

THE "ILLUMINATING QUALITY": IMAGERY AND  
THEME IN *THE SECRET AGENT*

AS ONE reads *The Secret Agent* he is aware of the fact that its tone is provided by an atmosphere of sinister darkness which is penetrated spasmodically by the blood-red glare of gaslight. The object of this study is to make a systematic analysis of this imagery, indicating how it arose from Conrad's inspiration for the novel; how it aids in the presentation of character and theme; and how it serves as a device for furthering the author's artistic purpose.<sup>1</sup>

In the preface to this narrative, Conrad gives the background of his inspiration for the subject and for its development. There were two distinct impressions, derived from two separate occasions, which gave him the idea of writing Winnie Verloc's story. The first of these occasions occurred as Conrad and a friend sat in desultory conversation, during which an attempted bombing of the Greenwich Observatory was mentioned. The friend remarked that the bombing was perpetrated by a man who was "half an idiot" and that his sister committed suicide later. Conrad was conscious that there was an "illuminating quality" about this story: "One felt like a man walking out of a forest on to a plain—there was not much to see but one had plenty of light. No, there was not much to see and, frankly, for a considerable time I didn't even attempt to perceive anything. It was only the illuminating impression that remained" (pp. x-xi).<sup>2</sup>

The second impression was gathered from an obscure book, "the rather summary recollections of an Assistant Commissioner of Police," and the only distinct remembrance Conrad had of the book was of about ten lines of dialogue,

in which Sir William Harcourt, the Home Secretary, remarked to the Assistant Commissioner that the latter's "idea of secrecy . . . seems to consist of keeping the Home Secretary in the dark" (p. xi). A line similar to this appears later in Conrad's novel in very nearly the same context (p. 136), but in view of the author's elaborate explication of his artistic purpose, it is apparent that Sir William's angry statement furnished more than the inspiration for one line.

Upon reading this dialogue, writes Conrad, he felt himself stimulated:

And then ensued in my mind what a student of chemistry would best understand from the analogy of the addition of the tiniest little drop of the right kind, precipitating the process of crystallization in a test tube containing some colorless solution.

It was at first for me a mental change, disturbing a quieted-down imagination, in which strange forms, sharp in outline but imperfectly apprehended, appeared and claimed attention as crystals will do by their bizarre and unexpected shapes. One fell to musing before the phenomenon—even of the past: of South America, a continent of crude sunshine and brutal revolutions, of the sea, the vast expanse of salt waters, the mirror of heaven's frowns and smiles, the reflector of the world's light. Then the vision of an enormous town presented itself, of a monstrous town more populous than some continents and in its man-made might as if indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles; a cruel devourer of the world's light. There was room enough there to place any story, depth enough there for any passion, variety enough there for any setting, darkness enough to bury five millions of lives. (pp. xi-xii)

From the first of these incidents Conrad received the inspiration for the subject of his narrative: a sister, maternally protecting her half-witted brother, who was, in spite of a maudlin and incoherent sympathy for living things and an abhorrence of suffering of any kind, ironically blown to bits in carrying out a half-baked idea that to shatter the Green-

wich Observatory would, in some way, strengthen aristocratism and weaken revolution all over the world.

But a subject does not make a story; in order for the narrative to take shape in the author's mind there must be "the addition of the tiniest little drop of the right kind." In the second of the incidents described above, therefore, Conrad found the catalytic agent which crystallized the narrative in his mind by providing a setting and artistic tone. The setting, suggested by the phrase "keeping the Home Secretary in the dark," was to be in London, therefore, a monstrous town, which was "indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles," was a "devourer of the world's light," had variety enough to furnish the setting for a cosmopolitan tale, was great enough for any passion, and dark enough "to bury five millions of lives." The tone was to be established through the artistic use of darkness penetrated by the glare of gaslight, which accentuated the darkness and squalor surrounding the home, the shop, and the street in which Mr. Verloc, the protagonist, carried on his shady business and brooded over his treacherous activities. The foggy, impenetrable darkness so often associated with that section of London in which the action of this novel takes place covers and hides Mr. Verloc's movements from all eyes but ours; and it is as if we were compelled to pull aside a curtain which hides repugnant and horrendous sights. For we are introduced to a strange world, which does not exist in the sunlight, which has reality only in the dead of night. If one were to walk down Brett Street during daylight hours he would be aware of the ugliness, sordidness, and muddy squalor of his surroundings; but if he were to go down the street at night, picking his way carefully and fearfully through the darkness which is dispelled only occasionally by patches of yellow light cast by the glare

of gaslights from streetlamps and foul-smelling public houses, he would become aware of the fact that the life of this place, in the words of Winnie Verloc, will not "stand much looking into" (p. 177).

Such a setting was forced upon the author by the nature of the subject. He rejected in turn South America ("a continent of crude sunshine and brutal revolutions") and the sea ("the mirror of heaven's frowns and smiles"). Revolutions, once they have been set in motion, are carried out in the open, and are often associated with the fierce and blinding light of a semi-tropical sun; and since the sea is "a reflector of the world's light," man's actions cannot well be hidden while he beats his way back and forth over its surface. The most obvious characteristic of this narrative, however, is its secrecy. Mr. Verloc's activities are hidden from every character in the book, and we alone have the dubious honor of watching him as he ponderously forms and executes his incredibly naive plan. For such activities a cloak of darkness is a necessity, and London, the "devourer of the world's light," provided the essential component.<sup>3</sup>

As is often his custom, Conrad establishes the tone of the narrative by the method of contrast, by the development of opposite qualities, rather than by direction. The reader is introduced to Mr. Verloc as the Secret Agent leaves his shop, a place where the gas-jets are turned low, either for economy's sake or for the sake of the customers. He has received word from the foreign embassy that he must report at eleven o'clock the same morning. He walks westward through the city, noting through the park railings the men and women riding in the Row, seeing the carriages of the rich go speeding by, the couples walking peacefully and sedately along the broad avenues, and here and there a solitary horseman

cantering unsociably in the midst of such sociability. Mr. Verloc sees this, as it were, from a distance—he is not part of this life which moves about at an hour that is much too early for him. As he continues his walk,

a peculiarly London sun—against which nothing could be said except that it looked bloodshot—glorified all this by its stare. It hung at a moderate elevation above Hyde Park Corner with an air of punctual and benign vigilance. The very pavement under Mr. Verloc's feet had an old-gold tinge in that diffused light, in which neither wall, nor tree, nor beast, nor man cast a shadow. Mr. Verloc was going westward through a town without shadows in an atmosphere of powdered old gold. There were red, coppery gleams on the roofs of the houses, on the corners of walls, on the panels of carriages, on the very coats of the horses, and on the broad back of Mr. Verloc's overcoat, where they produced a dull effect of rustiness. But Mr. Verloc was not in the least conscious of having got rusty. (pp. 11-12)

Even though he is unaware of the fact, the trusted Secret Agent (whose activities were formerly so useful that he was identified by a symbol rather than by name), has become rusty. For eleven years he has not been of any real service to the embassy which he serves; but he continues to draw his pay and to send in stupidly contrived reports upon the activities of his revolutionary friends, activities which are known to his superiors and which would have made little difference if they had not been known.

This sunlight also establishes another aspect of the tone of the narrative. Its coppery gleam, the fact that it casts no shadows, its look of diffused old gold, and its bloodshot appearance forecast the grotesque atmosphere in which the main action of the novel takes place. By placing Mr. Verloc in this setting of diffused old gold, caused by a bloodshot sun which casts no shadows, Conrad indicates that the chief characters move in an atmosphere of eeriness, in the bizarre

illumination of bloodshot sunlight or of yellow gaslight, much like the dimly lighted interior of a witch's den, which gives to familiar objects an antic appearance; and the violence of the imagery suggested in this description is sustained throughout the novel. By thus ordering that his characters live in an atmosphere which is not common to mankind generally, Conrad has removed them from the common pale of humanity. They are not bound by the same bonds which hold mankind together; they are separate, apart, divorced from their fellow men, as Mr. Verloc was separated from the other citizens of London by the park rail.

From this point on we are aware of the characters only in this kind of light. Thus, when Mr. Verloc learns from Vladimir that he must work or cease to draw pay from the foreign embassy, the Secret Agent grows weak and faint and is conscious that the rusty London sunshine, which is just struggling clear of the mist, sheds "a lukewarm brightness into the First Secretary's private room" (p. 27). The faint glow of sunshine, the buzzing of a fly against the windowpane, seem ominously foreboding to Mr. Verloc, who for the first time is threatened in his indolence. The sunlight seems to illuminate, to bring into relief and to accentuate Mr. Verloc's vulgar corpulence and the impudently unintelligent appearance of his face. Even in such unusual and uncanny sunshine he is enormously out of place, like a night crawler that has become confused and crept from its dank hiding place before daylight has faded. It is under these circumstances that the stupid plan of bombing the Greenwich Observatory is outlined to him. It is such a wild scheme that even Mr. Verloc is aware of its absurdity; but circumstances force him to acquiesce.

Consistent with his plan of placing the main characters in

this unusual and bizarre setting, Conrad presents Mr. Verloc's wife Winnie only in the glare of artificial light. It is as if she feared to venture forth in daylight, since, according to her adage, things would "not stand much looking into." Thus, as Mr. Verloc goes upstairs after one of his sessions with his revolutionary friends, he finds his wife asleep with the lamp turned up full. "The light thrown down by the shade fell dazzlingly on the white pillow sunk by the weight of her head reposing with closed eyes and dark hair done up in several plaits for the night" (p. 55). She awakens and goes downstairs to see about the half-wit Stevie. Left alone Mr. Verloc presses his forehead against the window, looking out at the dark, dismal squalor and ugliness of Brett Street. His predicament seems to impress itself upon him in terms of darkness, and he sees the supercilious, witty face of the First Secretary as it appears "enhaloed in the glow of its rosy complexion like a sort of pink seal impressed on the fatal darkness" (p. 57).

The conversation which follows Mrs. Verloc's return takes place in the glare of the artificial light, and her husband tells her at the end of their talk to "put it out." He has dreaded the time when this light must be extinguished, leaving him to darkness and sleeplessness. It is part of Conrad's ironic treatment of his subject that the Secret Agent should thus fear the darkness which hides his activities, and that he should also be uncomfortable in the dusty London sunlight which emphasizes his grossness and rusty uselessness. He is comfortable only in the yellow gleam of gaslight or in the glaring brightness of Winne's bedside lamp.

That this scene is significant in the development of the tone is apparent from the fact that Conrad later included another that is similar to it. Mr. Verloc, burdened with the

knowledge that he is forced to unwanted and unaccustomed activity by Vladimir, has sought solace by wandering in the dark sordidness of the gaslit streets of London's slums. He returns to the shop, puts out the light, and reluctantly goes upstairs to bed. There follows a repetition of the scene which has just been described. Winnie lies in bed with the lamp turned up; her husband begins his preparations for the night; and they talk until, in reply to her query, he snaps, "put it out"; and there follows another night of sleeplessness and fear.

The best description of Brett Street is found in the passage in which the Assistant Commissioner of Police, investigating the seemingly useless bombing of the Observatory, approaches Verloc's shop and home. His purpose is to get a tip from Verloc, who betrays his friends not only to their political enemy but to the London police as well:

Brett Street was not very far away. It branched off, narrow, from the side of an open triangular space surrounded by dark and mysterious houses, temples of petty commerce emptied of traders for the night. Only a fruiterer's stall at the corner made a violent blaze of light and colour. Beyond all was black, and the few people passing in that direction vanished at one stride beyond the glowing heaps of oranges and lemons. No footsteps echoed. They would never be heard of again. (p. 150)

In tone, this passage is reminiscent of the one in which Mr. Verloc is described as he walked westward through a town without shadows, for the effect is to isolate this part of London from the rest of the world, just as the Secret Agent had been separated from the other citizens by the park rail. It is a place to which few people come, and those who do are enveloped in darkness. Those who enter this street walk away from the commerce of humanity, willingly separate themselves from the daily traffic of life, and enter a world in



which evil deeds are done in the darkness of the night. The fruiterer's stand, with its yellow glare of lights, is, as it were, the last outpost of civilization, and beyond is a complete void. When one enters this blackness, he is swallowed up by this void; even his footsteps leave no echo as he vanishes at one stride behind the curtain that hides Brett Street from the rest of the world. The dyadic aspect of the tone is also apparent in the similarity of this description to that of the bloodshot sunlight which cast no shadows, thereby emphasizing Mr. Verloc's isolation as he walked westward through London on his way to the foreign embassy.

At the other end of the street, across a wide road, is a large and prosperous public house, which illuminates its portion of the street with a glare of yellow lights just as the fruiterer's stand lights the other. This light seems to "drive the obscurity of the street back upon itself, make it more sullen, brooding, and sinister" (p. 151).

Other similar passages add to the grotesqueness, the sinister nature, and the isolation of this abode and its inhabitants. The trip which Winnie, Stevie, and their mother make when they take the latter to the almshouse is a case in point. They make the journey in a dilapidated cab pulled by a half-dead horse, which is driven by a decrepit, maimed old man, so feeble that he can hardly speak above a whisper. From the sleeve of his ragged coat a hook protrudes in place of a hand. His face is bloated and red; his clothing is decayed; his senses are dulled by hardship and deprivation. The cab moves so slowly that its progress is almost imperceptible. It rattles and bumps its way along the streets with Winnie and her mother inside and Stevie sitting high on the box with the old driver. As they move along, "Night, the early dirty night, the sinister, noisy, hopeless, and rowdy night of South London" (p. 159) overtakes them.

Everything that occurs during the cab ride tends to emphasize the isolation of the people who are making the journey. The cab itself, as the old driver later explains complainingly to Stevie, is so old that it is not used during the day. He is allowed to take it out at night, when he must sit, alone and cold, waiting hopelessly for his fares—usually drunks, whose powers of discrimination are deadened. The dilapidated cab, with its maimed driver and half-dead horse, are not part of the ordinary goings-on of life; they have been set apart, forgotten, removed forcibly from active service of mankind. One cannot imagine that anybody would choose intentionally to make a trip, however short, in this equipage. Even Mrs. Verloc's mother hesitates when she sees it and decides to climb aboard only when assured by a constable that the old driver has not had an accident in twenty years. The three occupants and the driver move unheeded through the London night, creep slowly along the gaslit streets, looking out of the rattling, jingling windows, as the ordinary life of the city flows on about and around them. Even Stevie's determination to get out and walk (a decision brought on by the whipping of the horse) seems to illustrate the isolation of this group, for it is only by this act, which would not ordinarily be contemplated by any "normal" person, that attention is attracted to the cab and its occupants.

After it has served its purpose of bringing these people to their destination, the ruined cab, with its maimed driver, and half-dead horse sinks once again into obscurity; they move out of the light of a gas lamp, through the gates of the charitable institution, into the darkness from which they came, as if they had suddenly appeared to convey these oddities from one place to another and then ceased to exist.

During their journey homeward and after Winnie and her

brother reach their destination, we see the world through the eyes of Stevie, who visualizes himself, Winnie, and her husband as living in a "good" world, quite apart from the one which callously ignores the suffering of the old cabman and his infirm horse. That is a "bad world for poor people" (p. 171), and the shop on Brett Street is for him a haven. Stevie, in his half-witted innocence, sees the Verloc dwelling as isolated from the evil of the outside world; whereas it is in reality isolated by its own evil. A second aspect of the irony lies in the fact that Mr. Verloc is outwardly and negligently "good" to his brother-in-law. He never becomes angry with Stevie or begrudges him the livelihood which was tacitly granted when the Secret Agent married Winnie. Indeed he seems hardly aware of Stevie's presence, accepting him as he would his wife's favorite cat; and much in the same manner as he would decide to make use of a domestic pet, Mr. Verloc chooses to let Stevie carry the bomb to the Greenwich Observatory.

The fact that the bombing takes place on a foggy day is a necessary adjunct to the plot, but it also adds to the effect of the isolation of the main characters. The bombing, an act of stealth, cannot be carried out in the light of day; and only the flash of the explosion, making a bright hole in the fog, indicates to a constable standing nearby the location of the disaster. Even the description of the day on which the newspaper hawkers sell their papers announcing the sensational story accentuates the isolated inhumanity of the deed:

It was a raw, gloomy day of the early spring; and the grimy sky, the mud of the streets, the rags of the dirty men harmonized excellently with the eruption of the damp, rubbishy sheets of paper soiled with printer's ink. The posters, maculated with filth, garnished like tapestry the sweep of the curbstone. The trade in afternoon papers was brisk, yet, in

comparison with the swift, constant march of foot traffic, the effect was of indifference, of a disregarded distribution. (p. 79)

The isolation of the occupants of the shop on Brett Street is also emphasized in the scene in which Chief Inspector Heat unwittingly tells Mrs. Verloc that her brother was killed in the attempted bombing. She becomes aware of the fact that Stevie was the victim when Heat shows her the label with their address written on it. This label had been cut from the overcoat the boy was wearing on the day he left home for the "visit" with the revolutionary Michaelis. She learns the whole sordid story as she eavesdrops on the conversation between her husband and the Inspector. As Heat leaves the shop he gives her no more than a cursory glance:

And when the cracked bell ceased to tremble on its curved ribbon of steel nothing stirred near Mrs. Verloc, as if her attitude had the locking power of a spell. Even the butterfly-shaped gas flames posed on the ends of the suspended T-bracket burned without a quiver. In that shop of shady wares fitted with deal shelves painted a dull brown, which seemed to devour the sheen of the light, the gold circlet of the wedding ring on Mrs. Verloc's left hand glittered exceedingly with the untarnished glory of a piece from some splendid treasure of jewels, dropped in a dust-bin. (pp. 212-213)

The wedding ring, symbol of the only sacred and true bond in this sordid existence, gleams brightly, in brilliant contrast to the sinister aspect of the shop with its shady wares. In a larger context it emphasizes Mr. Verloc's isolation, for this marriage with Winnie was a mistake. It did not correlate with his existence. The First Secretary of the embassy seemed to be aware of the fact when the Secret Agent mentioned his wife during their interview. Vladimir was astonished and indicated that a man in the position of the Agent would have done better to remain single. But Vladimir was talking about the inconvenience of marriage. It is

true that a secret agent is condemned to loneliness; and the First Secretary was thinking solely of Verloc's services, not of the ethics of the question.

The passage quoted above, however, emphasizes another side of the error, for it accentuates the incongruity of the sacred bonds of matrimony amid the sordidness of the environment and the evil nature of Mr. Verloc's life. It is as if the Secret Agent were suddenly to appear in church. Marriage is a customary stage in the life of man; it is entered into by people whose adjustment to society is known and accepted by themselves and by others. But Mr. Verloc was not a part of this society; he had, as Conrad says of another of his characters, "kicked himself loose of the earth"; and he lived in social darkness, as symbolized by the physical darkness of Brett Street. The introduction of a wife into such an existence (even a wife who believed that things would "not stand much looking into") is an illustration of Verloc's depravity.

But Mrs. Verloc is compelled at last to look into things. As she sits there in the shop after Inspector Heat has gone, she keeps perfectly still, shocked into immobility by the enormity of the events of the past several days: "She kept still as the population of half the globe would keep still in astonishment and despair, were the sun suddenly put out in the summer sky by the perfidy of a trusted providence" (p. 244). This is precisely what has happened to Winnie Verloc: her sun, the sunlight of her comfortable existence, has been suddenly put out by providence (in the form of Mr. Verloc) in whom she had placed every trust. The last act of her ignoble drama is played out in the darkness of that night in which she first learns of Mr. Verloc's perfidy.

He tries to explain in bungling, blustering language his

reason for perpetrating the tragedy. He seems insensible to the death of her brother, and is conscious only of the fact that he, himself, faces danger. As he talks she is forced to look into the darkness of his heart, into the barrenness of a life of which she has become a part, into things which she formerly believed would not bear much looking into; and the result of the examination is the murder of her husband. She seizes a kitchen knife and plunges it into the heart of the Secret Agent. The murder occurs in the parlor by the light of the gas lamp, and we see, as does Mr. Verloc, only the shadow of his wife's arm as she raises it above him and drives the knife into his breast.

After the murder she stumbles about the shop and at last makes her way outside into the clammy, cold, foggy night which envelopes south London:

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. (p. 269)

This passage also recalls the earlier scene in which Mr. Verloc walks westward under a bloodshot sun through a town without shadows. The gas lamps, as did Mr. Verloc's back under the sun, appear to be rusty, and the light from the window makes a blood-red square on the pavement. Just as the imagery of the earlier scene forecast the dire events which were to follow, that of the present one reflects back on the horror of the deed which has been committed.

Mrs. Verloc's loneliness is emphasized again, and she thinks first of suicide, then of escape—to Spain or California, it does not matter which; but her solitude impresses itself upon her senses even as she thinks of the second alternative:

The vast world created for the glory of man was only a vast blank to Mrs. Verloc. She did not know which way to turn.

Murderers had friends, relations, helpers—they had knowledge. She had nothing. She was the most lonely of murderers that ever struck a mortal blow. She was alone in London: and the whole town of marvels and mud, with its maze of streets and its mass of lights, was sunk in a hopeless night, rested at the bottom of a black abyss from which no unaided woman could hope to scramble out. (pp. 270-271)

In such a condition, alone in physical and mental darkness, Mrs. Verloc is a prime target for the predatory activities of Comrade Ossipon, the handsome revolutionary, writer and distributor of harmless pamphlets condemning the bourgeoisie. Together they work out her means of escape, Ossipon with his eye on the money (withdrawn from the bank by Verloc that day and handed over to Winnie), and she thinking only of getting away from the scene and from London. The mistake is made when she insists on going back to the shop to close the door. She is betrayed by a gaslight which shines feebly through the glazed door separating the parlor from the shop. At her insistence Ossipon goes toward the parlor in order to shut off this light. As he opens the door, he sees Mr. Verloc, whom he had thought to be killed in the explosion, reposing peacefully on the sofa under the glare of the gas lamp; and the true sense of the scene seems first to be impressed on him by the sight of Mr. Verloc's black hat, lying rim upward on the floor.

Even to Ossipon, a man more accustomed to the activities of night than those of daylight, Mrs. Verloc has no existence outside of the darkness that covers her. His own face is so pale that it can be seen in the darkness of the shop, "while Mrs. Verloc, veiled, had no face, almost no discernible form. The trembling of something small and white, a flower in her hat, marked her place, her movements" (p. 291). The flower, which is all that can be seen of her as it "rose in the blackness," stresses the fact that she is now completely cut off

from the commonality of life about her; she has ceased to be a part of nature; by this act of darkness, she has completely isolated herself from the rest of the world, even the shadowy, in-between world of a man like Ossipon.

In the end, betrayed and swindled by Comrade Ossipon, forlorn and forsaken, alone in the vastness of a hostile world, Winnie Verloc commits suicide by leaping over the side of the boat on which she is attempting to make her escape. Even her death occurs in the darkness and is referred to as "an impenetrable mystery," and "act of madness or despair" (p. 310). Ossipon wanders through the London streets during the dark night and, arriving at his lodgings before morning, sits brooding until he falls asleep just as the sun beams down upon him. He sleeps in the sunlight.

From this point on we are conscious of Ossipon in the sunlight, and the quality of the light is changed. It is as if heaven were not only exposing him to our view, but also revealing to him the depravity of his own activities. His fortunes begin to fail. He is not even any longer a good revolutionary; and his remarkable success with women is a thing of the past.

With this description of Comrade Ossipon's downfall, and with the description of another minor character (the "professor," maker of explosives, who furnished Verloc with the means of bombing the Greenwich Observatory), Conrad brings us back from the world of darkness to which he has taken us and leaves us once again on familiar ground, in the common light of everyday life.

One is reminded of De Quincey's explanation of the effect of the knocking-at-the-gate scene in *Macbeth*. This episode, he says, emphasizes the murder, an act that is contrary to nature, by signalling the resumption of ordinary life. It closes the awful parentheses which set the murder outside the pale



of humanity. Conrad has taken us into this same world of darkness, has given us a glimpse of activities that cannot bear the light of sun, but must be carried on in the blackness of a south London night or in the glare of yellow gaslight. So it is that when the action of the narrative has come full circle, when the deeds of darkness are complete, the author returns us to a "known and familiar landscape" in the form of a busy London street, where we walk calmly with our fellow men, unaware of the pest in our midst.

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#### NOTES

1. Attention has been called to the fact that the barren ugliness and sordid squalor of the setting provide the predominant tone of *The Secret Agent*. See Walter F. Wright, *Romance and Tragedy in Joseph Conrad* (Lincoln, 1949), p. 189. See also Paul L. Wiley, *Conrad's Measure of Man* (Madison, 1954), p. 107 and *passim*.
2. Citations from *The Secret Agent* in the text are to Joseph Conrad, *Complete Works*, Canterbury Edition (New York, 1924), Vol. XIII.
3. I cannot accept the statement made in *The Art of Modern Fiction*, ed. R. B. West and R. W. Stallman (New York, 1949), pp. 491-492, that in his "Prefaces" Conrad was "highly deceptive, often deliberately misleading," and that he hid his intentions from the reader by presenting "bogus trade secrets" and "false clues." When Conrad said to Norman Douglas, "You must realize the inconceivable stupidity of the common reader—the man who forks out the half crown," he did not say or imply that one could not give the discriminating reader hints as to his method and artistic purpose. Indeed one is inclined to believe that the magnificent statement of his *ars poetica* in the "Preface" to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* is designed, not for "the common reader," but for the student of literature, and that it holds little meaning for one not already conversant with and sympathetic toward Conrad's major works.