

The Open Ending of The Secret Agent

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ALAN FRIEDMAN, in *The Turn of the Novel*, argues that modern novels are essentially different from their precursors. The former achieve open form; the latter were mostly closed. These two forms, he further observes, derive from two types of conclusions. A novel is open when "specific moral and emotional disturbances raised in the climax to a pitch of complexity and intensity are not put to rest" but are, instead, "expanded by the ending."¹ It is closed if the conclusion largely resolves the issues dealt with in the work. Friedman also maintains that Joseph Conrad occupies a transitional point between the older and the newer form. His fiction "brings us to the threshold of the radical vision of conscience that shapes the flux of experience in the twentieth-century novel." But Conrad brings us, Friedman believes, only to the threshold. Later novelists had to create "a new fable" to show "that experience is unreduced and irreducible."²

Such a view of Conrad's role in the development of the novel can well be questioned. James Guetti, for example, has observed how Conrad (like Melville and Faulkner) shows, through his rhetoric, metaphors, and narrative stance, an awareness of the ineffable nature of reality. Conrad's success as a novelist substantially derives, Guetti maintains, from his refusal to resolve the unresolvable.³ Similarly, Leon F. Seltzer has recently noted another way in which Conrad especially resembles Melville. Neither draws a story "flawlessly to its conclusion"; instead of "temporarily releasing us from what in life admits of no solution," both authors, in their best works, "return us directly to these same dilemmas."⁴ Conrad need not, therefore, be seen as merely an immediate forerunner of more modern

novelists who could cope with the complexity and ambiguity of open form. In his best fiction, as I shall now argue through an extended examination of the conclusion to *The Secret Agent*, he achieves endings which force his readers to return to and again confront the issues that give impetus to the entire work.

The imperfect marriage of the Verlocs terminates in a murder and a suicide. But we do not then have the converse of the wedding celebration that concludes many earlier novels. Unlike the marriage contracted, the marriage ended does not resolve any basic theme. Instead, as both husband and wife approach their demise, Conrad more and more indicates the fallacies on which their lives were founded. Such fallacies, he also demonstrates, are general. Verloc, for example, believes that, even though he had "grown older, fatter, heavier," he still "lacked no fascination for his own sake."⁵ Anyone might suffer from a similar delusion. Thus, when an awakening comes, it comes to a man who never dreamed such a revelation was possible. Verloc dies with his "note of wooing" on his lips. And this fact represents, for David Daiches, the most disturbing aspect of the book. The murder, set in such a context of "marital intimacy," suggests "that all such intimacy is both illusory and squalid."⁶

Closely examined, the Verlocs' "intimacy" is hardly intimate. As John Hagan has observed, the husband and wife, like others in the novel, never effectively communicate, never understand one another, and never sympathize with each other's feelings.⁷ But Verloc, at first, seems especially obtuse. He cannot "comprehend the value of Stevie in the eyes of Mrs. Verloc," since he prefers to believe "that the value of individuals consists in what they are in themselves" (p. 193). Of course, he never asks what he is in himself and how he should be accordingly valued. Other comments are equally indicative of how little he understands his wife and his own immediate situation. He notices the "wifely forethought" that left out the plate of cold beef and the

carving knife too (p. 192). And even more unconsciously ironic, talking of his dangerous profession, he tells Winnie how he would not "worry a woman that's fond of me" over "the risk of having a knife stuck into me any time these last seven years we've been married" (p. 197). Caught up with the problem of Vladimir's directive and the probable prison term which will come from Stevie's slip, he does not see that these smaller tragedies are really leading to a larger one. He is attempting to console his wife even as she readies to kill him.

Verloc's illusions, particularly the idea that he is loved for himself, have been seen as the cause of his death.⁸ More obviously, however, his wife kills him. And she kills him not for his illusions but for hers — which are rather more complicated than his. As Verloc tries, ineptly, to comfort her — "you go to bed now. What you want is a good cry" (p. 199) — certain thoughts pass through Winnie's mind. Prompted by her "maternal and violent" temperament, she thinks first of her past childhood life as Stevie's protectress and so recalls a time of perpetual drudgery partly redeemed by one consoling illusion. She might have married a young butcher to be his "girl-partner at the oar" in a fascinating "voyage down the sparkling stream of life" (p. 201). Of course, she then held a rather exaggerated view of the joys of sharing a butcher's life.⁹ But Winnie can never test this first dream; the young man could not support Stevie. Consequently, she marries Verloc, an act which substitutes one imperfect situation for another.

Conrad then shows how Winnie's altered condition entails different illusions. She is, as Verloc's wife, well aware of "the occasional passage of Comrade Ossipon, the robust anarchist with shamelessly inviting eyes" (p. 201). His glances obviously invite her to substitute a young, robust male for a fat and slothful one, while the degree to which she throws herself at him after the murder suggests how appealing that invitation is. But, because of Stevie, she cannot elope with Ossipon just as she could not marry her

butcher. So she remains with Verloc, justifying such fidelity with "the supreme illusion of her life" (p. 201). Verloc and Stevie might have been father and son.

There are, Conrad suggests, two ways in which this is a supreme illusion. It is, first, an obviously exaggerated view of the facts. Verloc is fat and dark. He has a heavy black mustache. Stevie, slim and fair, has a wispy blond beard. The two hardly look like father and son. But the illusion is especially important primarily because it provides some rationale for Winnie's frustrating life and seems to justify her existence as a woman. If Verloc can be seen as the boy's father, then she, Verloc's wife, who really resembles Stevie, might well be his mother. Her marriage would then be real. The proof of its validity, however, would not have to depend on any relationship between husband and wife but could be embodied in the "son."

This supreme illusion, although complex, still resembles the two simpler ones. All attest to how unimportant Verloc is in his wife's life and how only illusion justifies his presence there. His existence, moreover, conflicts with the illusion that compensates for him (he is the husband, so Ossipon, like the young butcher, must be a might-have-been) just as it conflicts with the illusion that justifies him (he does not really resemble Stevie at all). When the death of Stevie terminates the necessity for such illusion, it is not surprising that the wife turns immediately against her husband and does so largely on the level of illusion too. Winnie decides that Verloc deliberately "took the boy away to murder him" (p. 203).

She does not act on this illusion until the end of their encounter. At first, on a quite rational level, Winnie recognizes that she need no longer remain with Verloc and leaves the room to prepare to abandon home and husband. Soon she returns, dressed for the street, "down to the tying of a black veil over her face" (p. 209). Now, on opposite sides of this symbolic veil, neither at all comprehends the other's intentions. Verloc assumes that she is going to visit her

mother to tell of Stevie. But when he tries to restrain her, Winnie completely misunderstands him. She thinks that, since Stevie is now dead, Verloc will "want to keep her for nothing. And on this characteristic reasoning, having all the force of insane logic, Mrs. Verloc's disconnected wits went to work practically" (p. 211).

Conrad demonstrates that Mrs. Verloc is definitely wrong about her husband's intentions. His action is reasonable. He does not want his obviously distraught wife to go out so late at night. We are also told that Winnie's mind is now disordered. But the discerning reader might see more than that which is explicitly stated. Conrad dramatizes the essential nature of Mrs. Verloc's "insane logic" by illustrating how she projects her own shortcomings onto her husband. Her thoughts imply that he is the one who offered a secret bargain and agreed to support Stevie as long as she remained with him. She now pretends that he threatens to keep something to which this bargain does not entitle him. Her husband, however, made no such agreement. It is Mrs. Verloc, Conrad attests, who was "capable of a bargain the mere suspicion of which would have been infinitely shocking to Mr. Verloc's idea of love" (p. 213). Her bargain, made with herself, was to live with Verloc in order to take care of Stevie. Now that Stevie is dead, she must either remain with the man who is nothing to her or, by leaving him, admit that the marriage was empty and that her motives for entering it were largely mercenary. Unless, of course, she can believe that Verloc forced the bargain onto her. She therefore projects.

It is important to notice this element in her thinking because, immediately following such thoughts, Verloc utters the statements that bring Winnie to kill him. He first observes, "it's as much your doing as mine," and then, even more explicitly, "if you will have it that I killed the boy, then you've killed him as much as I" (p. 212). What he says is essentially valid. Even if he deliberately murdered Stevie, Winnie is still implicated. Since she picked

Verloc as their support, the catastrophe would ultimately derive from her mistaken judgment. If the death was accidental, then Winnie is even more involved. As Verloc himself points out, it was she who "kept on shoving him in my way when I was half distracted with the worry of keeping the lot of us out of trouble. What the devil made you? One would think you were doing it on purpose" (p. 212). It is part of Conrad's overriding irony that she was.

Winnie had already found some reason to believe Verloc deliberately killed Stevie. Because her questionable innocence is here being questioned and because she tends to project blame onto others, she now has even more reason to do so. One final illusion, the vision of her brother exploding — "smashed branches, torn leaves, gravel, bits of brotherly flesh and bone, all spouting up together in the manner of a firework" (p. 214) — brings her to explode too. Her husband calls to her in "the note of wooing." But his invitation is not, it should be noted, an invitation to intercourse. The husband assumes his wife's silence shows that she is now calmer, that reconciliation is possible. For her, however, reconciliation must never take place. The bargain must end and it must end more decisively than by her merely departing. Conrad makes it quite clear that she should have done so. But it is equally clear that she insists on fallaciously believing that her husband must be totally responsible for Stevie's death and that she, like the boy, is his victim. "Retaliating," she kills him.

The manner in which the killing is described is consistent with the motives postulated. We are, as has been generally observed, told that Winnie comes to resemble her brother as she kills Verloc. Pro-Winnie critics readily read this as proof that she is avenging Stevie's death or that both of them together are executing just judgment on Verloc.¹⁰ Such critics might look again at the precise words Conrad uses to describe the similarity of sister and brother: "The resemblance of her face with that of her brother grew at every step, even to the droop of the lower lip, even to the

slight divergence of the eyes" (p. 215). The description emphasizes the drooping lower lip and unfocussed eyes of the mentally deficient. Thus, if the now homeless soul of Stevie enters his sister's breast, he turns her not into the Stevie who compassionately sympathizes with the suffering of the world, but into Stevie, the idiot. Winnie's act also associates her with another less admirable quality of her brother. Like Stevie, she too can turn vicious in the presence of real or imagined suffering and injury. Conrad emphasizes both tendencies when he has Verloc recognize that his wife had gone "murdering mad" and that he must participate in a "ghastly struggle" with an "armed lunatic" (p. 216).

Her reaction immediately after the killing, however, aligns Mrs. Verloc with another character. Even though she has just killed her husband, still they remain harmoniously together: "Except for the fact that Mrs. Verloc breathed, these two would have been perfectly in accord" (pp. 216-17). Conrad thus associates the wife with her dead husband. She is both with him and like him. Since each was essentially moribund, "dead" to most of life, to the other, and to their own self, Verloc's actual demise effected no real change, and Winnie resembles her husband murdered to approximately the same degree that she resembled him living. Decorum and respectability "continued in immobility and silence" (p. 217). Earlier, their accord was equally perfect and resulted from the fact that both "refrained from going to the bottom of facts and motives" (p. 203). It is, of course, most ironic that what underlies this earlier accord, their willingness not to know each other, also underlies their final catastrophe.

Winnie resembles both her brother and her husband. She is, moreover, associated with these two in that she possesses the same qualities that contributed largely to the death of each. It is not therefore surprising that she dies too and dies in such a fashion as to partially re-enact the two earlier deaths. She is as lost in London as her brother ever was.

As Verloc's ticking blood becomes a trickle in which she sees her own time running out, Winnie flees the shop, intent on committing suicide by drowning. But she soon realizes that she will not find a bridge before morning, but will herself be found "knocking about the streets" (p. 221). Unable to find even the Thames River, she, nevertheless, decides to flee the country. Stevie could hardly be more irrational. Lost in this fashion, Winnie encounters Ossipon and is as unable to comprehend the way in which he plans to make use of her for his material advantage as Stevie was unable to fathom how the good Mr. Verloc was utilizing him.

In trusting Comrade Ossipon, she also has, as F. R. Leavis observes, her own turn to suppose herself "loved for her own sake."¹¹ Winnie participates, in fact, in an extended scene that re-enacts much of what went on in the preceding scene with her husband, except that she is now the suppliant, the chief victim of the extensive misunderstandings, and the one finally betrayed. In short, Winnie and Ossipon, as much as Verloc and Winnie, illustrate the persistent pattern of two characters who attempt to communicate but are unable to understand each other. Neither can perceive the other's situation or intentions. Ossipon is certain that Verloc died in the explosion. Winnie is, for him, a woman recently widowed, whose acquaintance might be profitably cultivated. Winnie, however, believes that Ossipon understands her hints about the failings of Verloc and sympathizes with her as an abused victim who has taken vengeance on "a devil" (p. 226). But Ossipon merely assumes that such hints probably refer to the late husband's sexual peccadilloes.

Ossipon's first awakening occurs when Winnie pushes him into the shop to put out the forgotten parlour light. Proceeding to do so, he comes upon Verloc "reposing quietly on the sofa" (p. 232). No light is put out; instead a minor illumination is experienced. Ossipon realizes his previous suppositions were wrong. This small mistake suggests the possibility of a larger one. Just when his affair with the Widow Verloc seemed to be progressing so smoothly, he

suddenly finds himself in a situation that must be "madness, a nightmare, or a trap" (p. 232). He begins to recognize the world in which he lives, a recognition that is carried further when he observes the manner in which Verloc has been murdered. He retches.

Precisely at this point, Winnie, afraid that a passing policeman might see her, enters the shop and seizes Ossipon in a sudden embrace. She wants him to shield her; he, terrified, wants to escape; the two of them re-enact the physical struggle that took place when Verloc earlier tried to prevent Winnie from leaving. On another level, however, this struggle is even more suggestive. While the policeman tries the door, the two inside stand "motionless, panting, breast to breast" (p. 234). Conrad here describes a parody of a sexual embrace in which the male, the subject of Winnie's earlier illusion, strives, not for union, but for separation, and in which the female asks, not for the brief escape of a metaphoric death, but for the final escape of a real one: "If he comes in kill me — kill me, Tom" (p. 234).

Misunderstandings continue. Later, at the railway station, Ossipon observes that her brother was a perfect type. He meant that Stevie was an excellent specimen of one variety of Lombrosian degenerate. But Stevie's sister answers, "you took a lot of notice of him, Tom, I loved you for it" (p. 242). Such exchanges illustrate how Winnie can regard Ossipon as her saviour, even while he sees her as an inhuman danger threatening his very existence. She is as mistaken about Ossipon as Verloc was about her and even exhibits the same unconscious irony that characterized many of her husband's statements. For example, confessing her inability to kill herself after Stevie's death, Winnie says to Ossipon, "I suppose the cup of horrors was not full enough for such as me. Then when you came. . . ." She does not complete the statement but adds, "I will live all my days for you, Tom!" (p. 243). And immediately Tom deserts. She is left alone, without money, ticketed for France. She too must face an awakening into a world of madness or nightmare, a world

in which she has been, not in fancy but in fact, completely betrayed. Her cup of horrors, as her suicide proves, is finally full enough.

Yet Conrad also demonstrates that Ossipon sees, in the unexpected events of an eventful evening, something of the horrors of his life too. After deserting Winnie, he walks endlessly through the London night. The second time he crosses a bridge, he stands for a long time looking down into "a black silence" (p. 244). But when he resumes his pointless wandering through "an enormous town slumbering monstrously on a carpet of mud under a veil of raw mist" (p. 244), he has apparently decided to substitute the deadness of total exhaustion for the death of suicide. This plan of escape is not completely successful. After his wanderings, Ossipon still sits for hours, motionless in his room. Only when the late afternoon sun shines on him can he at last go to sleep. It is as if he needed some hint of some warmth somewhere.

A less capable novelist might well have ended the book with this seemingly conclusive scene. Ossipon would have been the last link in a chain of betrayals, a link that has come to recognize something of the nature of the chain and has found such knowledge crushing. But Conrad, in his last chapter, achieves patterns that resonate with larger thematic implications. He has already suggested, through the resolution of the Verloc's situation, how much private life is governed by illusions and delusions. But his final chapter implies that all society, an age itself, can be equally irrational.

One movement in the last chapter is the further decline of Ossipon. The "even tenor" of his "revolutionary life" has been disastrously upset but not just because of a guilty conscience. Ossipon is haunted by what he thinks he knows. The newspaper article, "Suicide of Lady Passenger from a cross-Channel Boat," concludes: "An impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang forever over this act of madness or despair" (p. 249). These words, particularly the words

"mystery," "madness," and "despair," reverberate loudly inside him, for, like other of Conrad's representatives of modern materialistic man, Ossipon is hollow at the core. But the words also reverberate because he believes he experiences something of the same madness and despair. He is haunted by "the cursed knowledge" he can "never get rid of" (p. 250). And he is even more haunted by his "scientific fear" of what this first haunting might mean.

All of the characters in *The Secret Agent* live in a grossly imperfect world, in an insane world that they do not understand and in which they are, in one way or another, victims of their ignorance. Because the world is incomprehensible, all characters also live largely by illusions. They can, consequently, be as much victims of their own particular imperfect view of reality as they are victims of life itself. In this context, Ossipon is particularly noteworthy. He is the man who *believes* in "science," who invokes Lombroso "as an Italian peasant recommends himself to his favorite saint" (p. 242). But Ossipon's science does not save him. A scientific materialist, he is "scientifically afraid of insanity" (p. 249). He is thus the victim of his own illusions when his "scientific" fears are self-fulfilling. Believing that he is falling to pieces, he proceeds to do so. This process can, naturally, continue beyond the end of the novel. When we last see Ossipon, "already he bowed his broad shoulders, his head of ambrosial locks, as if ready to receive the leather yoke of the sandwich board" (p. 252).

But the final fate of Ossipon is meaningful in still another way. As the reader should recall, the whole plot against Greenwich Observatory derived from Vladimir's observation that "the sacrosanct fetish of today is science" (p. 38). Consequently, Ossipon, materialistically devoted to science and justifying his shallowness in terms of that belief, partly represents the modern world and suggests something about an ethos which can make science into a prevailing superstition. Times, like individuals, the novel implies, can have their special illusions. Perhaps a particular age is largely

characterized by its particular illusions. Perhaps these illusions are as misleading for an age as for an individual. Such possibilities raise uncomfortable questions for anyone who, in late nineteenth-century fashion, can trust in the inevitability of a science-fostered progress or who, in twentieth-century fashion, can believe that modern science shall cure those human ills largely created by an earlier science, cruder and more materialistic. "Ossipon's harrowing mental torment" can be seen as appropriate, Thomas B. Gilmore, Jr. observes, "if we realize how inhuman his science, his habit of scientific explanation or analysis, has made him."¹² A particular age can be similarly dehumanized, similarly harrowed. Seen from this perspective, Conrad's portrayal of Ossipon at the conclusion of the novel is radically open-ended.

Ossipon, however, is not the main character in the last chapter. It is the Professor, the "Perfect Anarchist," who most presides over the ending of *The Secret Agent*, a book which portrays an anarchistic world. The very fact that the Professor is still present at the end of the novel shows something of that anarchy. Although Inspector Heat is fully aware of the Professor's home industry, he would rather not face the implications of such knowledge and so advances a convenient hypothesis about the possible guilt of Michaelis. He claims he "would deal with the devil himself and take the consequences" (p. 116), yet he clearly prefers not to deal with the Professor. Conrad thus demonstrates that even the upholders of law and order can be as willfully and advantageously blind as the most lazy and unthinking anarchists. They all — statesmen, policemen, tradesmen, or anarchists — come from the same basket. Their world is, in fact, so disordered that conservative anarchists can, in a wildly irrational society, still talk of overthrowing order.¹³

There is none to overthrow. The ending of the novel, despite the claims of certain critics, does not suggest the presence of order or of any ultimate justice.¹⁴ Verloc does not justifiably die to pay for his crime against Stevie nor

does he die as punishment for his illusions. Killing her husband does not drive Winnie to kill herself. As already noted, considerations of justice do not underlie either the homicide or the suicide. Justice fares even worse with Vladimir and with the Professor. One provided the plot while the other supplied the bomb that resulted in the first death. Verloc is, in one sense, merely the secret agent who acts for those who are most reactionary or most revolutionary. But because the agent died, the one who prompted him to action and the one who provided him with his tools are both quite safe at the end of the novel. Verloc's trial could have brought to light the reasons for the bombing and the source of the bomb. The Assistant Commissioner might have controlled Vladimir; Inspector Heat might have been forced to cope with the Professor. But no trial takes place. Both men, one representing the anarchy of reaction and the other the anarchy of revolution, are still free at the end of the novel.

No one, however, triumphs, and especially not the Professor. He lives in a "poverty suggesting the starvation of every human need except mere bread" (p. 245). He mocks Michaelis's vision of the world as one immense hospital in which the strong will care for the weak and defends his own vision of the strong exterminating the weak until "every vice, every taint, every prejudice, every convention" has met its doom (p. 246). He might himself then remain if he were strong enough. But while so arguing, his "large ears, thin like membranes, and standing far out from the sides of his frail skull" blush deep red at the idea of such envisioned strength (p. 247). Both the ears and the blush testify to the illusory nature of his thought. He can, moreover, calmly toast "the destruction of what is" (p. 249), despite his "astounding ignorance of worldly conditions" (p. 76). And he is equally ignorant of himself. He does not recognize that he is merely the fanatic son of a fanatic father nor does he recognize how much his theory and his actions derive from a perverted sexuality. With his hand

deep in "the left pocket of his trousers, grasping tightly the India-rubber ball, the supreme guarantee of his sinister freedom" (p. 77), he continually, as Joseph I. Fradin observes, anticipates his own ultimate climax. This would turn him, like Stevie, into a heap of fragments and so render him even more (alteration without real change) an "analogue of the broken lives in the morally anarchic city."¹⁵

His explosion would really change nothing. Men are too many and time does not stop. The central action in the book is, from this point of view, completely futile. The attack on Greenwich Observatory can symbolize, as R. W. Stallman maintains, the desire to destroy all time.¹⁶ But both the total failure of the attack and the general treatment of time in the novel show, as David Kubal observes, the senselessness of such a venture.¹⁷ Man cannot manage his own world. How can he control time within that world, much less abolish it?¹⁸ The Professor's failures are, in this context, suggestive. The "Perfect Anarchist," who wishes to create a chaotic new world free from process and time, laments, at the end of the novel, that madness and despair are no more. Time has taken away all the passions he might use to move the world. But the mad Professor's despair merely proves that he is as deluded as anyone; madness and despair — consider his own — definitely remain. Like all men, he is time's victim but not in the sense he believes. He too lives by illusions and cannot alter, much less master, either time or his world.

The Professor does not know the world, and the world returns the compliment. He walks, as described in the last sentences of the novel, through the "odious multitude of mankind" (p. 252), "unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men" (p. 253). It is difficult to believe with Sister Jane Marie Luecke that a street full of men makes this ending affirmative.¹⁹ The novel has shown too clearly how all men, through ignorance and necessary illusions, are victims. Some might even be victims of the

Professor's ultimate blast. He, like much else in life, is unsuspected. But he is deadly and he is, inescapably, there. His presence, in fact, completes another pattern in the novel. Stevie was an incompetent with a bomb; Winnie was a mad-woman with a knife. The Professor remains, at the conclusion of the work, more deranged and more destructive than either.

His final condition, like Ossipon's, is open-ended. Conrad leaves us, as Norman N. Holland observes, "with the persistent question of the Professor 'unsuspected and deadly.'"²⁰ And the problem of the Professor, the question he gives rise to, is considerably more unsettling than the problem of Ossipon. What the Professor represents is irrational man committed to irrational destruction in an irrational world, one in which the "authorities" cannot even logically number the houses on a street but are nevertheless unwilling to recognize the irrational.

We are, consequently, left at the end of *The Secret Agent*, with the same problems that pervade the novel, the problems that derive from the illusions and delusions, the madness and despair, that are inescapable in an irrational world. The book must exhibit open form. Such problems, by their very nature, cannot be resolved by a conclusion. As Fradin points out, Conrad, in *The Secret Agent*, demonstrates that life itself, like the bell which, at the beginning of the novel, summons the Verlocs "is irreparably cracked."²¹ The best that any character can achieve is to counter the absurdity of his existence with some equally absurd palliative. Even the relatively capable Assistant Commissioner needs the sense of order that his whist supplies and he depends on this as if it were a drug. Inspector Heat has his trusted racing sheet; Sir Ethelred has his vision of nationalizing the fisheries; the various anarchists have their various hypothetical futures; the Professor has, finally, his bomb.

NOTES

¹Alan Friedman, *The Turn of the Novel* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 29.

- ²Friedman, p. 105.
- ³James Guetti, *The Limits of Metaphor: A Study of Melville, Conrad, and Faulkner* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967).
- ⁴Leon F. Seltzer, *The Vision of Melville and Conrad: A Comparative Study* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1970), p. 58.
- ⁵Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1953), p. 207. Hereafter references to this edition will be made parenthetically in the text.
- ⁶David Daiches, *The Novel and the Modern World*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 12.
- ⁷John Hagan, Jr., "The Design of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*," *ELH*, 22 (1955), 148-64.
- ⁸See David L. Kubal, "The Secret Agent and the Mechanical Chaos," *Bucknell Review*, 15, no. 3 (1967), 75, or Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (1958; rpt. New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 230.
- ⁹R. W. Stallman, in "Time and *The Secret Agent*," in *The Art of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Symposium*, ed. by R. W. Stallman (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1960), p. 243, notes the irony of Winnie rejecting a butcher for a husband to later butcher her husband.
- ¹⁰One recent example is Christopher Cooper who, in *Conrad and the Human Dilemma* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), pp. 48-52, maintains that Winnie is consistently portrayed as "an heroic figure," admirable even when she kills her husband because she is actually "still defending Stevie."
- ¹¹F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1960), p. 215.
- ¹²Thomas B. Gilmore, Jr., "Retributive Irony in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*," *Conradiana*, 1 (1969), 44.
- ¹³Lynne Cheney, "Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* and Graham Greene's *It's a Battlefield: A Study in Structural Meaning*," *MFS*, 16 (1970), 117-31, observes that the rational orderliness of society is not too firmly upheld when it depends on men like Sir Ethelred or Inspector Heat.
- ¹⁴Some critics exercise considerable ingenuity in attempting to read the novel affirmatively. Eloise Knapp Hay, for example, in *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 255, maintains that solid British institutions forestall any possible triumph of anarchy. Even the almshouse to which Winnie's mother commits herself, "however depressing, is as trustworthy as the corner policeman." Since the almshouse is portrayed as a foretaste of the grave and a policeman as the equivalent of a thief, Hay's observations may be true but not in the sense intended. However, the most extreme attempt to discover positive values in *The Secret Agent* is Sister Jane Marie Luecke's "Conrad's Secret and its Agent," *MFS*, 10 (1964), 47. Even the occasional shining of the sun proves, for this critic, that "disorder and darkness are consequent on man's shutting out the sun from his life" and thus refusing to see "the presence of what is permanently ordered and beautifully permanent."

- ¹⁵Joseph I. Fradin, "Anarchist, Detective, and Saint: The Possibilities of Action in *The Secret Agent*," *PMLA*, 83 (1968), 1415.
- ¹⁶Stallman, "Time and *The Secret Agent*," pp. 234-54.
- ¹⁷Kubal, "*The Secret Agent* and the Mechanical Chaos," pp. 65-77.
- ¹⁸For an excellent discussion of the way in which Conrad handles time in this novel see Avrom Fleishman, *Conrad's Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), pp. 203-12. As Fleishman points out, the anarchists seek to negate or abolish time. But even the most extreme anarchist, the Professor, "cannot transcend the limitations of human life which is lived in time" (p. 211).
- ¹⁹Luecke, "Conrad's Secret and Its Agent," pp. 37-48.
- ²⁰Norman N. Holland, "Style as Character: *The Secret Agent*," *MFS*, 12 (1966), 222.
- ²¹Joseph I. Fradin, "Conrad's Everyman: *The Secret Agent*," *TSL*, 11 (1970), 1023.

Book Reviews and Books Received

Because of the recent Canadian postal strike these features are being held over until the April 1976 issue.