical Heritage*, that Conrad "deliberately excludes the human and intimate aspects of his historical originals in order to condemn the anarchists by a caricatural presentation" (Sherry, p.68). Conrad's contempt for revolutionaries is powerfully expressed in this novel. He depicts them as helpless and useless figures. As the Professor's idealism is the result of his personal pride, in his heart he fears the crowd who will never submit to his domination, but at the end he proves that he is a loser, too.

CHAPTER II

DEHUMANIZATION IN *THE SECRET AGENT*

“Bad world for poor people”

SA, p. 119

The lack of any strong and healthy human relationship and the presence of disintegration in relationships can be seen clearly among the characters in *The Secret Agent*. Mrs. Winnie Verloc, the secret agent's wife, knows nothing of her husband's secret life. They are just husband and wife but there is nothing common between them. Mr. Verloc thinks that he is “being loved for himself” (SA, p.174), while Mrs. Verloc devotes her life to her younger, mentally sick brother, Stevie. The absence of real communication and empathy in the Verloc family is at the center of Conrad's critique against Late Victorian London (Spittles, p.64). That big city of darkness and unclear relations between its inhabitants is well presented in his novel.

Stevie's response to what he has seen and experienced in this cruel world of dehumanization and manipulation is shown clearly by his description of this world, relating that it is a “bad world for poor people” (SA, p.119). It seems merely words coming from a fool's mouth, but it is a wisdom that represents a moral understanding of the unfairness and dehumanization in human relations. One of the narrator's positive values that he wants to show us is the ability to care about other peoples' sufferings presented by a half-crazed boy. In the world of *The Secret Agent*, even the police officers have adapted themselves to such a world by recognizing the “bad” and

the “poor” and they do not oppose it, but rather are involved or disassociate themselves from it.

This chapter explores dehumanization in *The Secret Agent* as a clear example of the problems of the Victorian era and modern society in the industrial city, London, besides, the exploitation among characters which takes many levels; in politics, in friendships, and in family relationships. Furthermore, there is isolation; people are isolated even if they are living among crowds. There are no real relationships among people. The individuals themselves are self-alienated, as in Stevie’s case. He is alone in this world of destructive self-alienation, and sometimes speaks to himself with sincerity. The secrecy in relationships and in work among the individuals is very clear in the novel, and will also be discussed in this chapter.

What the anarchist, the Professor, has done is a clear example of dehumanization. He has invented a small detonator. He carries that bomb with him and is ready to blow himself up. He feels that he can do that if a police officer or anyone else threatens his safety or tries to arrest him. He is ready to kill himself and causes death to all people around him. Also, he supplies the bomb to Verloc who has bought it and supposed that he is the person who will carry out an anarchist act with it, not someone else. Conrad is aware of what the Professor and the other anarchists who dream of destroying the existing system as well as society, which shows Conrad’s views and his hatred of radicals and extremism in general.

2.1 Exploitation

Conrad finds that in modern life “man feeds on others” (Aubry, p.171), i.e., people exploit and manipulate one another. This fact can be clearly seen in *The Secret Agent*, where there are many cases of exploitation on different levels. In the novel, dealing with human beings as only means or objects is an obvious issue. There is a reference to the using of people by some other people as a resource, with no regard to

their well-being. Therefore, exploitation in social relationships can also be seen clearly where someone uses the other for his own personal advantage, just as how Verloc misuses Stevie. Like the modern world, in the world of *The Secret Agent* there is no place for the innocents. The characters are portrayed like animals, and there is no place for the weak. Verloc uses for his simple-minded brother-in-law, Stevie, to plant a bomb beside the wall of the Observatory in Greenwich Park, an act that can be considered as one of obvious terrorism against a worthy and perfect scientific institution (Spittles, p.73). Stevie is idealistic, and he likes his sister Winnie and the anarchists, too. He trusts Verloc completely as his protector. Especially after his mother's departure from Verloc's house, Winnie tries to strengthen the relationship between her husband and her poor brother, uttering: "I wish you would take that boy out with you, Adolf -You don't know him. That boy just worships you" (SA, p.129). Winnie asks Verloc to take Stevie with him to walk together, but Verloc does not like that idea at first because he thinks that the boy may get lost, but later he agrees to accompany him. Verloc finds it an opportunity to be alone with Stevie. However, instead of taking care of him, Verloc exploits Stevie. He convinces Stevie that blowing up the Observatory will be an act against poverty and injustice. He tells him that such an act will help to create a better and fairer society. Unfortunately, as he is carrying the bomb across the Greenwich Park in order to plant it, Stevie trips, accidentally triggers the detonator, and blows himself up.

Intentionally, Conrad chooses the retarded boy to convey his criticism of the corrupt people of the modern life because of Stevie's honesty and sincerity which come from his instinctive passion. Stevie is in many respects more sincerely "human" than most of the other characters in the novel. His compassion is not misdirected as theirs clearly is. His simple vision is much more generous than that of other characters. He is the only person who has insight into the meaning of things and who wants to go "to the bottom of the matter" (SA, p.120). After all, he is the only person

who does not hesitate to act upon the principles he believes in and turns them into actions.

Stevie's deep sympathy and his human sense to care about other people's sufferings make him an easy prey for Verloc's plot. The narrator expresses his sympathy for Stevie more openly after the explosion. He does not mention notions like idiot and crazy because such concepts could lessen his value as a human being. We can see that clearly in the following quotation from the novel: "The mind of Mr. Verloc lacked profundity. Under the mistaken impression that the value of individuals consists in what they are in themselves, he could not possibly comprehend the value of Stevie in the eyes of Mrs. Verloc" (SA, p.162).

Because of Verloc's lacking of wisdom, he misuses Stevie, not realizing the value of Stevie for Winnie. After the murder, the narrator contrasts Stevie's noble motives with his tragic fate by describing him as "the late faithful Stevie (blown to fragments in a state of innocence and in the conviction of being engaged in a humanitarian enterprise)" (SA, p.185).

The cab-ride scene, in which the man whips his horse, shows how this man has exploited his horse according to Stevie's norm. The scene makes it easier for the reader to recognize that the novel is really about the inner story of human reactions, rather than the outer frame of action. Conrad chooses that scene show us through a half-crazed boy, the reality of the world which is cruel to man and animal. The scene starts when Winnie's and Stevie's mother decides to move out of the Verloc home. Both Winnie and Stevie help her and they hire a cab with a very weak horse to transport her with her belongings. The cabman beats the horse many times. The poverty of the cabman and his horse are deeply affecting Stevie, and when he and Winnie are coming back home, they discuss that matter. Stevie feels surprised and asks why the police do not act against poverty and unfairness. Winnie clarifies that is not the job of the police, but Stevie gets angry and keeps asking:

What for are they then, Winn? What are they for? Tell me. Winnie disliked controversy. But fearing most a fit of black depression consequent on Stevie missing his mother very much at first, she did not altogether decline the discussion [...] Don't you know what the police are for, Stevie? They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have (SA, p.120).

Stevie thinks that the police exist not only to do justice in the sense of maintaining law and order, but to prevent injustice in a wider social, political and moral sense from happening. Winnie tries to answer him in a very careful way to show him the truth of the situation. Stevie's idealized views of society and social organization are opposed by the reality expressed by Winnie. He sees that cabman as a real exploiter and the police could not do anything to stop that unfairness. Stevie's words reveal his compassion and the "tenderness of his universal charity" (SA, p.117) to both the cabman and his horse. The author's comment on this indicates the author's sympathy for Stevie's case:

"Poor! Poor!" stammered out Stevie, pushing his hands deeper into his pockets with convulsive sympathy. He could say nothing; for the tenderness to all pain and all misery, the desire to make the horse happy and the cabman happy, had reached the point of a bizarre longing to take them to bed with him. And that, he knew, was impossible. For Stevie was not mad. It was, as it were, a symbolic longing (SA, p.116).

Stevie has an ideal conception of the police, which leads him to trust them. He feels betrayed when he discovered that the police are not interested in acting against evil, which is, for Stevie, a social injustice and cruelty. He thinks that the police have been pretending. Stevie's faith in the ideal of the external appearance of the police as a guardian of justice is destroyed by the reality of their real purpose which causes Stevie's mental and emotional pain. After losing his trust in the police, Stevie moves

into an absolute trust of Verloc. Unfortunately he, too, betrays Stevie's ideal trust, a betrayal caused by Verloc's selfishness and leading Stevie to his tragic end.

The Secret Agent expresses Conrad's essential political views with more clarity and simplicity than any other novels he wrote. The novel uncovers the fact that corruption and exploitation on the political level among policemen, and in the dealings of the foreign embassy, is a clear problem of the modern time which affects the social life negatively. George Steiner points out that *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* reveal that Conrad's novels after 1900 were the ones which so unexpectedly and so presciently revealed what Steiner calls "the impulses towards disintegration, the cracks in the wall of European stability" (Steiner, p.40). Conrad is concerned with these "instincts" and "cracks" in everything he wrote. Roger D. Spegele asserts that the conflict inherent in the middle-class regime takes place among individuals charged with public and private responsibilities alike. The laws and regulations charging public officials with certain duties do not reduce the desperate struggles for power (Spegele, p.16). The policemen use and exploit their position for personal purposes rather than being interested in law enforcement.

Chief Inspector Heat tries to use his position as an officer or detective to put the blame on the anarchist Michaelis as he is behind the Greenwich Observatory outrage. He does that for personal reasons; also his superior, the Assistant Commissioner aims to uncover the truth for personal reasons rather than for the sake of justice. Chief Inspector Heat struggles to prevent his boss, the Assistant Commissioner, from discovering his "secret" source of information. He aims to prevent the Assistant Commissioner from discovering the fact that he uses double agents, which has allowed Heat to get a higher position in the bureaucracy. Therefore, he protects Verloc, from being exposed as the doer of the Greenwich bomb plot by pinning the blame on Michaelis. His effort to keep his "whole system of supervision" (SA, p.146) is not motivated by concern for the public interest. On the contrary, Heat

is worried that if his “system” of double agents is discovered, his failure to arrest the Professor will come to light.

On the other hand, the Assistant Commissioner has different purposes and aims different from those of Heat. He wishes to protect Michaelis, upon whom Heat tries to cast suspicions as the one who is behind the bomb plot. The Assistant Commissioner’s motive is to keep a good relationship with Michaelis’ patroness, Lady Mabel, who “would not brook patiently any interference with Michaelis’ freedom” (SA, p.76). His motive is very selfish; he does that to keep this lady’s presence as a positive influence over his wife. Far from being the ideal public servant, his “interest in his work of social protection” (SA, p.71) is a travesty. On the contrary, it shows “the instinct of self-preservation was strong within him” (SA, p.78). Acting from self-interest is very clear here. He is more interested in his and his wife’s social status and ready to make use of others for that purpose.

The struggle between Chief Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner is designed to weaken the position of each in the bureaucracy. Due to this private struggle, the work assigned to them of protecting individual liberty and property is hidden and then ignored. Conrad suggests the conflict in the middle-class do not lead to public benefit. The regime fails to fulfil the promise of the classical liberal model (Spegele, p.17).

Always the risk in society is that the police will sink to the level of the terrorists in their fight against them. In his conversation with the other anarchist Ossipon, the Professor expresses his attitude towards the police and how he considers them just like the terrorists. He relates:

Like to like. The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket. Revolution, legality—counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical. He plays his little game; so do you propagandists. But I don’t play: I work fourteen

hours a day and go hungry sometimes. My experiments cost money now and again, and then I must do without food for a day or two (SA, p.48)

The Professor's view is that the revolution is not merely philosophizing as Ossipon and other anarchists think, but it is a counter-move to police action in the game of the proper society. Both the doings of the revolutionaries and those of the police reduce themselves to countermoves in a game whose rules are already prearranged. The terrorist action that is supposed to shake the society becomes fuel for the crackdown. The crackdown itself causes additional actions of opposition. This is the game of dominance, described by Walter Benjamin as "a cycle between law-making and law-preserving violence" (Benjamin, p.83). He describes the political life as a game. The terrorists and policemen are the two players of the game whose rules are not clear for both of them.

The Professor is known to Chief Inspector Heat as a fanatic who provides the explosives to any terrorist ready to use them. However, Chief Inspector Heat does not arrest him because he knows that the Professor is capable of blowing himself up and whoever is close to him with the home-produced bomb that he carries with him wherever he goes. In spite of the fact that the Professor does not have enough physical power, he has strong character and power of will, and because of his strong will, the police cannot arrest him. Ironically, the longer the police fail to act against him, the stronger becomes his threat. His self-confidence is improved and his will is increased. He feels confident by owning that bomb and he knows the police have an idea about it. He comments on that fact, saying:

I have the means to make myself deadly, but that by itself, you understand, is absolutely nothing in the way of protection. What is effective is the beliefs those people have in my will to use the means. That's their impression. It is absolute. Therefore I am deadly (SA, p.47).

The quotation shows a clear example of the police corruption. The Professor knows that the middle-class regime, represented by the police and Chief Inspector Heat, is exposed to exploitation. Its individual acts in terms of what will and what will not lead to personal survival makes them easy prey for exploiters. He feels that he is superior to others; he has strong beliefs, and he is not like others, he is deadly. However, although he appears to be completely insane, the professor has reasons for choosing to act the way he does. His aim is not only killing; bombs are designed to “destroy public faith in legality” (SA, p.55), the authority of a regime which he finds “monstrously enormous, odious, oppressive, worrying, humiliating, extortionate, intolerable” (SA, p.36).

Heat does not have true wisdom like that of the Professor. He has a wisdom of “an official kind” (SA, p.58). Therefore, he is unable to understand the Professor’s goals. He is good at understanding the objective of criminals who involve in the “more energetic forms of thieving” (SA, p.63). Truly, there is very slight difference between the police and thief in the middle-class regime “because, as a matter of fact, the mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer” (SA, p.63) they understand each other “ Both recognize the same conventions. [...] Products of the same machine, one classed as useful and the other as noxious, they take the machine for granted in different ways, but with a seriousness essentially the same” (SA, p.63). The corrupt police and the terrorists are presented as two sides of the same coin, both of them represent a real threat to the social life.

The lots of some characters reflect Conrad’s attitude to society. All the characters, including the police, act from self-interest. The order of the civilization is shown to be unreal; people are trapped in their own obsessions, and during the many dialogues in the novel, they continually misunderstand each other. Ian Watt mentions that Conrad sees civilization as a random creation depending on no source of value outside humanity. His picture of the evil collaboration of policemen and ministers of

the state within the heavy darkness of the huge town is one of his most remarkable dramatizations of this black vision of civilized society (Watt, p.182).

Mr. Vladimir, First Secretary of the foreign embassy, knows well how to exploit Verloc, the agent provocateur to carry out his plans. Mr. Vladimir is fully aware of Verloc's weaknesses, and he uses them for his own purposes. Vladimir's aim is to convince the "middle class" that anarchy is a danger that the only cure of which is the cancellation of individual liberty. The passivity or the inactiveness of the society makes him extremely angry and impatient. Mr. Vladimir thinks that the bourgeoisie are involved in that problem through using their power to support the anarchists. They have the power to expel them, but they are partners in the crime as he utters:

The imbecile bourgeoisie of this country make themselves the accomplices of the very people whose aim is to drive them out of their houses to starve in ditches. And they have the political power still, if they only had the sense to use it for their preservation (SA, p.19).

His method of pushing them into action is to provoke an act so outrageously that it strikes at the very heart of bourgeoisie. An attack on property will not do that, but the outrage must be outside the "ordinary" passions of humanity. Vladimir's plan for the bombing of the Greenwich Observatory is intended to attack the "fetish" of the bourgeoisie (Spegele, p.13) which is "science". Science is worshiped by them. For them, it is more important than an attack on a theater or the whole street because they believe in science as a main source of their material wealth. Vladimir declares:

It is the sacrosanct fetish. [...] All the damned professors are radicals at heart. [...] They believe that in some mysterious way science is at the source of their material prosperity. [...] And the absurd ferocity of such a demonstration will affect them more

profoundly than the mangling of a whole street—or theatre—full of their own kind. To that last they can always say: “Oh! it’s mere class hate.” But what is one to say to an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable; in fact, mad? (SA, p.22).

Vladimir plans the outrage as to be so destructive, so absurd, unfathomable, unthinkable, and totally mad. He realizes the importance of the Greenwich Observatory, the science institute, for the bourgeoisie and how such an outrage will push them to act against the doer, the anarchists. Therefore, he waits for the reaction to such madness which is the repression of individual liberty and to put the blame on the anarchists.

Vladimir wants Verloc to accomplish his plot, but first he must break down Verloc’s confidence in his own worth. Vladimir begins by ordering him to come to the embassy in daylight, indicating that the embassy officials are ready to risk his discovery. However, the insult to Verloc does not stop here; in the embassy, Councillor Wurmt insults him too by saying, “you are very corpulent” (SA, p.12). Later, Vladimir continues in the same tone. He asks Verloc if he knows French, when Verloc answers positively, Vladimir speaks English with him not French, which shows in subtle Vladimir’s aim to underestimate Verloc’s trust in himself. He accuses Verloc of being subjected to seduction and then indicates he is too fat to be attractive to women.

These intended series of insults are designed to convince Verloc that he is in danger of losing his long-standing and money-making position as an agent provocateur. By weakening Verloc’s understanding of his own value, Vladimir is in a position to order him to prove his worth by doing something really dangerous. Mr. Vladimir’s word or threat is clear: either Verloc agrees to carry out the Greenwich bomb plot or he loses his job (Spegele, p.14). Vladimir wins that game and has succeeded in exploiting Verloc. The weakness of Verloc’ personality subjects him to

manipulation. Also his fatness, his emotionality to women, and his moral nihilism have showed his character as a loser and helpless figure. He chooses to become a tool in the plan to destroy the middle-class regime. After that meeting, Verloc comes home and thinks seriously of keeping his job and he decides to follow Mr. Vladimir's orders.

As for the narrative style of the novel, the conversation between Vladimir and Verloc which is described as the linguistic bomb, spoken by Vladimir, triggers off the whole series of explosions; it destroys Verloc's false impression that the value of individuals consists in what they are in themselves or the belief of "being loved for himself" (SA, p.174), and it threatens Verloc's mistaken sense of security. These tactics used by Vladimir have successfully shocked Verloc and achieves the effect which Vladimir has intended. As Vladimir declares to Verloc, "The good old Stott-Wartenheim times are over. No work, no pay. Mr. Verloc felt a queer sensation of faintness in his stout legs. He stepped back one pace, and blew his nose loudly. He was, in truth, startled and alarmed" (SA, p.18). Vladimir's linguistic bomb transports him to an absurdly violent world where the individual is unimportant and society itself seems shaking on the edge of an abyss (Panagopoulos, p.116). In other words, these verbal threats have produced the psychological explosion in Verloc's mind. However, both Verloc and Ossipon find it difficult to express this destructive knowledge they have because it associates them in murder.

Almost all the anarchists in the secret agent, except the Professor, are described as inactive figures in the world of anarchism. They exploit and depend on others in their lives. Karl Yundt, the old anarchist, is a member of Verloc's group. In more than one time in the novel, he is referred to as an "old terrorist" (SA, p.24). He leads his life by exploiting the woman whom he had an affair with a long time ago. He lives on another's favor:

A lazy lot—this Karl Yundt, nursed by a blear-eyed old woman, a woman he had years ago enticed away from a friend, and afterwards had tried more than once to shake off into the gutter. Jolly lucky for Yundt that she had persisted in coming up time after time, or else there would have been no one now to help him out (SA, p.36).

This quotation above clearly shows that he is too lazy to do anything except making use of “the blear-eyed old woman” whom he has seduced earlier, not only because he is too old, but also to show what kind of a man he is. The woman is old, too, but she used to come and took care of him from time to time. Without that woman, he is helpless and no one else offers him any help.

Conrad despises the anarchists thoroughly. He tries to show us how useless they are. Not only Karl Yundt who exploits women, but also the other anarchist Ossipon does the same thing to many women that he seduced before and finally he exploits Mr. Verloc’s wife, Winnie.

What Ossipon has done to Winnie is considered as unhuman behavior and a clear example of exploitation in *The Secret Agent*. By chance, he hears the news of Verloc’s death who is killed by Winnie when she finds out that he was responsible for her brother’s death. Ossipon goes there to make sure of Verloc’s death and to see Winnie, the same time. He likes her because she is a very attractive woman. He meets her in the street. She asks him “Help, Tom! Save me. I won’t be hanged!” (SA, p.202). Ossipon deceives Winnie and promises her that he will help her to run away from the police because she feels terrified of the gallows. He misleads Winnie and takes her money by acting to help her to escape out of the country, but he leaves her alone by leaping off the train when he had promised to accompany her to France.

Ossipon, like his society in general, may have moved away from a mortality based on religious belief. He follows his whims and seems to lack the morals. As the narrator indicates, “He was free from the trammels of conventional morality—but he

submitted to the rule of science” (SA, p.206). He believes in science more than religion. Conrad refers to Ossipon, comparing his relations with Lombroso to how “an Italian peasant recommends himself to his favourite saint” (SA, p.206). It is a clear reference to the fact that the real morality has simply been replaced by another. By comparing Ossipon to an Italian peasant, Conrad mocks Ossipon’s motives while suggesting that superstition and fear may be as much an essential part of science as of religion. Religious feeling and scepticism are also placed in dialectical opposition to one another (Panagopoulos, p.261). The moral aspects of Ossipon’s actions, in return, bring him to an early grave: “I am seriously ill, he muttered to himself with scientific insight” (SA, p.216). That is because of his real betrayal of Winnie.

Winnie is frightened and tries to find anyone who can protect her and gets her out of this trouble. After she runs away with Ossipon, she asks him: “What is it, Tom? Is there any danger? [...] You think of everything [...] You’ll get me off, Tom? [...] “There is no danger, he said” (SA, p.206). He promises to help her and to be her savior from the gallows, but instead of doing that, he does the opposite:

As he felt the train beginning to move, Mrs. Verloc heard and felt nothing, and Ossipon, her saviour, stood still. He felt the train roll quicker, rumbling heavily to the sound of the woman’s loud sobs, and then crossing the carriage in two long strides he opened the door deliberately, and leaped out. He had leaped out at the very end of the platform (SA, p.208).

This act shows the evil in the character of Ossipon. All of these grieves, losing of her dear brother, losing of her husband, and the betrayal caused by Ossipon, push Winnie to commit suicide. She is found drowned in the river.

As a result of what he has done to drive a simple woman to suicide, Ossipon is the only character in the story who has come into the presence of real madness and despair. In the state of terror, he has effectively exploited it without knowing that.

After he reads an article in the newspaper about Winnie's drowning and death, he is left to drown in drinking. The narrator describes his state as "impenetrable mystery destined to hang forever over this act of madness or despair" (SA, p.214). Most of Conrad's main characters are rarely achieve self-knowledge, and when they do, it is only when they are about to die or go mad.

2.2. Isolation

In Conrad's world man is essentially alone. He is not under the protection of a benevolent God. Even blood ties or the marriage bond, in Conrad's works, are not free of isolation. In fact, Conrad's characters are often "isolated" individuals. Joy and happiness are not shared among people but they rather prefer isolation. Love or affection between people, man and woman, parent and child, between friends is always uncertain and short-lived. His stories reflect many cases of human alienation.

Isolation in Conrad is either intended (the choice of the individual) or imposed (the punishment of the society). Intended isolation may be due to the individual's desire to live outside the social circle, to be free from its limits and burdens. Sea life is less complicated compared to life on land, or in a great city. Being away from society may be possible in a ship as in *Chance*, or deserted in island (*Victory*), or unusual wilderness (*Lord Jim*, *Heart of Darkness*), but not from land as in *The Secret Agent* (Araz, p.153). Winnie's mother prefers to live alone and she moves out of Verloc's house by her will. Michaelis also leaves the city and lives in a cottage in the country to be alone and start writing his book. Some other characters live in imposed isolation such as Winnie, Stevie, and others.

However, a human being may live a life of isolation in the middle of a huge city, even when enclosed in his or her own family. Verloc and Winnie; Jim, Stein, Nostromo, Mrs. Gould, Decoud, Razmov, Marlow (*HOD*), Heyst, Captain Anthony are all lonely individuals. As Cedric Watts comments about that matter:

The isolation Conrad depicts is not merely the physical isolation of individuals or groups on ships surrounded by sea or in outposts surrounded by jungle; more tellingly it is the covert loneliness that occurs within crowds or within marriage when seeming mutuality has been rotted inwardly by egotism. There are very few happy marriages in Conrad's pages; and on the joys of parenthood, on happy family reunions, on sociable celebrations, he has conspicuously little to say: loss, separation and the conflict of desires are his preference (Watts, p.48).

Cedric Watts shows us that Conrad, in many of his works, presents not the traditional type of isolation as in someone or group of people in a ship or in a jungle and away from others, but what he tries to present is that type of isolation which happens in the middle of the crowds, within marriages, between family members. This type of isolation causes separation in society. An ambiguity of social forms controls the emotional world of love, hate, friendship, and enmity in Conrad's world, where almost nothing is pure or absolute. Lack of communication characterizes even the relation between husband and wife.

The most common type of the isolation is the one produced by self-enclosurement. This is seen most often in people who live in a heavily populated city. Verloc and Winnie are an example. They are husband and wife, but they have nearly nothing in common. Each one has entered into marriage for his or her specific reasons but they are neither aware of each other's reasons nor of their own. Winnie is basically uninterested as a wife and holds to her beliefs that "things don't bear much looking into" (SA, p.125). This refusal reflects her motives to concentrate all her care and attention on her half-witted brother Stevie. On the opposite side, her husband cares for himself and never thinks of sharing anything with his wife:

Mr. and Mrs. Verloc's accord was perfect, but it was not precise. It was a tacit accord, congenial to Mrs. Verloc's incuriosity and to Mr.

Verloc's habits of mind, which were indolent and secret. They refrained from going to the bottom of facts and motives (*SA*, p.179).

Even their conversation consists of statements that do not form a real dialogue. They do not discuss the real facts or problems of their lives. They do not know each other's real motives. Because of the tension that he lives in, Verloc does not communicate a lot with his wife. He is even not interested in listening to her, but this "had prevented him from attaching any sense to what his wife was saying. It was as if her voice was talking on the other side of a very thick wall" (*SA*, p.40). This separation or alienation between Verloc and his wife reaches its climatic point. Then, after the explosion and Stevie's death, Verloc thinks that he has at last talked to his wife and calls her to his side at the sofa, and Winnie comes closer with a knife in hands stabs him to death.

Also the anarchists in the novel, who never really communicate, are unable to establish an effective union. The lack or shortage of communication is there between friends, parents and children, co-workers, the member of the crew, and colleagues. There is isolation on every level between any two people. Verloc, for example, cannot make Vladimir see the difference between an 'agent provocateur' and a bomb-throwing anarchist. Likewise, Ossipon and the Professor are only brothers superficially; they are both of the same anarchist group, but they are not united in ideas. Also, Winnie's mother, who prefers to move out of Verloc's house and live alone, cannot explain her motives to her daughter. Winnie herself does not explain to her husband that he is not loved for himself alone, but to find a safe shelter for her mentally sick brother, Stevie. Therefore, the misunderstanding or the image of darkness as in Verloc's and Winnie's case is the most common sign of the isolation in personal relationships in the novel.

Conrad argues that man should satisfy himself with a partial achievement of good through solidarity instead of chasing the impossible perfection in the dangerous attitudes of isolation, to minimize partial success, to struggle for 'all or nothing', to give up the struggle or reject one's natural (societal) environment, to refuse ethical

responsibility toward society or one's community is not a correct attitude (Araz, p.157). Man can achieve nothing in solitude, no happiness nor good can be accomplished in isolation. No virtue is valid if it cannot stand the public test.

2.3. Secrecy

In the world of *The Secret Agent*, almost everything happens secretly. "Secrecy" enters in the core of each character's essential mode of being. Secrecy, as well as ignorance of each other's real actions or motives, portrays relations in the world of the novel. The characters of the novel do not converse with one another, but they rather talk about each other which reveal their bad behavior (Raval, p.107). Their words and intentions are not direct, but rather manipulative. Verloc is a double agent with no sincere loyalty to either side. He has little understanding of the values he shares or rejects in his activities as a spy. His tone or speeches to Winnie, when she finds out that Stevie has been the victim of his own plot, show he has no understanding of his terrible act.

Secrecy fills the lives of the novel's characters, infecting even the most deeply felt or essential moments. For instance, Verloc tries to keep Winnie from knowing the truth about Stevie's death, and when he does tell her he treats the event as if it were a minor irritation or something only to be known and to be put aside. Therefore, secrecy becomes unreasonable and exploitative; it is not the result of the unseen and unavoidable force as in Greek tragedy (Raval, p.108). The result of this secrecy is that Verloc's death is not directly connected to his espionage activities. The radicals do not know the truth about Verloc's activities as a double agent, and they do not know about Verloc's trip with Stevie to the Greenwich Observatory. On the other hand, the Professor informs Ossipon that Michaelis "didn't know anything of Verloc's death" (SA, p.210), but he himself does not know the facts about that incident. The same thing is with the Assistant Commissioner. He does not know anything about Verloc's death and Winnie's escape with Ossipon. He describes events as "domestic drama", without realizing that this domestic drama is also a social-political tragedy.

Conrad sees “civilization” as a random creation, resting on no source of value outside humanity. His picture of the evil cooperation of the policeman, the anarchists, and the ministers of the state within the heavy darkness of the huge town is one of his most notable dramatizations of this dark view of civilized society (Watt, p.182). Conrad tries to present the web of people in that big industrial city who work for their own motives. They do not care about one other, they do not really communicate and share their ideas, there is clear disintegration in their relationships, and they are like tools or stones in that city of modern life.

CHAPTER III

TERRORISM IN *THE SECRET AGENT*

Terrorism, whether international or translational, is not only a political problem; is not only a psychological problem; it is not only a moral problem; it is, fundamentally, a legal problem.

Robert A. Friedlander

The aim of this chapter is to show the effects of terrorism on individuals, their relationships, and society as a whole. This can be achieved through exploring the terrorist act in *The Secret Agent*, which is the Greenwich Observatory explosion; by detecting the aim behind it, and also by examining the psychological impacts of the terrorist event on the individual, the family, and the society. Besides, this chapter deals with some notions which are frequently used in Conrad's last novels, such as political terrorism, anarchism, nihilism.

The setting of *The Secret Agent* was in the late-Victorian period, a period which was full of violence and terrorist acts. The first terrorist bomb attack on London was done by Irish and American-Irish Republicans. Also the book reflects the concerns about the Anarchism that had started expanding internationally and become an obvious danger. These radical political beliefs and the responses it motivated brought the ideologies of terrorism that Britain inherited at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first Fenian² attacks on British soldiers in Manchester, and the bombing

² Fenian is a name derived from the ancient Irish army. This organization is like other organizations as Fenian Brotherhood and Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), all were

of Clerkenwell Prison, in which twelve people died and 100 were injured (Houen, p.21). By the 1890s, anarchists activity had spread and taken on an international level. Furthermore, there were many dynamite attacks in Europe and the USA, and there was a series of assassinations of heads of state. David Miller mentions some examples of these historical incidents in his book entitled *Anarchism*, which are:

A man named Bourdin, who had connections with anarchists in London, blew himself up carrying a bomb across Greenwich Park in 1894; President Carnot of France was killed in 1894; the Spanish Prime Minister Castillo in 1897; King Umberto of Italy in 1900; and President McKinley of the USA in 1901 (Miller, 1984, pp.112-3).

Combined with this increasing and spreading of violence, many British newspapers and journals stated their government's rule on political crime and asylum to be short-sighted. Therefore, political crime has some similarity to state insurgency. As a result, anarchist violence was frequently denied the status of political crime, especially by the press: "the anarchist is not a political assassin; he is merely a noxious beast. Anarchism has no politics" (Houen, p.36). This general contradiction and uncertainty in the British rules concerning political criminality is the main cause of the problems that terrorist violence and anti-terrorist laws presented for British liberalism at the time.

The connection between absolute optimism, ideology, and terrorism appear clearly in Conrad's fiction, as terrorism becomes a dominant theme in most of his last major fiction. Orr and Billy assert that "Conrad too felt the appeal of a cleansing annihilation. Significantly, nearly everything he wrote between 1905 and 1908 involved explosions of one kind or another" (Orr and Billy, p.180). Kurtz, in *Heart of*

opposed to Britain's 1801 Act of Union which had deprive Ireland of self-determination. These organizations aimed to the establishment of an independent Irish Republic in the 19th and early 20th century (Hachey, p.137).

Darkness, terrorizes uncooperative natives by having their heads cut off and placing them on stakes around his cottage as a reminder to others; his “Auracy and War” is full of metaphoric explosions, the manuscript of the *Chance* was known as “The Dynamite Ship” in its early stage of writing; and *The Secret Agent* is built up on the story of a revolutionary who was blown up with his own bomb. In some of Conrad’s other works, if we do not find a real explosion, we find a clear reference to it or an intention to do it, through the characters’ words and dreams, such as the anarchist character in the *Under Western Eyes*, who spends his hours dreaming and planning violent acts of terrorism. Also the mysterious Mr. X in the “The Informer” *A Set of Six*, states that there is no “amendment to be got out of mankind except by violence and terror” (Conrad, 1928, p.77), which shows clearly his way of achieving his goals through violence. The same thing applies to the Professor in *The Secret Agent*, whose final goal is to replace the middle-class political order with a better one. Such a goal may be irrational but his strategy for destroying the regime is realistic and gives one some insight into Conrad’s attitude toward liberal politics. In this point, the Professor shares Conrad’s belief in the inefficiency of reform and revolution alike. Instead, the Professor states “what’s wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life” (SA, p.50). Like Conrad, the Professor realizes that the legality and crime are linked aspects of a single system, “counter moves in the same game” (SA, p.48), each reliant on the other for its meaning and legality. The Professor understands revolution in its sense of rotating, of curving back to an original position. His refusal to obey the rules of the game makes the Professor an uneasy figure for both the other anarchists and Chief Inspector.

The central events of *The Secret Agent* arise from Mr. Vladimir’s plan to bring Britain back into line by forcing her to follow to the international order concerning harboring the anarchist. He is against the idea of accepting the anarchists as immigrants in Britain. His intention is to produce violence or a terrorist act under the anarchists’ name which he thinks will cause a problem against the anarchists. He

explains his philosophy of the bombing to Verloc, saying “A bomb outrage to have any influence on public opinion must go beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely destructive” (SA, p.22). He wants all the newspapers write about it. It is an action that needs an immediate reaction from Britain. Mr. Vladimir addresses Verloc saying: “You anarchists should make it clear that you are perfectly determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation” (SA, p.22). He tries to show him that such an outrage will be the best act for the anarchists to get what they want. Vladimir intends to terrify society, as such he aims at destroying not society itself but instead its belief in some ideologies supporting it. Mr. Vladimir chooses the target, which is the Greenwich Observatory. This choice comes from the importance of the Greenwich Observatory as a symbolic sign of science. Henry H. Han’s comment about this matter is as follows:

The political violence of European origin emerged during the last third of the 19th century, and based on a set of values embedded in modern European civilization. That terrorists from European based cultures tended to carry out their attacks against targets of great symbolic meaning, but ones usually yielding few deaths unlike those of non-European (Han, p.36).

However, it is said that “*The Secret Agent* is as much about the force of signs as it is about the force of deeds” (Haines, 102). In other words, in the text there is a clear distinction between sign and action, between image and event. This fact takes a number of forms, including these produced between pornography and revolutionary zones, the effects of the bomb plot and Winnie’s suicide, and the identification of the revolutionaries with speech rather than their actions.

The Greenwich Observatory is a scientific institute and it is an important symbol for the bourgeoisie; that is why the novel as a whole is built on that deed of violence or terrorism. The foreign embassy in London is behind that outrage. When the new first secretary Mr. Vladimir comes to the embassy, he checks the agent

provocateur's record, who is Mr. Verloc, and he finds out or it seems to him that he is useless. He orders him to come to the embassy during the daytime to meet the new first secretary. When Mr. Vladimir meets him, he discusses Verloc's inefficiency and he insults Verloc in different ways such as by calling him a "fat pig" (SA, p.8), by showing him that he is useless, by disrespecting him, and by telling him that he has done nothing to be mentioned in his secret service in the history of the embassy and they may not need his service any more. All this was to push Mr. Verloc to do more and to carry out what he will be ordered to do, which is the bombing of the scientific institute of the bourgeoisie. Vladimir plans that outrage to be carried out under the name of the anarchists. The aim behind that outrage is to end the privileged asylum given to the foreign revolutionary in England so that the English stop harboring them. The revolutionaries or the anarchists are against rules or the government of Vladimir's country, but Britain gives them the asylum and they still represent a threat to his country. However, the planned domestic terrorism will affect British government, and it will certainly respond. Terrorist attacks even at the lowest level of consideration are crimes against public order. In addition terrorism is intended to be a challenge to the state and must be dealt with as such. This is what Vladimir wants, the respond to this act and the repression of the individual freedom.

In his conversation with Verloc, Mr. Vladimir confirms that the explosion should be against science which has become more important in English life and is seen as "the fetish of today" (SA, p.20). Mr. Vladimir tells Verloc about the target which "is neither royalty nor religion. Therefore, the palace and the church should be left alone" (SA, p.21). Attacks on property, religion, and churches fail to disturb the calmness of everyday life in Britain. Vladimir informs Verloc that the target should not be a palace or a church, but the scientific institute, the Greenwich Observatory. Conrad tries to show us the everyday life of his age in a fresh light. Vladimir describes the target as follows:

A bomb in the National Gallery would make some noise. But it would not be serious enough. Art has never been their fetish ... Artists—art critics and such like—people of no account. Nobody minds what they say. But there is learning—science. Any imbecile that has got an income believes in that. He does not know why, but he believes it matters somehow ... All the damned professors are radicals at heart ... They believe that in some mysterious way science is at the source of their material prosperity (SA, p.22).

Vladimir suggests that science is universally worshiped and it becomes just like religion in the old days (Hay, p.244). An attack on a gallery or on art in general will be not affected or will be useless altogether. No one will listen to the artists and they are not effective power in society. To Vladimir, art is not as important as science. He also adds “The greatest possible regard for humanity with the most alarming display of ferocious imbecility. I defy the ingenuity of journalists to persuade their public that any given member of the proletariat can have a personal grievance against astronomy” (SA, p.23).

Thus, targeting the Greenwich Observatory will be the best goal for Vladimir. Such an outrage would be an attack on “the whole social creation” (SA, p.22). Moreover, an attempt for targeting the Greenwich Observatory will be considered as an attack on Astronomy and will be viewed as a global event because he believes that “the whole civilized world has heard of Greenwich” (SA, p.23).

In his *Inside Terrorism*, Bruce Hoffman states that “The terrorist act is specifically designed to communicate a message” (Hoffman, p.229). The message that Mr. Vladimir wants Britain to realize is that the anarchists represent a threat to the national security of the state and they are not loyal to the nation which shelters them. They possess destructive instincts which push them to commit acts against humanity and the national symbols wherever they go.

Like communists, the anarchists wanted to resist class repression through terrorism. Their own way of carrying out terrorist acts has its own unique features. Its importance lies in the way they follow which is the terrorism of the lone rebel or small circle of rebels. In anarchist theory, an act of terror was referred to as an *attentat*³ whose purpose is to convey a message or propaganda by action. For anarchist, terrorism often takes the form of killing an enemy of the people or destroying ruling class properly by means of bombing or destruction. David Miller relates in his book *Anarchism* “a doctrine of collective responsibility [...] that can justify violence against [...] anyone who acts as a state functionary or servant of capitals” (Miller,1984, p.116). In this way, the anarchists would include all the actions under the title of revenge. While Conrad reveals the anarchists as an inactive group, and they do not do any act to be mentioned in the world of anarchism. The only revolutionary act that Conrad permits in his narrative is an imposed explosion caused by a simpleton boy who blows up nothing except himself. In his *The Secret Agent*, Conrad sees the anarchists as weak figures and they do not represent any real political threat. This fact helps us to know something historical about the reality of the anarchists. In late-Victorian England, most anarchists were refugees and exiles who tried to get the acceptance of the countries which harbored them. Until the end of the century, when anti-immigration laws were enacted, anarchism does not represent the threat to the state, but the threat came from its own authorization, which was very challenging to those European powers that had reason to fear anarchism’s acts of assassination and random terror. It seems that the questions arose for *The Secret Agent* from the conventions of terrorist fiction, such as how dangerous is the Greenwich explosion? And who is behind the explosion? Both are answered ironically by Conrad. In reality, the harmless explosion destroys an entire family, first Stevie, then Verloc, then Winnie, and finally the effect reaches Winnie’s mother, too.

³ A French term (in English, it means “attempt,” and also “attack”), specific political action meant to be exemplary to others. It is related mainly with violent political actions (Han, p.64).

Through the sequence of the events, *The Secret Agent* shows that regular life is terrifying and insecure, and that London is far from being a haven of peacefulness. The city which is shaken by detonations, there is fear, effort, anxiety, pain, and defeat for the majority of its inhabitants (Stape, pp.109-10).

The other term which accompanies anarchism in Conrad's fiction is nihilism. H. Han contends that a "nihilism emphasized the revolutionary as alienated radical who totally rejected existing society and its values in order to engage in terrorism" (Han, p.64). In the nihilists' view the revolutionary is the one who "despises and hates present-day social morality in all its forms [...] Day and night he must have one thought, one aim-- merciless destruction" (Han, p.64). This fact clearly shows the nihilists' pessimistic views of life in which the world seems meaningless and aimless. In this context, for them, terrorism is seen as expressing the will of the people. Therefore, the anarchist terrorism is often focused on two purposes which are striking back at any enemy of the people and motivating a series of reaction which can lead to violent revolution.

In his *Terrorism and the International Anarchist Movement of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Whitney Kassel mentions that though there is a difference in motive between the modern terrorists and the anarchist terrorists of the 1890s, but the difference between them does not nevertheless mean that some features of the psychological character of the anarchist assassin are not present in modern terrorists. Thus, it can be said that features such as a desire to state a fact of being famous for some bad deed, and a need to reveal strength and to feel accepted and associated in groups of the same thoughts, are found in nearly every person who carries out terrorist actions. Kassel adds "the difference in the case of the anarchist attacks of the 1890s is that these attacks were unaccompanied by any true understanding of the cause for which they fought. Almost none of the assassins of that time had any direct contact with the anarchist foundation" (Kassel, p.247).

Therefore, these can be seen as individual acts which are regarded as a weak devotion to anarchism.

As a result of the anarchist movement which spread widely in Europe and the USA, the anarchist novels succeeded and increased in the number at the end of nineteenth century. Barbara Melchiori, in her book titled *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel*, shows that “much of this fiction confirmed the political status quo by presenting all forms of social protest as essentially terroristic” (Melchiori, p. 248). These novels seek to spread fear and provoke reaction by using figures like the dynamiter and the *agent provocateur*, and by the metaphorical use of words and expressions such as the secret society and the international conspiracy. All these elements are offered in *The Secret Agent* as well. The ideal socialist Michaelis, the bloodthirsty nihilist Yundt, and the genetic engineer Ossipon, although distinguished from one another, are from a secret association that meets regularly in Verloc’s Soho shop. Verloc manages the anarchists’ movement and meetings, and sets up an outrage on behalf of a foreign power represented by Mr. Vladimir. Though in a normal terrorist fiction these elements or such figures represent a real threat to the society, in Conrad’s novel they are exposed as harmless and powerless. Excluding the Professor, all the revolutionaries are not men of action, and they lack all energy and power of creativity. They are completely reliant on women whom they exploit when they can; the aged Yundt owes his survival to a faithful old woman, the helpless Michaelis his freedom depends on his lady-patroness, the self-loving Ossipon takes his living expenses from the nursemaids he seduces, and the secret agent Verloc owes his well-being to the foreign embassy he works for. Even the arrogant Sir Ethelred takes anarchism at its face-value. The insufficiency of unvocal or un-ironic dialogue is a theme that fills the whole of *The Secret Agent*. The conversation between the characters, as H. Stape relates, includes:

The conventions of late-Victorian terrorists fiction, the language of the daily press, which achieved unique growth between 1890 and

1910, and the various modes of the detective thriller, which developed in response to the establishment of the CID in 1878, and which was brought to some sort of sublimity by Conan Doyle (Stape, p.107).

The detective language and the investigations about the Greenwich explosion reflect the strongly worded speech between the main police characters. As they look for uncovering the aim behind the outrage, the evidence for the Greenwich explosion is firstly incomprehensible. Nevertheless, Chief Inspector Heat finds a proof that links the outrage with his own secret informer, the anarchist Verloc, and chooses to suppress it and finds another scapegoat instead of him.

Generally, there is no one legal definition of terrorism, just as there is no universally political definition of terrorism, as Alex Houes observes that “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter” (Houes, p.7). This fact makes it hard to give an exact legal definition to terrorism. However, Henry H. Han, in his book entitled *Terrorism and Political Violence: Limits and Possibilities of Legal Control*, argues that even though there is no one proper legal definition of terrorism till this time, there is no need for it, if we look at terrorism as an unlawful act. No matter what the means are and how they are used, the terror-violence acts are public crimes in every civilized society in this world. For this reason, a precise lawful definition is not essential, if we only deal with the factors of this behavior which lead to: murder, serious bodily harm, hostile engagement, international suffering or severe mental distress (Han, p.54). However, Houen, in his book titled *Terrorism and Modern Literature from Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson*, defines terrorism as “the use or threat of action to influence the government or to intimidate the public in order to advance a political, religious, or ideological cause” (Houen, p.8). The action may expand to include serious damage to property and to include disturbance in other systems. However, the most dangerous thing is the destructive effects of such acts on the psychology of the individual because the crime scene is not the land upon which

the attacks take place, but rather, it is the mind - the psychology - of those who survive.

In Conrad's view, the terrorist's strategy is psychological. By planning and applying what appear to be mindless acts of violence and cruelty against symbolically valued targets, the terrorist hopes to create feelings of extreme fear among the public authorities and the crowds. The objective is to provoke the authorities into resorting to procedures to suppress terrorism, procedures which will destroy the legality of the regime. The other objective is to explain to the public that established authorities lack the will and the capacity to deal with the terrorists, which will increase the public's sense of insecurity. Therefore, in *The Secret Agent*, the Professor seeks confrontations with the police authorities to reveal their weakness of will. At the same time, he hopes to provoke the police into "shooting us down in broad daylight" (SA, p.50).

Terrorism is a deeply psychological act. In the *National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals*, edited by Virginia M. Frankenberger, it is claimed that "terror is a natural phenomenon, terrorism is the conscious exploitation of it" (Frankenberger, p.3). Terrorism, therefore, is far more than an option of violence against individuals. It is a means to create a psychological state and a way to force someone's views on the others' consciousness. In other words, it is a way of disturbing the security of the individuals and the groups through using various acts of killing or exploding to cause a kind of terror in the minds of its direct and possible victims. As Michael McEwen rightly notes:

Terrorism—is a form PSYOP (psychological operation) [...] Many other characteristics of terrorism are argued but the drafters of competing definitions, but virtually all include words to the effect that acts of terrorism are directed at a target audience wider than the immediate victim. Without this provision terrorism would be indistinguishable from other forms of violence (McEwen, p.62).

Generally, the aim behind the terrorist act is to terrify people more than causing any other destruction or death of the target himself/herself. Such an act will leave bad psychological effects on the society, and the reaction to the terrorist act usually leads to destructive results, too. In other words, many of those who are directly exposed to traumatic events such as violence and terrorism will develop significant posttraumatic psychological distress and perhaps posttraumatic stress disorder. There are different ways of perceiving and interpreting risk which influence their emotional and behavioral responses to that risk (Mathewson, p.192). Particularly, persons who directly see others' deaths or experience and witness the loss of family members, relatives, and friends may experience strong psychological reactions. In *The Secret Agent* which is described by Ian Watt as "the novel, especially virtually created the genre of the serious psycho-political mystery novel" (Watt, p.153). Winnie, although she is described with these words in the novel to show her submissiveness "She was always undemonstrative and silent" (SA, p.175), suddenly, after Stevie's death, changes to be another person who is violent and "could scratch, kick, and bite—and stab, too; but for stabbing she wanted a knife" (SA, p.177). This shift in Winnie's life shows clearly her mind's status and how she is psychologically affected by this terrorist act which leads to her brother's death. The narrator's comment on her is as follow:

Mrs. Verloc's whole being was racked by that inconclusive and maddening thought. It was in her veins, in her bones, in the roots of her hair. Mentally she assumed the biblical attitude of mourning—the covered face, the rent garments; the sound of wailing and lamentation filled her head (SA, p.171).

In addition to Stevie's death, the effects of the Greenwich explosion lead to Verloc's death and then Winnie's death. In short, this act leads to the end of the Verloc's family as a whole. Besides, the psychological effects of the terrorist act, indirectly, reach Ossipon who feels despair and starts drinking alcohol after he hears the news of

Winnie's death: "The suicide of a lady—this act of madness or despair" (SA, p.216). He carries that paper or the report in his pocket wherever he goes. "He could neither think, work, sleep, nor eat. But he was beginning to drink with pleasure, with anticipation" (SA, p.216). At the end, he is described as someone who is dying slowly: "Comrade Ossipon walked without looking where he put his feet, feeling no fatigue, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, hearing not a sound. 'An impenetrable mystery...' He walked disregarded. ... 'This act of madness or despair'" (SA, p.216).

CONCLUSION

Political institutions, whether contrived by the wisdom of the few or the ignorance of the many, are incapable of securing the happiness of mankind.

Notes on Life and Letters, p.33

Conrad has a complex and delicate political understanding which has been the center of the attention of several critics. They all agree that Conrad's major novels are not only deeply and self-consciously political, but speak to the political, social, and economical conflicts of our time. Eloise Knapp Hay, in her book *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad*, relates that "whatever else in Conrad has dated, his politics are contemporary" (Hay, p.8). She mentions that Conrad was aware of the politics of the time and political disintegrations which made him very pessimistic in his works and in his view of the future of the West.

In his political novels, Conrad is concerned less with political theory than with the cost of politics and violence and its effects in terms of disintegration of family ties, of personal relationships, and finally, of personal growth. The novelist is enthralled by political doctrines, movements, and ideals, but he feels despaired of political activity because it fails as most men are selfish; those who are not selfish are victims of their obsessions, and are incapable of continuous activity on behalf of the community. Conrad regards most political activity as both suspect in its cause and destructive in its effects (Schwarz, p.556). He believes that political activity can turn into a threat to the traditional standards on which civilization depends: intimate relationships, family relations between parents and children as well as siblings, and other personal relationships between all those who seek to be understood and to be

loved. Therefore, in the political novels, Conrad puts social relationships and family ties in the foreground, rather than political doctrines, while he reveals that mankind can be destroyed when the individual allows political thoughts to take precedence over the private self.

In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad reveals the reality of the social life in London in the late-Victorian era and how fragile the society was. He criticizes the modern man's life in the industrial world, in which the disintegration of relationships is so obvious. This disintegration and the hardships of life in London, which is described as a city of mist and blackness, lead to dehumanization. No one cares about the other, and there is no cooperation between individuals. People become selfish and ready to misuse others for their own benefits. This fact causes mistrust among people and they start preferring to be isolated from others, which shows a real isolation in a huge populated-city of London. On the other hand, the novel shows the corruption of the representatives of the state, especially the police, and how they act according to their self-interests, not according to the law. They do not act against the individuals or the groups who represent a real threat to people's security; they prefer to interest themselves in the matters of secret information sources and relations. This helps such groups like the anarchists to carry out terrorist outrages which bring death and terror to people.

Conrad's skepticism toward political institutions results from his view that man is not, by nature, a political animal at all. This view which defines man as a creature whose happiness relies on political society is in opposition to that of Aristotle's; only in the *polis* (city-state) can man reach the highest self-realization. "It would be a strange thing to make the happy man a solitary; no one would choose to have all the good things of the world in solitude: man is a being meant for political association, and whose nature is to live with others" (McKeon, p.83). Conrad's attitude is well-matched with the modern political philosophers' attitude which sees man as a solitary and lonely animal. Isolation may lead to many things such as: unhappiness, complete

withdrawal from life, and finally committing suicide. We see that such a thing befalls Winnie in *The Secret Agent*.

Man's isolation is not a temporary or accidental occurrence; it is a direct result of his inability to understand nature or the meaning of the universe. In his book *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, G. Jean Aubry mentions that the difference between Aristotle's and Conrad's knowledge of man is associated with their own views of man's place in the universe. He argues that, if for Aristotle, man gets a high rank in the natural order of things, for Conrad, there is no *telos* (purpose) to which man is directed. The universe and man are not in agreement with each other. The important harmony between man and nature, the harmony which suggests human self-realization in political society, does not exist. Men are "victims of nature", and life is nothing more than "an uninterrupted agony of effort" (Aubry, p.226). Man is in continuous conflict against nature, but he is unable to change his condition, his "refuge in stupidity, in drunkenness of all kinds, in lies, in beliefs, in murder, thieving, reforming, in negation, in contempt, -each man according to the promptings of his particular evil" (Gee and Sturm, p.10). Conrad argues that political societies present man with an awful danger; there is the danger to freedom and individuality in the severe and illogical power of the organized society. Man's only resistance against this power is his self-regarding drives. However, Conrad recognizes that man's selfishness may lead to an anarchic society. The thing which makes him resistant to autocracy or tyranny subjects him to the possibility of cruelty.

In his *The Art of "Non-Commitment": Problematic Issues in Conrad's Major Fiction*, Turkan Araz mentions that Conrad examines the notion of governance by viewing the state mechanism in its political and economical phases. In this sense, Conrad deals with different models of the political system depicted in his novels that are products of different mentalities in several parts of the world: Europe, America, Africa, Far East and other unusual settings. Generally, Conrad does not trust those systems that are undeveloped, and he is able to observe the underlying hypocrisy and

greed in more developed and established ones. The political and economic systems and their difficulties are taken up in the context of specific nations, real or imaginary (Araz, p.46). As in the settings of some of his works, such as *The Secret Agent* which is set in Victorian England, *Under Western Eyes*, which takes place partly in Czarist Russia and partly in Switzerland, Europe's center of neutralists, and *Heart of Darkness* explores the depths of Africa where it traces the European colonialism.

Cedric Watts mentions that Conrad has "developed a keen feeling for disparities between word and fact, slogan and deed" (Watts, p.62), which means that, from his personal experience, Conrad forms a clear viewpoint on the European Political scene. He thinks that even if the established orders are stable, they may have many ills and the revolutionary opposition cannot bring any cure to these ills or flaws. In one of his letters, which Conrad wrote to a socialist friend, he declares that: "I look with serenity of despair and the indifference of contempt upon the passing events, there is no earthy remedy for those earthy misfortunes, and from above, I fear. We may obtain consolation but no remedy" (Aubry, p.229-30). Conrad used to write letters full of pessimism and skepticism. In those years, Europe was going through a phase of chaos, and many old political notions were being questioned and reconsidered in the light of contemporary realities. The letter quoted above shows that he was aware of what was going on and felt despair because of that. He sees that the political problems and the conflicts between the political parties can bring only destruction and death, and nothing else. He feels pessimistic for that and he thinks that there is no cure to such ills. Not far from the way Watt and Aubry present Conrad's opinions, Morton Dauwen Zabel makes the following observation:

It was his temperamental disillusionment that led [Conrad] to view later creeds or programs of political or revolutionary action with revulsion; and the forms such action took in his life time-imperialism, anarchism, militant nihilism, or communism power coalitions, the tactics of *realpolitik* – gave him sufficient occasion

for distaste and contempt, as the casuistry of balances of power among the western nations gave him cause for alarm for the future of the west (Zabel, p.140).

Here, Zabel tries to show us how Conrad feels disappointed in these recent programs of political or revolutionary action which, for him, are so disgusting. Conrad does not believe in the sincerity of the actions of these movements which he experienced in his life. He seems to be aware of how these movements could cause problems in the balance of power among the Western countries. Such movements can bring nothing good for these nations.

Martin Tucker, in his *Joseph Conrad*, suggests that in his *The Secret Agent*, Conrad tells the story using political anarchy as his narrative means, but the concern is with moral anarchy. From Conrad's observation to modern world, morality does not inform the political field, and this shortage weakens the force of politics. Lack or absence of morality, as in the Professor's case, is like a dangerous disease which infects the whole world body. In Conrad's examination of the modern disorder, he sees the police as criminal as the anarchists and terrorists, the idealists as self-interested as oppressors (Tucker, p.74). Inspector Heat, an old officer in the service, uses Veloc as his source of information against the anarchists, and he does not consider that as a failure of duty in such a way to his job. The Assistant Commissioner, Heat's superior, who is new in the service, protects the anarchist Michaelis because of Michaelis's patron. That wealthy lady is a friend of Commissioner's wife and she has influence in high places in society. Assistant Commissioner and Heat spy on each other. On the other hand, Sir Ethelred, the one who is in charge of security matters, is rather interested in fisheries than in people. While his secretary, the womanish Toodles, has other things in his mind than the morality of government. The world is described as a corrupt world, in which all the attempts to find a moral base end with failure. Nothing is exactly what it looks. The secret agent's secret or the message he has brought is that all are lying and all are

playing a game. When the game wins over the players, it becomes too hard and too late for them to change the rules. They become the victims of their own game.

In his *The Secret Agent*, Conrad's aim is not ironical, he is attacking extremism, he is against political corruption, and he is against the idea that the anarchists and the police (the enemies and the guardian of rules) are birds of a feather. Conrad is cautious of revolution since he feels that "it to be a wheel that returns to the same base with a different driver" (Tucker, p.75). He does not trust revolutionaries and thinks that they cannot bring anything good for the country. It clearly shows that Conrad is not cynical, but the pain he felt prevented him from giving up on humanity. The novel asserts several sets of positive values which are implicit rather than explicit. These values often have to be concluded from their obviously stated negatives, while their confirmation is fixed in the text. This story develops what we may call borrowing from the Structuralist term "binary opposites" (Araz, p.163), in this system, activity against indolence, order and discipline against chaos and anarchy, solidarity against isolation, morality against hypocrisy, and loyalty against betrayal are the prescribed values.

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