

Secrecy in *The Secret Agent*

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F. R. Leavis was not wholly wrong when he described *The Secret Agent* as “truly classical,” optimistically suggesting that “we don’t look for the secrets of Conrad’s soul.”¹ For, though the “adjectival” abundance and the frequent digressions from the linear narrative (both are always marked as being Conradian) are still perceptible, there is indeed a certain simplicity in the novel — what might be called the sub-literariness of a spy and detective novel with a classically well-constructed plot — as is legitimated by its sub-title: *A Simple Tale*. However, it should be noted that such conflict between two genres of literature was not quite new to Conrad in *The Secret Agent*, but actually a problem that had haunted him since his *début* as a writer of tropical adventure novels.

My primary and crucial question in this paper is whether the two “literatures” — the serious one and the light one — are really incompatible with each other. Furthermore, I hope to examine whether the simplicity of the plot itself does not imply a “philosophical” necessity that often drives Conrad to other extremes. This necessity, I will show later on, is the need not to be seen or to be secret: namely, secrecy. Perhaps it is not only Conrad’s personal policy but the prevailing one of modern literature, as well as of his contemporaries; so a more thorough contextual approach might be helpful. My concern here is in fact mainly with Conrad’s text, and yet I hope I can maintain a macroscopical viewpoint which will lead at some level to the common but everlasting question: what is literature.

What is Conrad’s secrecy really like, then? To explain this, it is the best to begin by talking about the title of the novel. In fact, *The Secret Agent* is far more

fascinatingly titled than “Verloc,” which was originally planned to be “a longish story 18000 [words] or so.”² Of course the “secret agent” primarily indicates Verloc himself, who is “so secret that he [is] never designated otherwise but by the symbol Δ .”³ He is, however, completely unsuitable for the title, as Allan Hunter says: “[O]ne expects some sort of James Bond figure, and gets Verloc instead. Fat and ageing, he is the direct antithesis of the normal expectations of sensational literature.”⁴ Verloc is so far from this sub-literary cliché that we might expect another revelation of the true “secret agent.” Thus the title itself becomes a “symbol,” accompanied with multiplied secrets (Avrom Fleishman counts more than fifty),⁵ a symbol of what is expected to be opened to our eyes, lurking behind the simple tale.

A much-quoted passage from *Heart of Darkness* may show us the nature of our own expectations of such revelation; for Marlow, the excellent narrator, is also undoubtedly among the most sophisticated critics of our age:

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical . . . and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.⁶

Marlow’s concern does not remain within the simple tale, but he sees through the haze and mist which envelop it so as to know its true “meaning.” However,

the haze is an obstacle preventing him seeing through the real moonshine. As J. Hillis Miller suggests, the "misty halo" is even "twice-reflected" (the signifier of the signifier), not unlike Marlow's own narrative, because moonshine itself is the reflected light of the sun.⁷ Thus the original meaning to be penetrated (the signified), if it ever exists, might turn out to be impenetrable; in Miller's phrase, this is a "revelation of the impossibility of revelation."⁸ And yet, it is these tantalizing phenomena themselves that tempt Marlow to see through; they are envelopes to wrap the outer meaning as well as the inner tale, indicating the secret they at the same time conceal. Therefore, the haze, which rests between the tale and the meaning, represents secrecy itself.

Marlow's epistemological difficulties may be related to what Ian Watt calls Conrad's "impressionism and symbolism," which is "a landmark in the literature of modern solipsism."⁹ This is possibly a common modernist problem (Virginia Woolf's "life" as "a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end");¹⁰ and is what Terry Eagleton might call Conrad's "metaphysical materialism."¹¹ If anything must be added to these formulations, it is that these difficulties cannot but be our own difficulties as Conrad readers. We confront Conrad's text, which is sometimes as obscure as the haze. The text approximates to the "numberless circles" drawn by Stevie the "mad" artist (p.45),¹² or the obsessive image of Stevie's fragmented body itself: namely, modern writing or *écriture*. And yet, we still hope to elucidate it. "What it really means" seems to both appear and disappear under our eyes, even though it might finally remain uninterpretable.

If *Heart of Darkness* is an allegory of the modern age, as is often said, then Marlow is an allegorical reader of the literature of that age. Therefore, to begin my discussion by speculating over the haze, like Marlow, is not such an extravagant digression.

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Conrad's recurrent use of climatic phenomena is noteworthy through all his novels and stories. Famous

examples may occur to us immediately: the haze in *Heart of Darkness* over the Thames shores "that [runs] out to sea in vanishing flatness" (*HD*, p.45); the cloud and sea mist in *Nostromo* behind which the "forbidden treasures" are hidden. In *The Secret Agent* also, the bomb-throwing is executed in the foggy morning where the light of explosion is almost invisible except as "something like a heavy flash of lightning" (p.87). The weather on that morning is even emphasized by repeated references in the various reports of the incident. It is, in a way, no less a realistic description of the real climate of "the biggest and greatest town on earth" (*HD*, p.45) in the late nineteenth century, than either the haze or mist is in the Orient or South America. In those days, fog and rain seem to have been the most likely weather in London, as we gather also from, for example, Dickens's description in the opening of *Bleak House*.

And yet, the fog and its correlatives (haze, mist, mud, even blood: all the semi-liquids that fill, figuratively speaking, the gaps of the text) appear something like a catalyst added to a reality; they generate mysteries about that reality by their atmospheric influence. Indeed, on that bombing day, Conrad's London is filled with such obscure materials. The street is like "a slimy aquarium" (p.147) and "a murky gloomy dampness" (*ibid.*) envelopes the Assistant Commissioner on his way to Verloc's shop, the supposed heart of foreign Anarchism; thus he becomes literally "the queer foreign fish" (*ibid.*) swimming in the flood of moisture, like Verloc the "sprat" (p.215, p.216) and Vladimir the "dog-fish" (p.216); then Sir Ethelred introduces the "Bill for the Nationalization of Fisheries" to control all of them. It is such moisture that captures Winnie outdoors in the Brett Place, where the "falling mist" (p.276) with the "misty halo of the few lamps" (p.273) permeates the air, when she goes out to escape from the blood overflowing indoors, "a destroying flood" (p.265). The "enormous town" Ossipon walks through at the end of the day is "slumbering monstrosly on a carpet of mud under a veil of raw mist" (p.300).

What is the function of this fogging? There is perhaps an analogy between the indoor blood flowing out of Verloc's murdered body and the outdoor

moisture which clings to Winnie. And this analogy erases the inner/outer boundaries. Her dreamlike muttering: "Blood and dirt. Blood and dirt." (p.290) is significant in this sense. Similarly, the two opposite principles — British Order and Foreign Anarchy — are blurred under the thick fog of London. For the foreignness in London is, in effect, as the Assistant Commissioner tells Mr.Vladimir the first secretary of the Embassy: "Theoretically only, on foreign territory; abroad only by a fiction" (p.228).

Indeed, such "fictional" extra-territorial places appear everywhere in Conrad's London: the Embassy; the little parlour behind Verloc's shop where Anarchists assemble; the salon of Michaelis's patroness where one meets "everybody sooner or later" (p.223); still more, the Italian restaurant the Assistant Commissioner visits, where, though the restaurant itself is a "British institution," the patrons, all English, are "denationalized as the dishes set before them with every circumstance of unstamped respectability" (p.149). There the Assistant Commissioner discovers his "foreign appearance" in the mirror and pretends to be a real foreigner, feeling "a sense of loneliness, evil freedom" (p.148) which is characteristic of the Professor the "perfect Anarchist." Confusion goes so far that when she sees the Assistant Commissioner and hears him talk without an accent, Winnie concludes that "some foreigners could speak better English than the natives" (p.198).

Thus in this foggy city, people as well as the fog come and go between the two spaces so as to make a kind of chaos. The anonymous "secret agent" Verloc, being a double spy, may be typical of them; while all the Verlocs are after all of mixed-blood. "The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket" as the Professor points out (p.69), and the name of the basket is undoubtedly "London." Curiously, the city can also be associated with the image of tropical colonies Conrad used to write about: the Assistant Commissioner, who looks back at his golden age in the colonies, sighs at the sight of the city mystified by rain (transformed fog in the morning), saying: "Horrible, Horrible!" (p.100), which is to some degree reminiscent of Kurtz's "The Horror! The Horror!" However, what makes the Assistant Commissioner

shudder is not the Congo, the heart of "darkest" Africa, but reputedly the most civilized city in the world at that time. In fact, this analogy, which is much more obviously studied in *Heart of Darkness*, had been rather popular since the late nineteenth century: the slum, the "submerged" part of the city had been famously compared with the misty forests of colonized Africa.¹³

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The narrative of the novel itself begins to flow out at Winnie's murder scene, to be "plotless" as if it were "at sea in a tempest" (p.263). The narrative time is slowed down to an extreme, while the narrative is filled with overflowing descriptions: only the trickling of blood functions as an "insane clock" (p.265). And yet, in *The Secret Agent*, there is an obvious blockage of the spatial expansion of the flow — the well-constructed plot which derives from the late-Victorian sub-genre of the novel.¹⁴ This is the "simple tale" which has been put aside so far.

The detective plot also practically concerns the search for the truth wrapped up in secrecy, waiting to be opened. Chief Inspector Heat is literally the chief detective who inspects all the facts heatedly with his "eyeballs glimmer[ing] piercingly" (p.83) in order to know the true cause of the incident: standing in the middle of Verloc's shop, he "inspect[s] it with a swift, cool, all-round glance" and "his eyes [run] over the walls, [take] in the ceiling, [note] the floor — all in a moment"(p.201). Meanwhile the Assistant Commissioner, "a born detective" (p.117), suddenly comes to feel "a special kind of interest in his work of social protection . . . which may be defined best as a sudden and alert mistrust of the weapon in his hand" (p.103), and competes with Inspector Heat in the search. Stevie's fragmented corpse ("Person unknown"), mixed up with his own clothes and mud, is the enigma to be solved by the "miraculous cleverness" (p.226) of the English police which justifies and encourages their activity, even if their primary motives are private as are those of the Assistant Commissioner.

Each piece of Stevie's body must be pieced

together to be the totality so as to designate his name; and their search begins with a piece of the velvet collar of his coat, which comes out of the heaps the local constable assembles with his shovel. Using the role of the detective, they must "see through" self-consciously to reach the truth. In this sense, Comrade Ossipon, nicknamed the Doctor, who is a devotee of Lombroso's criminology and detects Stevie's "degeneracy" from the lobes of his ears, provides them with theoretical support.¹⁵

What is also of great importance here is that this same act might be repeated by some of us readers, to whom Conrad addresses this detective plot: the traditional bourgeois readers who have not yet lost their confidence in both the police *authority* and the existence of a Truth which will come to us through the hand of the *author*.¹⁶ However, such faithful readers, presented with a secure entertainment, are to be betrayed secretly: the Assistant Commissioner, who is successfully to encounter Vladimir, the person who projects the "murdering-plot" (as Verloc calls it), points out to Sir Ethelred: "From certain point of view we are here in the presence of a domestic drama" (p.222). We too gradually realise that the drama differs from what we have supposed it to be, though we have enjoyed the role of a detective, feeling a sense of superiority over the less informed detective characters. The velvet collar itself, which leads them too easily to Verloc's shop, defies our expectations altogether.

It is this self-consciously plotted plot itself, or this metafictional "narcissism" which entraps a certain kind of reader,¹⁷ and at the same time, excludes other readers' reading. Provided with a strict model of reading, our free act of seeing through the meaning of the text for ourselves may seem to be forbidden; for conventional rules presuppose the intrinsic meaning of the text so that external commentary should not be necessary. The mock-Hamletian generalization on human nature in the Author's Note (written 1920): "Man may smile and smile but he is not an investigating animal" (p.viii) does not contradict his inner necessity to explain to those who "[shrink] from explanations" (ibid.) Or rather, the reader who "loves the obvious" (ibid.) is fundamental to Conrad's

vocation as an artist: in the Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* he put it this way: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see."¹⁸

The enigma forces both the reader and the detectives into a double-bind: to see (are you ready to gather up Stevie's pieces with your shovel, carefully assorting his body from the mud, patching them up, so as to reconstruct his body into an "organic whole"?); or not to see at all. The plot itself is a cover, and it both covers and induces us to uncover, suggesting hidden secrets by the very act of hiding them, as well as the fog covering the exploded body. Thus the detective story is aligned with the Victorian Realism Conrad employs in the novel, where in spite of its "realistic" description the "real meaning" is also repressed by its own code: we are shown the fog but forbidden to see through it.

Symptomatically, the act of avoiding "looking into" is repeated in the text. Verloc's "heavy lidded eyes" (p.7) are not convenient for seeing things clearly, and when he sees beyond the window-pane the illusion of Vladimir's face "enhaloed in the glow of its rosy complexion like a sort of pink seal impressed on the fatal darkness," pulls down the venetian blind to make himself *blind* to it (p.57). Stevie's vacant gaze is "as though he were afraid to look about him at the badness of the world" (p.167). Winnie's middle-class common sense tells her that "things do not stand being much looked into" (p.178, p.180, p.241), so she covers her face with her hands in order not to see the murderer of her brother. In this particular case Mr. and Mrs. Verloc cooperate each other: in bed, (probably every night) Winnie offers to Verloc to put out the light and Verloc answers: "Yes, put it out" (p.60, p.181). Moreover, there are many short-sighted people: the "haughty eyes" are Sir Ethelred's "weak point" (p.217), one who loves the "lucid"; even the Professor, "who would know the inside of this confounded affair," is "be-spectacled" (p.61).

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Stevie's eavesdropping (p.49) is a moment of confusion and may prefigure the central image of the text: the confusion of the explosion in which he is killed. Standing on the threshold between the kitchen where his mother and sister are at housework and the parlour where the Anarchists are making their radical speeches, Stevie hears Karl Yundt talking about the savagery of the police, a symbol of civilization. Stevie then becomes confused; he "prowl[s] round the table like an excited animal in a cage" (p.55), as if he himself were one of the circles he is fond of drawing, and Verloc wonders: "What's the meaning of these antics?" (p.54). Because Stevie is "always easily impressed by speeches" (p.173), his literalism links the two worlds — the political and the domestic — together, blurring the boundary between them. A similar scene is once more repeated by his sister Winnie, when she eavesdrops on the interview between her husband and Inspector Heat held in the parlour, "with her ear to the keyhole" of the door between the parlour and the shop (p.208). It drives her to madness, too, and when she approaches Verloc to murder him, her complexion grows to resemble Stevie's "even to the droop of the lower lip, even to the slight divergence of the eyes" (p.262).

After hearing of Stevie's death, it is Winnie's turn to be another enigma for those who confront her madness, which corresponds to the text's own plotless madness. Another detective story begins, for such insanity should be interpreted by sanity: since "[h]er personality seem[s] to have been torn into two pieces" (p.254), Verloc demands that Winnie "pull herself together" (p.232, also referred to on p.240, p.247 in Verloc's direct speeches). Vladimir says appropriately: "Madness alone is truly terrifying" (p.33) to the bourgeois with their taste for science, their "sacrosanct fetish" (p.31)

Winnie's hands, her black veil and even the skin of her face that looks like a mask (see p.212) conceal her from other's eyes, as the fog conceals the explosion of the bomb. She is "looking nowhere particular and saying nothing at all" (p.257); for all his "unmasking" the veil, her face remains still "unreadable" to Verloc (p.256). After all, as Verloc despairs, it is "impossible to talk to any purpose with a

woman whose face one cannot see" (p.234). Meanwhile it is Comrade Ossipon, a competent reader, who dares to "[peer] closely at her veil" (p.240). Knowing what she has really done, he observes her stony face "scientifically," as he does Stevie's ear:

She had uncovered a face like adamant. And out of this face the eyes looked on, big, dry, enlarged, lightless, burnt out like two black holes in the white, shining globes. . . . He was scientific, and he gazed scientifically at that woman, the sister of a degenerate, a degenerate herself — of a murdering type. . . . He gazed at her cheeks, at her nose, at her eyes, at her ears ...Bad!...Fatal! (pp.296-297)

The "impenetrable mystery" in the newspaper is not impenetrable to Ossipon, either. His "cursed knowledge" is "as precise as the newspaper man could make it — up to the very threshold of the 'mystery destined to hang for ever...'" (pp.307-308).

And yet, curiously, Ossipon fears being possessed of this knowledge. The paper which reports the mystery — "this act of madness and despair" — remains in his pocket like the Professor's fatal bomb. In fact, Ossipon refuses to see through the mystery on the very "threshold" of it: he decides that he "[can] face no woman" any more (p.310). The same is even true of the Professor, who is contrasted with Ossipon as the other London promenader. The Professor is "incorruptible" only because he "avert[s] his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind" (p.311). For this Superman, influenced by Nietzschean philosophy,⁹ wishes "a perfect detonator" to disrupt all established order, but the force of the masses who "[swarm] numerous like locusts, industrious like ants, thoughtless like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed, impervious to sentiment, to logic, to terror" (p.82) is the most enigmatic to him. He wishes to extinguish them by means of his own "force of personality" (p.67) because "he [is] a force" (p.311); while at every moment he is threatened, aware that even "death — his own weapon" is on their side (p.304).

What is actually so terrifying to both Ossipon and

the Professor, whose personalities might seem, as the Professor hopes, strong enough to endure after all "the weak" are exterminated? It is, say, the potentiality of the bomb, or the other — it might explode in spite of them; more symbolically, the "feminine penetration" of the "whiteness of [Winnie's] big eyes gleamed lustroously" through the black veil (p.294) which may or may not look back at Ossipon.²⁰ Even Verloc, who is unaware of the real state of her mind till the last moment, is surprised at the "inappropriate character of his wife's stare":

It was not a wild stare, and it was not inattentive, but its attention was peculiar and not satisfactory, inasmuch that it seemed concentrated upon some point beyond Mr. Verloc's person. The impression was so strong that Mr. Verloc glanced over his shoulder. There was nothing beyond him: there was just the whitewashed wall. The excellent husband of Winnie Verloc saw no writing on the wall. (p.240)

It is impossible to tell the true nature of this uncanny stare. It can be either "white" or "black" at the same time: in the middle of the "white, shining globes" revealed under the black veil, Winnie's mad eyes are like "two black holes"; her "black gaze" is where "the light of the room [is] absorbed and lost without the traces of a single gleam" (p.259), which implies that the gaze, though itself black, is possessed of the light. In fact, it is this reciprocity between blackness and whiteness that terrifies but fascinates Conrad's men; while women's shining globes and black pupils represent both the sea, "the mirror of heaven's frowns and smiles, the reflector of the world's light" and the "enormous town," the "cruel devourer of the world's light" (p.xii).²¹

Ossipon's confrontation with Winnie may correspond to Marlow's with Kurtz's Intended in *Heart of Darkness*:

"You know him best," I repeated. And perhaps she did. But with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illuminated by the unextinguishable light of belief and love. (*HD*, p.158)

Here the feminine whiteness of her forehead is described as the reflection of a masculine (Marlow's) darkness: the "otherness" turns out to be the reflection of Marlow's self. Therefore, they are fundamentally inseparable from each other, as Ossipon sees Winnie "twined round him like a snake, not to be shaken off" (p.291) and considers her "death itself — the companion of life" (*ibid.*) In other words, these men are really confronting a kind of mirror, which both reflects and devours their world's light, or darkness; just like the Greek Narcissus looking into the mirror of a stream, they are fascinated and obsessed with their own image reflected on the "sea."

Thus the detective story ends up as a story about the detectives' search for themselves, as *Heart of Darkness* is about the European's own heart. This ironic conclusion might be well caricatured by Michaelis's self-confined narrative: during the solitary life in "the four whitewashed walls of his cell," he has lost interest in communicating to others, so he "talk[s] to himself, indifferent to the sympathy or hostility of his hearers, indifferent indeed to their presence" (p.44).

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And thus, madness remains at this dead-end. In a way, curiously, the mad people in *The Secret Agent* engage in something "artistic."²² Stevie is such an artist whose madness produces the "mad" art of "cosmic chaos, the symbolism . . . attempting the inconceivable" (p.45). Winnie is also "a master in that domestic art" (p.259; italics added). There is a third mad person: the Professor is described by Inspector Heat as "Lunatic" (p.97), and his large ears, like Stevie's, attract our attention as a symptom of "degeneration." Probably, Vladimir might say, the bomb is his "means of expression" (p.33), which also corresponds to Stevie's purposeless fireworks. Their similarity might be confirmed by the fact that in "The Informer," a short story written about a year before *The Secret Agent*, an anarchist called the Professor "perish[es] . . . in a secret laboratory through the premature explosion of one of his improved detonators."²³ The "secret laboratory" is replaced in *The*

Secret Agent by the foggy Greenwich Park where Stevie's explosion takes place as secretly as in any laboratory.

Stevie's struggle to gain precise expression seems to represent the text's own philosophy of fiction-making. The "mad artist" is "no master of phrases" and that is why "his thoughts [lack] clearness and precision" (p.171).²⁴ His short cries, "half words, and even words that would have been whole if they had not been made up of halves that did not belong to each other" (ibid.), are the outcome of his difficulty in articulating his chaotic thoughts (if they can be called that), or the unconscious which does not belong to himself, still less is subject to his own control. They are the best substitutes for thoughts that cannot be substituted by any alternative; Stevie is really standing on the threshold of the inconceivable. His compressed expressions of his indignation at social unfairness: "Poor! Poor!" or "Bad! Bad!" are reminiscent of Kurtz's fragmentary outcry ("The Horror! The Horror!"); for they both seek for the radically new language which is to describe the nameless horror confronting them all in the face.

In fact, even Stevie, the ambitious disrupter of the linguistic rule itself, does feel the need for a control: he demands that "the mystery of the universe" which perplexes him, should be controlled by the pre-established power of the police, that is, "the organized power of the earth" (p.172). Thus London is sure to be on its way to the "immense and nice hospital" Michaelis dreams of (p.303), where both Order and Anarchy are highly systematized like the "game," from which the Professor always attempts to escape. Nonetheless, the Professor remains still in the middle of his own dilemma: he is possessed of a bomb and brings it wherever he goes, but necessarily conceals it in his coat pocket, avoiding the fatal explosion. It is as if to prolong in this subtle balance the "long and terrifying dreams" supposed to be dreamed by Stevie at the instant of the explosion (p.88). The Professor's end may be the "complete irresponsibility and endless leisure, almost in the manner of a *corpse*" Winnie enjoys momentarily after her violence (p.263; italics added); but all he must do now is play a kill-time game until he really dies, like

Jimmy Wait in the ship *Narcissus*, who is literally *waiting* for the coming of his own death.

These mad artists, therefore, attempt to disrupt the established and at the same time reconstruct a new order (which can be language itself) by means of their own art, whether by a perfect detonation, fireworks, circle-drawing or murder. In this sense, the fog, which is a device of the aesthetic transformation of "raw materials" (Stevie's body transformed into an artistic image under the fog), might be regarded as Conrad's own means of expression. Indeed, in the classically well-constructed plot which is actually to avert our eyes from the real explosion, as we have seen already, the dense fog in London is the densest of all the fogs in Conrad's world. We may be surprised suddenly to find that the central incident of the bombing is not ever told to us directly: it is given three times (by the local constable, in the extra newspaper *Ossipon* brings to the Professor, finally, in Verloc's confession in the presence of Inspector Heat); but every time is in the form of someone's report.²⁵ Such narrative elaboration is most Conradian, that is, it represents Conrad's secrecy, perennially both concealing and indicating the secret explosion.

Secrecy is always related to our difficulties in reading Conrad thematically. In fact, it might covertly aim at the Lady Patroness's transcendental position that is "above the play of economic condition" as a "complete stranger" to the suffering class (p.108). At such height, Conrad himself keeps concealed and detached from the reader, too. This not only reflects what was at stake in literature of his own age, but portends a future problem (notice that such alienation of the reader is a common tendency of both modern and post-modern literature). What could we have expected to see, then, if Conrad had really made us see something? To this he would answer rather ambiguously: it must be "all [we] demand — and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which [we] have forgotten to ask" (*NN*, p.x), that is, the problem of literature itself.

Notes

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1. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948) pp.209-210.
2. Conrad to J. B. Pinker, 5 March 1906. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad* vol.3 ed. by Frederick Karl and Laurence Daries (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) p.320.
3. *The Secret Agent* in the *Dent Collected Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad* (London, 1946 ff.) p.27. References to Conrad's works are to this edition.
4. Allan Hunter, *Joseph Conrad and the Ethics of Darwinism* (London: Croom Helm, 1983) p.153.
5. See Avrom Fleishman's *Conrad's Politics: Community and Anarchy in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Pr., 1967) pp.190-198. Fleishman's view that secrecy is "expedient and partly effective in promoting social stability"(p.192) might be linked up with my own discussion, though he underestimates its effects as being only "partly effective."
6. *Heart of Darkness*, p.45. Hereafter cited as *HD*.
7. See J. Hillis Miller's "Heart of Darkness Revisited" in *Heart of Darkness: A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism* ed. by Ross C Murtin (Boston: St Martin Pr., 1989) especially pp.215-216.
8. Miller p.215.
9. See Ian Watt's "Impressionism and Symbolism in Heart of Darkness" in *Joseph Conrad: A Commemoration* ed. by Norman Sherry (London: Macmillan, 1976) pp.37-53.
10. Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction" in *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth Pr., 1925) p.189. Following this famous passage, she asks herself: "Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit . . . with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?"
11. In *Criticism and Ideology* (1975. rpt. London: Verso, 1976) Terry Eagleton describes Conrad's "metaphysical materialism" as follows:
The naturalistic form of *The Secret Agent* thickens and reifies the material world to a point where its revolutionary destruction seems naturally unthinkable; yet this very thickening lends men and objects an air of grotesque mystery which merges with the book's fear of the anarchic unknown. (p.139)
12. Norman N. Holland points out that like Stevie, Conrad himself is drawing circles in his novel: "coins, spectacles, wheels, clock faces, haloed streets, bowler hats, orange peel, billiard ball, the Professor's india-rubber ball, even the great come of the observatory" ("Style as Character: *The Secret Agent*" in *Joseph Conrad* ed. by Harold Bloom, New York: Chelsea House, 1986) p.55.
13. This analogy is seen in one of William Booth's books: *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890). Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army, who saw in civilized England the same sacrificial system as was seen in Africa, colonized by Arabian ivory-traders. His use of metaphor to describe the slums ("the London sewage, which, feculent and festering, swings heavily up and down the basin of the Thames with the ebb and flow of the tide") is also noteworthy here.
14. See Peter Keating's *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989) pp.341-366. According to Keating, since the publication of "A Scandal in Bohemia" in 1891, Sherlock Holmes had been the most famous detective in the genre. Keating suggests Holmes's and still more Doyle's covert complicity with the police force. In the strict sense, *The Secret Agent* should be called a spy thriller rather than a detective story; for the reader is more informed than the detectives from the beginning. In this paper I use the term "detective" rather literally in order to indicate readers' attempts to reach the truth.
15. Here Ossipon implements Cesare Lombroso's

- theory that the criminal type can be identified by certain physical or facial birthmarks. Hunter points out Conrad's deep concern with Lombroso. See Hunter pp.182-202.
16. In *The Use of Obscurity* (London: RKP, 1981) pp.30-54, Allon White points out that in the late nineteenth century the reading population was divided into two groups: the traditional mass readers and the more critical ("symptomatic") readers who had come to seek the "real origin" of the work of art in its author's unconscious. According to White, the rise of the latter was related to that of proto-psychology by such authors as Max Nordau.
 17. See Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1980. rpt. London: Methuen, 1984). See especially pp.71-76, where Hutcheon suggests that post-modern writers' use of the "clichéd structural conventions of detective fiction" entails that "the act of reading becomes one of active participation of 'production'" and that is one aim of the metafiction.
 18. *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'* p.x. Hereafter cited as *NN*.
 19. In "Conrad and Nietzsche" in *Commemoration* pp.65-76, Edward W. Said points out that Conrad often shares the same views with Nietzsche, especially in the radical attitude towards language itself. In a superficial way, the Professor may be a caricatured figure who embodies Nietzschean Superman, while Michaelis may be one who embodies Marxism.
 20. The phrase "feminine penetration" appears in Conrad's short story "The Return" (written 1897). The almost plotless story describes a dramatic confrontation between a man and his "mysterious" wife who attempts to abandon him, and then returns to him for no particular reason. Most of the story is written from Hervey, the betrayed husband's perspective, yet there are a few counter-glimpses from his wife which indicate that he never loved her but only loved himself. The story is important also because it is one of the earliest attempts of Conrad to use European setting as the background of his fiction.
 21. It is also notable that in *Heart of Darkness* whiteness belongs to the ivory that fascinates and corrupts Kurtz in the middle of the "black" continent; and Kurtz's own "lofty frontal bone" resembles his love object: an "ivory ball" (*HD*, p.115).
 22. This may correspond to Max Nordau's formulation of "degeneration": he wrote in the dedication of *Degeneration* that "degenerates" were not always "criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics" but often "authors and artists." According to White, the first English edition of *Degeneration* was published in 1895 and Nordau's scientism had been popular since then. See White p.45, p.169.
 23. "The Informer" in *A Set of Six*, p.88.
 24. When she goes mad, Winnie cannot speak except "in the disjointed phrases completed only in her thought" (p.282).
 25. And there are, of course, cheaper copies: Verloc's shop is filled with "rousing titles" (p.3) and Stevie is easily excited by reading them. Inspector Heat's knowledge about dreams is also from popular publications (p.88). The "object" of Winnie's fear, and even her death itself, is reported in a few familiar journalistic phrases.