

## Terrorism in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*\*

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

Robert A. Friedlander

*The Secret Agent*, published in 1907, is a detective novel by Joseph Conrad, the well-known Polish-English novelist, and it is classified as one of Conrad's political novels, together with *Nostramo* (1905) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). *The Secret Agent*, particularly because of its theme of terrorism and the violence it depicts, has become famous again in the US after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and after the recent suicide bombings that have occurred in Europe. The novel describes the period of the fear of the dynamite-throwing anarchist that disturbed the European society from the 1880s through the early part of the twentieth century. Early critics mentioned that Conrad's *The Secret Agent* was related to a fictional genre known as the “dynamite novel” which was widely spread throughout the thirty years preceding World War I, and enjoyed its highest fame in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>1</sup> Conrad's novel depicts the prewar period around 1885 and 1886 which was an era of considerable anarchist activity in England. The Greenwich bombing, which constitutes the germ of *The Secret Agent*, occurred in February 14, 1894;<sup>2</sup> the events of the novel are based on this attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory which was carried out by an anarchist, named Martial Bourdin,<sup>3</sup> who did not damage or reach the target but was himself killed by the bomb. The aim of this article is to show the effects of terrorism on individuals, their relationships, and society as a whole. This can

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1. Writers such as Philip May, George Griffith, E. Douglas Fawcett, and Grant Allen followed that genre in their works, which are unvaried and focused on few elements such as secret organizations, foreign spies, conspiratorial meetings, extravagant and sinister plots against society, threats of violence, and the possibility or actuality of explosions both frequent and destructive (Orr and Billy, p.175).
2. Beth Sharon Ash, *Writing in Between Modernity and Psychological Dilemma in the Novels of Joseph Conrad* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), p.198.
3. C. B. Cox, *Conrad*. Ian Scott-Kilvert, (ed.). (London. Longman Group, 1977), p.28.

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

The setting of *The Secret Agent* was in the late-Victorian period, a period which was full of violence and terrorist acts. The first terrorist bomb attack on London was done by the Irish and American-Irish Republicans. Also the book reflects the concerns about the Anarchism that had started to expand internationally and became an obvious danger. The radical political beliefs and the responses it motivated brought the ideologies of terrorism that Britain inherited at the beginning of the twentieth century such as the first Fenian<sup>4</sup> attacks on British soldiers in Manchester, and the bombing of Clerkenwell Prison, in which twelve people died and 100 were injured.<sup>5</sup> By the 1890s, the anarchist activities had spread and taken on an international level. Furthermore, there were many dynamite attacks in Europe and the US, and there was a series of assassinations of heads of state. David Miller in his book entitled *Anarchism* mentions some examples of these historical incidents, which are:

“A man named Bourdin, who had connections with anarchists in London, blew himself up carrying a bomb across Greenwich Park in 1894; President Carnot of France was killed in 1894; the Spanish Prime Minister Castillo in 1897; King Umberto of Italy in 1900; and President McKinley of the USA in 1901.”<sup>6</sup>

Combined with this increasing and spreading of violence, many British newspapers and journals stated their government's rule on political crime and asylum to be short-sighted. Therefore, political crime has some similarity to state insurgency. As a result, anarchist violence was frequently denied the status of political crime, especially by the press: “the anarchist is not a political assassin; he is merely a noxious beast. Anarchism has no politics.”<sup>7</sup> This general contradiction and uncertainty in the British rules concerning political criminality is the main cause of the problems that terrorist violence and anti-terrorist laws presented for British liberalism at the time.

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4. Fenian is a name derived from the ancient Irish army. This organization is like other organizations as Fenian Brotherhood and Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), all were opposed to Britain's 1801 Act of Union which had deprive Ireland of self-determination. These organizations aimed to the establishment of an independent Irish Republic in the 19th and early 20th century (Hachey, p.137).

5. Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature, From Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.21.

6. David Miller, *Anarchism* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd.,1984), pp.112-13.

7. Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature, From Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson*, p.36.

The connection between absolute optimism, ideology, and terrorism appear clearly in Conrad's fiction, as terrorism becomes a dominant theme in most of his last major fiction. Orr and Billy assert that "Conrad too felt the appeal of a cleansing annihilation. Significantly, nearly everything he wrote between 1905 and 1908 involved explosions of one kind or another."<sup>8</sup> Kurtz, in *Heart of Darkness*, terrorizes uncooperative natives by having their heads cut off and placing them on stakes around his cottage as a reminder to others; his "Autocracy and War" is full of metaphoric explosions; the manuscript of the *Chance* was known as "The Dynamite Ship" in its early stage of writing; and *The Secret Agent* is built up on the story of a revolutionary who is blown up with his own bomb. In some of Conrad's other works, if we do not find a real explosion, we find a clear reference to it or an intention to do it, through the characters' words and dreams, such as the anarchist character in the *Under Western Eyes*, who spends his hours dreaming and planning violent acts of terrorism. Also the mysterious Mr. X in the "The Informer" *A Set of Six* states that there is no "amendment to be got out of mankind except by violence and terror"<sup>9</sup> which shows clearly his way of achieving his goals through violence. The same thing applies to the Professor in *The Secret Agent*, whose final goal is to replace the middle-class political order with a better one. Such a goal may be irrational but his strategy for destroying the regime is realistic and gives one some insight into Conrad's attitude toward liberal politics. At this point, the Professor shares Conrad's belief in the inefficiency of reform and revolution alike. Instead, the Professor states "what's wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life."<sup>10</sup> Like Conrad, the Professor realizes that the legality and crime are linked aspects of a single system, "counter moves in the same game,"<sup>11</sup> each reliant on the other for its meaning and legality. The Professor understands "revolution" in its sense of rotating, of curving back to an original position. His refusal to obey the rules of the game makes the Professor an uneasy figure for both the other anarchists and Chief Inspector Heat. Conrad, too, is cautious of revolution since he feels that "it to be a wheel that returns to the same base with a different driver."<sup>12</sup> He does not trust revolutionaries and thinks that they cannot bring anything good for the country.

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8. Leonard Orr and Ted Billy., (eds.), *A Joseph Conrad Companion* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), p.180.

9. Joseph Conrad, *A Set of Six* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928), p.77.

10. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (New-Delhi: Peacock books, 2011), p.50.

11. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.48.

12. Martin Tucker, *Joseph Conrad* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1976), p.75.

Generally, there are different kinds of violence, like those which cause abuse, injuries, or death; but the worst type is the one which is aimed to cause more than that. It goes far beyond death and destruction, it is planned to terrorize individuals. This kind of violence is described as terrorism. In other words, we can say there is a clear distinction between violence and terror. Violence is a wider term which covers all illegal acts that include damage (or the threat of damage) to person or possessions. Acts of terror, on the other hand, are acts of violence carried out to create a climate of fear among individuals, and the authorities which will lead to political changes such as new policies or a new regime.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the Greenwich Observatory outrage was a terrorist act which was planned to terrorize the people in Britain to achieve one's goal.

The central events of *The Secret Agent* arise from Mr. Vladimir's plan to bring Britain back into line by forcing it to follow the international order concerning harboring the anarchist. He is against the idea of accepting the anarchists as immigrants in Britain. His intention is to produce violence or a terrorist act under the anarchists' name which he thinks will cause a problem against the anarchists. He explains his philosophy of the bombing to Verloc, saying "A bomb outrage to have any influence on public opinion must go beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely destructive."<sup>14</sup> He wants all the newspapers write about it. It is an action that needs an immediate reaction from Britain. Mr. Vladimir addresses Verloc and explains: "You anarchists should make it clear that you are perfectly determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation."<sup>15</sup> He tries to show him that such an outrage will be the best act for the anarchists to get what they want. Vladimir intends to terrify the society, as such he aims at destroying not the society itself but instead its belief in some ideologies supporting it. Mr. Vladimir chooses the target, which is the Greenwich Observatory. This choice comes from the importance of the Greenwich Observatory as a symbolic sign of science. Henry H. Han's comment about the matter is highly suggestive in terms of pointing out the symbolic value of the Observatory:

"The political violence of European origin emerged during the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and based on a set of values embedded in modern European civilization. That terrorists from European based cultures tended to carry out their attacks against targets of great symbolic meaning, but ones usually yielding few deaths unlike those of non-European."<sup>16</sup>

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13. David Miller, *Anarchism*, p.109.

14. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.22.

15. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.22.

16. Henry H. Han, *Terrorism and Political Violence: Limits and Possibilities of Legal Control* (New York, London, Rome: Oceana Publications, 1993), p.36.

However, it is said that “*The Secret Agent* is as much about the force of signs as it is about the force of deeds.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, in the text, there is a clear distinction between sign and action, between image and event. This fact takes a number of forms, including these produced between pornography and revolutionary zones, the effects of the bomb plot and Winnie’s suicide, and the identification of the revolutionaries with speech rather than their actions.

The Greenwich Observatory is a scientific institute and it is an important symbol for the bourgeoisie; that is why the novel as a whole is built on that deed of violence or terrorism. The foreign embassy in London is behind that outrage. When the new first secretary Mr. Vladimir comes to the embassy, he checks the agent provocateur Mr. Verloc’s reports, and he believes that Mr. Verloc is useless. He orders him to come to the embassy during the daytime to meet the new first secretary. When Mr. Vladimir meets him, he discusses Verloc’s inefficiency and he insults Verloc in different ways such as by calling him a “fat pig,”<sup>18</sup> by showing him that he is useless, by disrespecting him, and by telling him that he has done nothing to be mentioned in his secret service in the history of the embassy and they may not need his service any more. All this was to push Mr. Verloc to do more and to carry out what he will be ordered to do, which is the bombing of the scientific institute of the bourgeoisie. Vladimir plans that outrage to be carried out under the name of the anarchists. The aim behind that outrage is to end the privileged asylum given to the foreign revolutionary in England so that the English stop harboring them. The revolutionaries or the anarchists are against rules or the government of Vladimir’s country, but Britain gives them the asylum and they still represent a threat to his country. However, the planned domestic terrorism will affect British government, and it will certainly respond. Terrorist attacks even at the lowest level of consideration are crimes against public order. In addition, terrorism is intended to be a challenge to the state and must be dealt with as such. This is what Vladimir wants, the respond to this act and the repression of the individual freedom.

In his conversation with Verloc, Mr. Vladimir confirms that the explosion should be against science which has become more important in English life and is seen as “the fetish of today.”<sup>19</sup> Mr. Vladimir tells Verloc about the target which “is neither royalty nor religion. Therefore, the palace and the church should be left alone.”<sup>20</sup> Attacks on property,

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17. Henry H. Han, *Terrorism and Political Violence: Limits and Possibilities of Legal Control*, p.102.

18. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.18.

19. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.20.

20. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.21.

religion, and churches fail to disturb the calmness of everyday life in Britain. Vladimir informs Verloc that the target should not be a palace or a church, but the scientific institute, the Greenwich Observatory. Conrad tries to show us the everyday life of his age in a fresh light. Vladimir describes the target as follows:

“A bomb in the National Gallery would make some noise. But it would not be serious enough. Art has never been their fetish.[...] Artists—art critics and such like—people of no account. Nobody minds what they say. But there is learning—science. Any imbecile that has got an income believes in that. He does not know why, but he believes it matters somehow.[...] All the damned professors are radicals at heart.[...] They believe that in some mysterious way science is at the source of their material prosperity.”<sup>21</sup>

Vladimir suggests that science is universally worshiped and it becomes just like religion in the old days.<sup>22</sup> An attack on a gallery or on art in general will not be affected or will be useless altogether. No one will listen to the artists and they are not effective power in society. To Vladimir, art is not as important as science. He also adds: “The greatest possible regard for humanity with the most alarming display of ferocious imbecility. I defy the ingenuity of journalists to persuade their public that any given member of the proletariat can have a personal grievance against astronomy.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, targeting the Greenwich Observatory will be the best goal for Vladimir. Such an outrage would be an attack on “the whole social creation.”<sup>24</sup> Moreover, an attempt for targeting the Greenwich Observatory will be considered as an attack on Astronomy and will be viewed as a global event because he believes that “the whole civilized world has heard of Greenwich.”<sup>25</sup>

In his *Inside Terrorism*, Bruce Hoffman states that “The terrorist act is specifically designed to communicate a message.”<sup>26</sup> The message that Mr. Vladimir wants Britain to realize is that the anarchists represent a threat to the national security of the state and they are not loyal to the nation which shelters them. They possess destructive instincts which push them to commit acts against humanity and the national symbols wherever they go.

Like communists, the anarchists wanted to resist class repression through terrorism. Their own way of carrying out terrorist acts has its own unique features. Its importance

21. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.22.

22. Knapp Eloise Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p.244.

23. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.23.

24. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.22.

25. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.23.

26. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p.229.

lies in the way they follow, which is the terrorism of the lone rebel or small circle of rebels. In anarchist theory, an act of terror was referred to as an *attentat*<sup>27</sup> whose purpose is to convey a message or propaganda by action. For anarchist, terrorism often takes the form of killing an enemy of the people or destroying the ruling class by means of bombing. David Miller relates in his book *Anarchism* that “a doctrine of collective responsibility [...] that can justify violence against [...] anyone who acts as a state functionary or servant of capitals.”<sup>28</sup> In this way, the anarchists would include all the actions under the title of revenge. In his *The Secret Agent*, Conrad reveals the anarchists as an inactive group; they do not do any act to be mentioned in the world of anarchism. The only revolutionary act that Conrad permits in his narrative is an imposed explosion caused by a simpleton boy who blows up nothing except himself. In the novel, Conrad also sees the anarchists as weak figures and they do not represent any real political threat. This fact helps us to know something historical about the reality of the anarchists. In late-Victorian England, most anarchists were refugees and exiles who tried to get the acceptance of the countries which harbored them. Until the end of the century, when anti-immigration laws were enacted, anarchism did not represent the threat to the state, but the threat came from its own authorization, which was very challenging to those European powers that had reason to fear anarchism’s acts of assassination and random terror. It seems that the questions arose for *The Secret Agent* from the conventions of terrorist fiction, such as how dangerous is the Greenwich explosion? And who is behind the explosion? Both are answered ironically by Conrad. In reality, the harmless explosion destroys an entire family, firstly Stevie, then Verloc, then Winnie, and finally the effect reaches Winnie’s mother, too. Through the sequence of the events, *The Secret Agent* shows that regular life is terrifying and insecure and that London is far from being a heaven of peacefulness. In a city which is shaken by detonations, there is fear, effort, anxiety, pain, and defeat for the majority of its inhabitants.<sup>29</sup>

The other term which accompanies anarchism in Conrad’s fiction is “nihilism.” H. Han contends that “nihilism emphasized the revolutionary as alienated radical who totally rejected existing society and its values in order to engage in terrorism.”<sup>30</sup> In the nihilists’ view, the revolutionary is the one who “despises and hates present-day social morality in all

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

28. David Miller, *Anarchism*, p.116.

29. John H. Stape, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.109-110.

30. Henry H. Han, *Terrorism and Political Violence: Limits and Possibilities of Legal Control*, p.64.

its forms [...] Day and night he must have one thought, one aim—merciless destruction.”<sup>31</sup> This fact clearly shows the nihilists’ pessimistic views of life in which the world seems meaningless and aimless. In this context, for them, terrorism is seen as expressing the will of the people. Therefore, the anarchist terrorism is often focused on two purposes, which are striking back at any enemy of the people and motivating a series of reaction which can lead to violent revolution.

In his *Terrorism and the International Anarchist Movement of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Whitney Kassel argues that though there is a difference in motive between the modern terrorists and the anarchist terrorists of the 1890s, the difference between them does not nevertheless mean that some features of the psychological character of the anarchist assassin are not present in modern terrorists. Thus, it can be said that features such as a desire to state a fact of being famous for some bad deed, and a need to reveal strength and to feel accepted and associated in groups of the same thoughts, are found in nearly every person who carries out terrorist actions. Kassel adds “the difference in the case of the anarchist attacks of the 1890s is that these attacks were unaccompanied by any true understanding of the cause for which they fought. Almost none of the assassins of that time had any direct contact with the anarchist foundation.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, these can be seen as individual acts which are regarded as a weak devotion to anarchism.

As a result of the anarchist movement which spread widely in Europe and the USA, the anarchist novels succeeded and increased in the number at the end of the nineteenth century. Barbara Melchiori, in her book titled *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* shows that “much of this fiction confirmed the political status quo by presenting all forms of social protest as essentially terroristic.”<sup>33</sup> These novels seek to spread fear and provoke reaction by using figures like the dynamiter and the *agent provocateur*, and by the metaphorical use of words and expressions such as the secret society and the international conspiracy. All these elements are offered in *The Secret Agent* as well. The ideal socialist Michaelis, the blood thirsty nihilist Yundt, and the genetic engineer Ossipon, although distinguished from one another, are from a secret association that meets regularly in Verloc’s Soho shop. Verloc manages the anarchists’ movement and meetings, and sets up an outrage on behalf of a foreign power represented by Mr. Vladimir. Though in

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31. Henry H. Han, *Terrorism and Political Violence: Limits and Possibilities of Legal Control*, p.64.

32. Whitney Kassel, “Terrorism and International Anarchist Movement of Late Ninetieth and Early Twentieth Century,” *Study in Conflict & Terrorism* (2009), p.247.

33. Barbara Melchiori, *Terrorism in the Victorian Novel* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p.284.

a normal terrorist fiction these elements or such figures represent a real threat to the society, in Conrad's novel they are exposed as harmless and powerless. Excluding the Professor, all the revolutionaries are not men of action, and they lack all energy and power of creativity. They are completely reliant on women whom they exploit when they can; the aged Yundt owes his survival to a faithful old woman, the helpless Michaelis' freedom depends on his lady-patroness, the self-loving Ossipon takes his living expenses from the nursemaids he seduces, and the secret agent Verloc owes his well-being to the foreign embassy he works for. Even the arrogant Sir Ethelred takes anarchism at its face-value. The insufficiency of unvocal or un-ironic dialogue is a theme that fills the whole of *The Secret Agent*. The conversation between the characters, as H. Stape relates, includes this:

“The conventions of late-Victorian terrorists fiction, the language of the daily press, which achieved unique growth between 1890 and 1910, and the various modes of the detective thriller, which developed in response to the establishment of the CID in 1878, and which was brought to some sort of sublimity by Conan Doyle.”<sup>34</sup>

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

Generally, there is no one legal definition of terrorism, just as there is no universally political definition of terrorism as Alex Houen observes that “one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter.”<sup>35</sup> This fact makes it hard to give an exact legal definition to terrorism. However, Henry H. Han, in his *Terrorism and Political Violence: Limits and Possibilities of Legal Control*, argues that even though there is no one proper legal definition of terrorism till this time, there is no need for it if we look at terrorism as an unlawful act. No matter what the means are and how they are used, the terror-violence acts are public crimes in every civilized society. For this reason, a precise lawful definition is not essential, if we only deal with the factors of this behavior which lead to: murder, serious bodily harm, hostile engagement, international suffering or severe mental distress.<sup>36</sup> However, Houen, in his book titled *Terrorism and Modern Literature from*

34. John H. Stape, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, p.107.

35. Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature, From Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson*, p.7.

36. Henry H. Han, *Terrorism and Political Violence: Limits and Possibilities of Legal Control*, p.54.

*Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson*, defines terrorism as “the use or threat of action to influence the government or to intimidate the public in order to advance a political, religious, or ideological cause.”<sup>37</sup> The action may expand to include serious damage to property and to include disturbance in other systems. However, the most dangerous thing is the destructive effects of such acts on the psychology of the individual because the crime scene is not the land upon which the attacks take place, but rather, it is the mind - the psychology - of those who survive.

In Conrad’s view, the terrorist’s strategy is psychological. By planning and applying what appear to be mindless acts of violence and cruelty against symbolically valued targets, the terrorist hopes to create feelings of extreme fear among the public authorities and the crowds. The objective is to provoke the authorities into resorting to procedures to suppress terrorism, procedures which will destroy the legality of the regime. The other objective is to explain to the public that established authorities lack the will and the capacity to deal with the terrorists, which will increase the public’s sense of insecurity. In *The Secret Agent*, therefore, the Professor seeks confrontations with the police authorities to reveal their weakness of will. At the same time, he hopes to provoke the police into “shooting us down in broad daylight.”<sup>38</sup>

Terrorism is a deeply psychological act. In the *National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals*, edited by Virginia M. Frankenberger, it is claimed that “terror is a natural phenomenon; terrorism is the conscious exploitation of it.”<sup>39</sup> Terrorism, therefore, is far more than an option of violence against individuals. It is a means to create a psychological state and a way to force someone’s views on the others’ consciousness. In other words, it is a way of disturbing the security of the individuals and the groups through using various acts of killing or exploding to cause a kind of terror in the minds of its direct and possible victims. As Michael McEwen rightly notes:

“Terrorism—is a form PSYOP (psychological operation) [...] Many other characteristics of terrorism are argued but the drafters of competing definitions, but virtually all include words to the effect that acts of terrorism are directed at a target audience wider than the immediate victim. Without this provision terrorism would be indistinguishable from other forms of violence.”<sup>40</sup>

37. Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature, From Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson*, p.8.

38. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.50.

39. Virginia M. Frankenberger, (ed.), *National Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals: Disorder and Terrorism* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1976), p.3.

40. Michael T. McEwen, “Psychological Operations Against Terrorism: The Unused Weapon,” *Military Review* 66/1. 59-67, 1986), p.62.

Generally, the aim behind the terrorist act is to terrify people more than causing any other destruction or the death of the target himself/herself. Such an act will leave bad psychological effects on society, and the reaction to the terrorist act usually leads to destructive results, too. In other words, many of those who are directly exposed to traumatic events such as violence and terrorism will develop significant posttraumatic psychological distress and perhaps posttraumatic stress disorder. There are different ways of perceiving and interpreting risk which influence their emotional and behavioral responses to that risk.<sup>41</sup> Particularly, persons who directly see others' deaths or experience and witness the loss of family members, relatives, and friends may experience strong psychological reactions. *The Secret Agent* is described by Ian Watt as "the novel especially virtually created the genre of the serious psycho-political mystery novel."<sup>42</sup> Verloc's wife Winnie, although she is described with these words in the novel to show her submissiveness ("she was always undemonstrative and silent"<sup>43</sup>), changes to be another person who is violent after Stevie's death, and she "could scratch, kick, and bite—and stab, too; but for stabbing she wanted a knife."<sup>44</sup> This shift in Winnie's life shows clearly her mind's status and how she is psychologically affected by this terrorist act which leads to her brother's death. The narrator's comment on her behavior is notable:

"Mrs. Verloc's whole being was racked by that inconclusive and maddening thought. It was in her veins, in her bones, in the roots of her hair. Mentally she assumed the biblical attitude of mourning—the covered face, the rent garments; the sound of wailing and lamentation filled her head."<sup>45</sup>

In addition to Stevie's death, the effects of the Greenwich explosion lead to Verloc's death and then Winnie's death. In short, this act leads to the end of the Verloc's family as a whole. Besides, the psychological effects of the terrorist act indirectly reach Ossipon who feels despair and starts drinking alcohol after he hears the news of Winnie's death: "The suicide of a lady—this act of madness or despair."<sup>46</sup> He carries that paper or the report in his pocket wherever he goes. "He could neither think, work, sleep, nor eat. But he was beginning to drink with pleasure, with anticipation."<sup>47</sup> He is described as

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41. Judith J. Mathewson, "The Psychological Impact of Terrorist Attacks: Lesson Learned for Future Threats." Ch. 9. [www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/cpc-pubs/hls\\_papers/mathewson.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/cpc-pubs/hls_papers/mathewson.pdf), p.198.

42. Ian Watt, (ed.), *Conrad: The Secret Agent*. Casebook series (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973), p.153.

43. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.175.

44. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.177.

45. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.171.

46. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.216.

47. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, p.216.

someone who is dying slowly: “Comrade Ossipon walked without looking where he put his feet, feeling no fatigue, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, hearing not a sound. ‘An impenetrable mystery...’ He walked disregarded. ... ‘This act of madness or despair.’”<sup>48</sup>

*The Secret Agent* is deemed to be among Conrad’s political novels, but one thing is clear that in his political novels Conrad is concerned less with political theory than with the cost of politics and violence and its effects on individuals in terms of disintegration of family ties, of personal relationships, and of personal growth. It can be clearly seen in *The Secret Agent* that violence and terrorism leave destructive effects on individuals and their relationships. Its vicious psychological impacts can be extended not only to those who expose directly to the terrorist act but also to their families, neighbors, and friends. Still what is annoying is that the terrorist act, regardless of its effect, is aimed to carry out someone’s agenda.

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