"The Voice of Dynamite":

Anarchism, Popular Fiction and the Late Political Novels

of Joseph Conrad.

by

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Preface:

        The peculiar attraction that anarchism has held for the
imagination of the novelist, and which has thereby transformed anarchism
into a particularly literary form of political theory, is no doubt due
to many reasons and diverse cultural influences. One reason, certainly,
is that anarchism possesses a dramatic and imaginative immediacy that
has traditionally made the anarchist the rebel *par excellence* and,
whatever the writer's own political allegiance and belief, therefore the
perfect subject for the political novel about social unrest and
revolution. Indeed, anarchism offers an aesthetic of direct action and a
philosophy of individual power and freedom that are themselves based on
imagined conditions: political concepts on the verge of fantasy, and so
suitably vague as to afford the writer of imaginative fiction great
space for emotional and imaginative expansion on this theme. Consider,
as an example of anarchist thought with a quality peculiarly lending
itself to a literary treatment, Bakunin's dramatic conception of the
revolution in a letter to a fellow revolutionist, Albert Richard, in
1871:

> There must be anarchy, there must be-- if the revolution is to
> become and remain alive, real and powerful-- the greatest
> possible awakening of all the local passions and aspirations, a
> tremendous awakening of spontaneous life everywhere ... We must
> bring forth anarchy, and in the midst of the popular tempest, we
> must be the invisible pilots guiding the Revolution, not by any

kind of overt power but by the collective dictatorship of all
our allies, a dictatorship without tricks, without official titles,
without official rights, and therefore all the more powerful, as it
does not carry the trappings of power. [1].

Herein lies the plot of many a popular novel as well as many a
revolutionist's dream. Bakunin's melodramatic and schizophrenic vision,
by means of which he could reconcile his own principles of absolute
individual liberty with the fantasy of an apparently unlimited personal
power, resolves itself into this vision of "invisible pilots": the God-
like authors and directors of the "popular tempest" whose "guiding" hand
is suspected but never seen, and therefore the ideal material for the
writer's "revelation" of the truth.

Another reason for anarchism's special appeal to the
imaginative writer must be the fact that it is pre-eminently the
politics of the individual and that the anarchist discourse aims to give
voice to the same type of independent values and perceptions which are
also ideally to be found at the heart of the artistic endeavour to
represent the world. George Woodcock described the "truly independent
writer" as "an agitator, an anarchist, an incendiary" [2]; and there
would seem to be a strong conceptual continuity between that ideal
literary perspective, of the artist as impartial spectator and critic of
the public world dedicated to telling the "truth", and the anarchistic
sense of disgust at and alienation from the world of conventional
politics. Like the artist, the anarchist claims to take the vision
available to the individual spectator as the starting point for all his
arguments and explanations, and consequently tends to explore the world
of politics in essentially similar ways: in terms of central polarities

between the individual and society, knowledge and the imagination, and the role of narratives, of myths and fictions, in bridging the gap between them.

My intention here is to explore this connection between the artist and anarchist in terms of the contradictory politics of the fiction which became so popular at the end of the nineteenth century: in terms of the fact that literature can be both an active means of social and political control and, ideally, also the perfect artistic expression of the passive and apolitical perspective of the individual spectator of the world. The writer of fiction about political conflict and change is torn between the need for a positive commitment to the ideological or mythical thought and language of his age, with the attendant loss of the "artistic" value of individual expression that such commitment involves, and the artistic commitment to a genuinely individual perspective on the world, which involves the corresponding loss of larger political value and coherence. As a result the political novel of this period often embodies a deeply confused vision of the world and a divided response to the political forces which are its subject; as the novelist moves between the most commonplace political fantasies of revolution as barbarism and indiscriminate destruction, and an aesthetic of incoherence in which the revolution is grasped only in the most solipsistic and mystifying language: a language which reduces the whole of the public world to an alienating spectacle or spectre of power, somewhat resembling Bakunin's imagination of a world under an "invisible" dictatorship or, as we shall see, Sanguinetti's notion of a society enthralled by an "artificial terrorism" [3].

And it is here, of course, that the appeal of anarchism comes

most into play, since it is the political theory which most closely

addresses the contradiction inherent in the literary artist's position

and apparently resolves his dilemma by reducing the world of politics

itself to a purely imaginary reality, against which the true artist's

task is defined. Anarchist theory tends to place great stress upon the

criticism of the negative role and power of unacknowledged fictions in

our social organization and yet, in an apparent contradiction, offers a

commited vision of individual power and freedom in a future society

which is itself an imaginative and fictional construction: one which is

distinguished from what it negates only by the fact that it is a

formally powerless discourse which acknowledges its own fictionality and

individual source. In Emma Goldman's terms:

> The state has no more existence than gods and devils have.
>
> They are equally the reflex and creation of man; for man,
>
> the individual, is the only reality. The state is but the
>
> shadow of man, the shadow of his opaqueness, of his ignorance
>
> and fear. [4].

In a world of melodrama ic visions and "shadows", present power and

order are simply invented and thought into existence and can just as

easily be unthought if an alternative form of expression can be found

for the needs they represent. Indeed the anarchist ideal of a language

of action, mixing violent iconoclasm with a positive assertion of

imaginative visions, grows directly out of this perception and is a use

of words which aims to create the thing it describes and to re-mould the

"plastic" human soul. It is also, of course, a model of communication

which would appeal in obvious ways to the writer of imaginative

literature, since it confers his imagination with power in the political

arena and absolves him from the responsibility to directly engage with

and represent existing social and political realities.

Thus the anarchist, in a sense, approaches the world from a

position identical to that of the artist and his adoption of a

simplified language of action as a means of representing it forms a

model of political communication which both challenges and reflects the

very basis of the writer's undertaking. It challenges the writer's ideal

of an individual and non-political commitment to the world in fiction;

since, in the anarchist worldview, all public representation of the

world is the covert expression of a political power and order, and

inevitably involves the writer in the subjection of individual vision to

the systematized falsehoods of the public world. It also provides,

however, a reflection and political sanction for the writer's claim to

be able to represent imaginative "truth"; since anarchism conceives of

society in terms of a conflict between the truth of individual

experience and the innate falsehood of its social and political

representation. This has often lead even the most politically

conservative of writers to an implicit aesthetic engagement with the

language of anarchism.

These then, in abstract, are the connections and observations

which form the basic theme of the thesis which follows. Its purpose,

however, is rather more difficult to define and can perhaps be best

understood through a brief account of how it evolved. Originally it

began as an exploration of the theme of language, revolutionary violence

and ideological/political commitment in Conrad's later political novels,

The Secret Agent (1907) and Under Western Eyes (1911). This lead me,

naturally, to research into the linguistic and propagandistic ideas of the anarchists and revolutionaries who Conrad obviously had in mind in his depiction of the revolutionary coteries of London and "Russian" Geneva: most clearly Michael Bakunin, the French "propagandists by the deed" like Emile Henry, and in England the exiled Russian political assassin and novelist Stepniak (for this connection I am indebted to Keith Carabine, who not only told me about Stepniak but even lent me the books). Within this context I first encountered the works of Henry B. Brewster and Georges Sorel and began to toy with the notion of the existence of a specifically anarchist theory of language: a consistent attitude or way of thinking about language and politics which ran through anarchism in its myriad manifestations and which was sufficiently similar to and yet in conflict with Conrad's ideas as to form a theoretical or political philosophical context in which those late novels could be appreciated and understood. This topic, of anarchism and language, therefore became a subject in its own right, but one which sprang from and is ultimately justified by my interest in Conrad.

The other major strand of my research was into the English popular fiction of anarchism and revolution, which became such a fashionable literary formula during Conrad's writing career and with which his novels clearly form a kind of dialogue. Again this became, to a large extent, a subject in its own right but implicitly defined and inspired by my interest in Conrad and desire to understand the form of his two major late works of political fiction. I am aware, of course, of the extreme dangers and limitations of any attempt to restrict the account of the literary context of Conrad's work to English fiction.

Conrad, obviously, was not an English novelist but simply a novelist in English and his work was influenced by and reactive to Russian, Polish and continental traditions of fiction equally or more strongly than English traditions. However, I did need to keep my research and presentation within the bounds of possibility and, although I barely mention figures as important to Conrad's work as Dostoyevsky and Flaubert, I justify that by attempting to place Conrad in relation to a specific late nineteenth and early twentieth century English fictional tradition (in this respect the footnotes to chapters, especially in Part Two, are of importance).

Perhaps, then, the best way of defining the purpose of this thesis is to say that it is the attempt to investigate and account for a distinctive strand of thought and literature about anarchism and revolution of which Conrad's work and ideas were a particularly sophi ticated and interesting expression.

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Notes:

1   Cited by Eugene Schulkind in The Paris Commune of 1871: The View from the Left (London: Cape, 1972), p.39.

2. The Writer and Politics (London: The Porcupine Press, 1948), p.17.

3. On Terrorism and the State: The Theory and Practise of Terrorism divulged for the first time trans. Lucy Forsyth and Michel Prigent (London: B.M.Chronos, 1982), p.92.

4. Cited by Paul Berman in Quotations from the Anarchists (London: Praeger, 1972), p.93.

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PART ONE:

Notes Towards An
Anarchist Theory of Language.

If one does not wish to be satisfied with truth in the
form of a tautology -- that is, with empty shells --
then he will forever buy illusions for truth ... The
"thing in itself" (which is precisely what the pure truth,
apart from any of its consequences, would be) is something
quite incomprehensible to the creator of language and
something not in the least worth striving for. This creator
only designates the relation of things to men, and for
expressing these relations he lays hold of the boldest
metaphors ...   Nietzsche,"Philosophy and Truth", [1].

When power is placed in the service of vicious reaction, a language
must be called into being which does its best to appropriate such
obscenity of power and fling its excesses back in its face.
Criticism of such language is simply squeamish or christianly--
language being expected to turn the other cheek, not to stick out
its tongue; offer a handshake of reconciliation, not stick up a
finger in an obscene, defiant gesture. Such criticism must begin by
assailing the seething compost of inhuman abuses from which such
language took its being, then its conclusions would be worthy of
notice. When it fails to do so, all we are left with is, yet again,
the collaborative face of intellectualism with power-- that is, the
taking of power and its excesses as the natural condition, in
relation to which even language must be accountable. But suppose we
begin accounting all arbitrary power-- that is, all forms of
dictatorship-- as innately and potentially obscene. Then, of course,
language must communicate its illegitimacy in a forceful,
uncompromising language of rejection, seeking always to make it
ridiculous and contemptible, deflating its pretention at the core.
Such language does not pretend to dismantle that structure of power,
which can only be a collective endeavour in any case; it does,
however, contribute to the psychological reconstitution of public
attitudes to forms of oppression. Language needs to be a part of
resistence therapy. When it plays such a role successfully in
advance of the right circumstances for change, the political will
escapes paralysis by the aura of sanctity which, the longer it
lasts, power hypnotically exercises over all and sundry, but most
especially the rationalizing, self-excusing intelligentsia.
                        Wole Soyinka, The Man Died [2].
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Notes:

Heading:
1. Nietzsche, <u>Of Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzche's Notebooks of the 1870's</u> Trans. and Ed. Daniel Breazeale. (Sussex: Harvest press, 1979), p.82.

2. Wole Soyinka, <u>The Man Died: Prison Notes</u> (London: Arrow Books, 1985), p.xiii-xiv.

Chapter One:

The Language of Anarchism.

The criticism most often directed against anarchism is that it is an unworkable failure as a theory of revolution because it has never moved any sizable number of men to action, and because the anarchist society, so long discussed and promised, has never in fact materialized. This failure is due, say its critics, to the inability of anarchists, of all varieties, to articulate goals and methods appropriate to the real needs of men. Anarchism, they add, is the politics of the isolated and imaginative individual: of intellectual abstraction verging sometimes on dangerous fantasy. Consider the character of history's leading anarchists: Shelley, Proudhon, Godwin, Stirner, Tolstoy, Courbet, Kropotkin, Bakunin, Nechaev, Sorel, Makhno, Read. They are, say their critics, proselytizers and visionaries, poets and political dilettantes, and they were unable to address the limited ambitions and commonplace abilities of ordinary men. Anarchism is apocalyptic myth and spectacular violence rather than sober theory and sensible revolutionary strategy [1]. The criticism comes from all types of political thinker and all agree that one of the defining qualities of anarchism is that it is idealistic, or, in other words, unrealistic and sometimes even incomprehensible.

My purpose here is not to refute this charge, but to examine anarchism in terms of the order of questions and problems it implies and to thereby discover why it has been so specially attractive to artists and

writers; even to those who overtly refuted and denied it. Anarchism, as a political philosophy, directly addresses the question of the relation between thought and action, between words and reality, in such a way as to suggest that the conventional catagories of imaginary and real into which we divide our thoughts and knowledge, our hopes and fears about the world, are not as clear cut as we are lead to believe; but are, on the contrary, merely the expression of the temporary political conditions in which we live. Anarchism, as an intellectual movement, also advances many ideas about the relations of politics, language and power which closely mirror the concerns of the literary artist seeking a social purpose and a means of individual self-expression through his work in language. It seems to offer a solution to his artistic alienation and a political legitimization of his imaginative visions. The history of the engagement of writers with anarchism is therefore one which brings us directly to the central issues involved in discovering the nature and purpose of political fiction and of what the anarchists termed "fictional" politics. To keep this within bounds I shall restrict myself largely to the years 1880-1920, the time of anarchism's greatest success and influence, but for the meantime I shall survey a wider range of sources.

I.

To begin with we must, of course, establish precisely what anarchism is. It is not and never has been a clear political movement with set aims and goals [2], but is rather a turn or attitude of mind directed

towards the total liberation of the individual from the restrictions and

limitations imposed upon him by social and cultural authority. In its

intellectual aspect, it is an interrelated set of ideas which form a total

theory of human motivation and action in which human nature is potentially

free and creative, but presently stunted and enslaved by authority. In other

words, anarchism posits and asserts an ideal imaginary future against a real

empirical present, since the anarchist view of man as he could be is

obviously not wholly derived from the observation of man as he is: on the

contrary, it must be at least partially a construction of the mind or the

imagination. "The majority of anarchists", wrote Lenin, "think and write

about the future without understanding the present" [3], and he thereby

points to the crux all of charges against anarchism: that its view of human

nature is read into, not derived from, the empirical evidence we have on how

men behave and what motivates them. The realist looks around him and

mistakes the picture of human nature that he sees in the present

circumstances for human nature as it is in all times and places. The

idealist looks around him and mistakes his vision of human nature as it

ought to be in ideal circumstances for what he sees around him. The

anarchist, clearly belonging to the latter category, is like Conrad's Haldin

who sees the greatness of the Russian soul prefigured in the body of a

drunken peasant; or like Jerry Rubin who sees the human aspiration to

liberty and justice expressed, albeit negatively, in his iconoclastic vision

of the revolution as "niggers and longhair scum invading white middle-class

homes, fucking on the living room floor, crashing on the chandeliers,

spewing sperm on the Jesus pictures, breaking the furniture and smashing

Sunday school napalm-blood Amerika forever" [4].

The anarchist sees the world as it is as a source of metaphor

for his idealistic dreams and, in order to resolve the dichotomy between man

as he is and the anarchist idea of man as he ought to be, anarchism employs

a curiously exhortational style of rhetoric, riddled with extremes of

threatening negation and positive assertion. Consider Proudhon in his

negative phase:

> God is stupidity and cowardice; God is hypocrisy and falsehood;
>
> God is tyranny and poverty; God is evil. For as long as men bow
>
> before altars, mankind will remain damned, the slave of kings
>
> and priests ... Get thee hence, O God! [5].

Proudhon employs the apocalyptic style of religious discourse to effect a

violent iconoclasm. The purpose of this kind of rhetoric is to shock: to

provoke an instinctive reaction which momentarily suspends rational thought

and directly transmits that sense of scorn and indignation at the world,

which is the reverse side of anarchism's high idealism. Now consider

Proudhon in his positive phase:

> The people ... understand that, whatever phraseology is used,
>
> feudal system, governmental system, military system, parliamentary
>
> system, system of police, laws and tribunals, and system of
>
> exploitation, corruption, lying and poverty, all are synonymous.
>
> Finally they know that in doing away with rent and interest, the
>
> last remnants of the old slavery, the Revolution, at one blow, does
>
> away with the sword of the executioner, the blade of justice, the

club of the policeman, the gauge of the customs officer, the erasing

knife of the bureaucrat, all those insignia of government which

young Liberty grinds beneath her heel. [6].

For Proudhon there is no compromise: having smashed the myth of religion, he

offers us an awesome personification of liberty victorious over all systems

of repression. Here the purpose is to communicate that intoxicating

emotional expansion which is the positive side of idealism. The work of

revolution becomes a matter of inspiring images and exhortation, rather then

of rational critiques and careful explanations.

Thus it would seem that if anarchism has failed, it has failed

firstly as a theory or description of human nature. Similarly, if it is

incomprehensible, as a host of critics have maintained, it has failed as a

theory of expression and propaganda, since its ecstatic mode of discourse

has failed to register with the great mass of men who are its audience. The

anarchist, speaking of ideal aspirations, of freedom and justice, may just as

well be drawing words from an unknown imaginary language if men are

incapable of achieving such ideals. Anarchism erases the distinctions

between the real and ideal, between fact and theory, and so its opponents

always point out its source in the imagination.

The ultimate test of the life of any theory is, of course, said

to be its ability to describe and predict empirical facts, and anarchism's

opponents point to the facts. Sometimes, however, even facts can be

confusing and subject to ideological interpretation themselves. The facts in

the history of anarchism, for example, could be presented to argue for many

types and degrees of success or failure. The eventual defeat of the Spanish

anarchists in the civil war does not necessarily invalidate their ideals, rather it merely points to the superior power of their enemies. Similarly the successive victories enjoyed by Makhno are obviously not solely attributable to the ideals that he espoused [7]. Thus there is no easy resort to historical facts by which to measure anarchism.

And, more generally, neither is there resort to "empirical reality" as it now exists by which to measure any idealistic vision of life. Look, say the critics, at man as he is, is he not greedy, unco-operative, dependent upon others for his ideas, and totally lacking in the aspirations attributed to him by the anarchists? But, of course, there is no answer to this question which is not itself an ideology and equally subject to denial. The question ignores the dynamics of life in which man can break free from what he is under specific conditions and which is precisely what anarchism attempts to describe. Most centrally, however, it also betrays an ignorance of the real nature of political and philosophical theories which do not work as simply as biological or physical theories. An altogether more pertinent question when dealing with a philosophical theory is what kind of relation is claimed between theory and fact, between the words of which it consists and the "truth" it claims to represent, and even what kind of reality is being talked about. Christianity, for example, would obviously claim a different status for the reality it purports to describe to that which is claimed by socialism, but both implicitly contain a view of the relationship between words and facts which is the key to their discourse. Therefore when dealing with a theory like anarchism, which criticizes life from the standpoint of philosophical and political ideals, we would perhaps do better

to ask the same set of questions as we do when we consider the nature of the "truth" to be derived from the overtly "fictional" representations that we encounter in novels and poetry. This is perhaps most obviously true of anarchism, since it so clearly offers a vision of the world which radically differs from that arrived at conventionally and sanctioned by social authority.

To sum up so far. Anarchism, as a philosophy of revolution, grasps life as a dynamic process of change in which the future is both undetermined by the past and open-ended in an existentialist sense. The subject of its discourse is the movement from the present moment to the imaginary future, and so to judge of the truth of its statements, their representative or expressive quality, mere facts will not do. It is necessary to look at the predictions it makes and what status it assigns to them, before crudely applying facts or, more properly, assessments of probability.

What is needed, then, is an anarchist epistemology: a theory of knowledge which explains, from an anarchist point of view, how we know things and what status to give to our knowledge. This is a need felt, of course, when analysing any body of thought or knowledge, but which intensifies in the case of a revolutionary ideology, which expreses an intention towards what it describes, rather than simply representing facts. Like the words on the page of a novel, the subject of a political discourse exists somewhere between fiction and fact; that is to say, partly in the fictional future, as an extention of the ideology or viewpoint it represents, and partly in the factual present as a metaphor. For example,

the individual perceiver cannot see the class-war but can believe or think
he sees it, as it is shadowed forth in events like riots, strikes and
assassinations that words turn into metaphors. He can partake of a reality
which had not consciously existed for him before he heard the words "class-
war". And so to understand anarchism we must first understand the theory of
language and knowledge which lies behind its political formulations.

To help set the terms for a discussion of anarchist linguistics,
I will begin with an excerpt from a classic example of anarchist rhetoric.
It is from outside the period I am specifically interested in, but thereby
demonstrates the continuity of tone and thought which has characterized
anarchism from its inception. It is from On Terrorism and the State (1982)
[8] by the colourfully named Gianfranco Sanguinetti, one of the leading
theorists of the Situationist International [9]. Sanguinetti, claimed by his
comrades to be "the voice of those who do not yet have the power to speak"
(p.12), discusses the political role of the proletariat in a society held
together only by the escalating violence of the state:

> In such conditions, where the development of class society in
>
> all its bourgeois and bureaucratic variants opposes, not only
>
> the interests of the greatest majority, but also the most simple
>
> elementary conditions for the survival of the species and
>
> individuals, and whats more even their will itself, it is not
>
> for the prolarariat to delay and even less to avoid a social
>
> war which has already begun; and neither is it a matter, in the
>
> future, of expending all one's forces in a multitude of little
>
> skirmishes, endlessly renewed as endlessly doomed to fail,

skirmishes for the defence of one doesn't know quite what --

"for wages, for work, for the country", as the Stalinist and

trade-union scum uselessly bark -- but for workers to pass onto

the offensive, and to win on the entire stretch of the theatre

of war, which is worldwide, as is worldwide the present crises

of all powers. For what is at stake today is nothing other than

the "destiny of the world"; however it is not at all in the name of

some old pretended "historic mission" more or less inevitable and

prophesied, that the proletariat is called upon to become "the class

of historical consciousness", but because it is only from this

position of fundamental superiority that it can attack and combat

successfully all the "forces of unconsciousness" which are all, and

the only things, represented "democratically" in present day

capitalism; these forces nowadays manifest themselves in their

failures, their disasters, and their infamies. (p.45)

As Mao Tse-Tung once said, "theories are not to be looked upon as dogma, but

as guides to action" [10], and a call to action is precisely what this

exhortation aims to be. If we are to understand it, we need to focus not

just on the concepts being propounded, but also on the nature of their

presentation: the type of language used and its relationship to its subject.

The obvious purpose of the passage is to encourage the reader to perceive

the needs and potential for change contained in the present situation: to

"unmask" the apparently stable conditions under discussion as inherently

unstable and unacceptable. Thus the alternation of positive romantic

assertion and violent negative iconoclasm is a typical tactic of anarchist

rhetoric which concentrates on the point where the future is created: always on the next moment, where a dialectic of creation and destruction operates and does away with the present situation to create the new. Thus the style, so breathlessly rhetorical, is classically anarchist and could easily be the work of Proudhon writing over a century earlier. The zeal and moral urgency, the raison d'etre of the passage, evolves from taking the accepted socialist doctrine of the class struggle only at its extreme cataclysmic phase and exploiting its full dramatic potential. Sanguinetti sees conflict everywhere and the issue becomes one of the "mere survival of the species" in an apocalyptal battle, while all theoretical constructions of social and economic trends are implicitly thrown out along with "historic mission". The placing of key phrases in speech marks locates the concepts they represent as being from types of political discourse different in theory and purpose to the kind that this aims to be: as being, in fact, mere verbal masks which hinder one's perception of the real situation and hence only delay action. This passage aims, in fact, to debunk all theoretical elaboration, and to substitute for it an image of "crises" which will spur people into immediate and unthinking action. We are therefore invited to see the world in metaphorical or imagistic terms, which move us away from a simple grasp of cause and effect in a concrete situation; away from seeing the cause of a strike in the desire for higher wages, for example, and towards the perception of a large mythic dimension in which each event is assigned a place in the movement towards some ultimate end. And so, in grim theatrical, the proletariat must act on "the entire stretch of the theatre of war" in order to decide an undetermined "destiny of the world". The end is conceived

as inhering more in the movement towards something, than as a definable

target; more as a quality belonging to the act of creation, than the thing

created at the end of it.

The passage, therefore, is more of a creative performance,

replete with startling imagery, than an attempt to represent something which

already exists. Its point of reference, its subject, is as much in the

future as in the present and as much in the mind as in the world. Thus the

unstated but overwhelming tendency of thought here is towards that

anarchistic view of politics as illusion: of the public arena of political

debate as little more than a theatre of fantasy and deception; as a

"representation" only of "unconsciousness"; and which can therefore be acted

against only in terms which deny the most basic rules and conditions of that

"representation". In terms, that is, of direct action without any

theoretical elaboration around it. It is this ideal of direct and simple

deeds of opposition that Sanguinetti holds out against the complexity and

intellectualism of the modern world. His subject is, ultimately, the "will"

to "act" itself; and Sanguinetti is speaking most clearly to the predicament

of the individual who cannot "act" socially or politically, because lost in

the merely passive reception of political "ideas" and phrases. And yet,

paradoxically, Sanguinetti's ideal itself is also the construction of a type

of fantasy vision of the future in which such action is possible: his words

provide a clear example of a political language which operates in a way more

closely related to the indirect language of art, than to the direct

representational language of scientific and rationalistic discourse. The

"art" of politics is the communication, not of facts or information, but of

a state of feeling or an motional perspective on the imagined world that it creates. Political rhetoric, in its effort to harness the human will, thus replaces thought with an attitude and so aims to be more of an action than a description and to in fact create the reality it apparently describes. A receptive reading of Sanguinetti, for example, would engender exactly that sense of the drastic urgency of class warfare that is both the subject and purpose of his work.

Consider, as an amusing comment on Sanguinetti's idea of political language, Baron Wrangel's account of the experience of listening to a speech by another anarchist: Bakunin in Geneva, 1867:

> I no longer remember what Bakunin said, and it would in any case scarcely be possible to reproduce it. His speech had neither logical sequence nor richness in ideas, but consisted of thrilling phrases and rousing appeals. It was something elemental and incandescent -- a raging storm with lightening flashes and thunderclaps, and a roaring of lions. The man was a born speaker made for the revolution. The revolution was his natural being. His speech made a tremendous impression. If he had asked his hearers to cut each other's throats, they would have cheerfully obeyed him. [11].

Naturally one cannot make a point about the language of a worldwide movement from Bakunin's individual virtuosity with words, yet Wrangel's impression is a well substantiated one. It is, as we have seen, a commonplace of criticism that anarchist rhetoric tends towards a form of ecstatic communication somewhat akin to religious discourse; and which operates on the border between fantasy and reality, between future and present. It it is here that

we get to the very centre of the reason why language has been such a particular concern for the anarchist revolutionary.

Perhaps this reason can most easily be grasped in relation to the thought of Max Stirner, that most turgid and solipsistic of anarchist theoreticians [12]. For the anarchist like Stirner, man the individual ego is the only valid, integral and irreducible human unit in existence. Everything else, including the language systems into which we are born, is a social and political construct and hence antagonistic or alien to the free operation of that individual ego. Stirner was acutely sensitive to the ways in which language, like all other aspects of society, could control our perception and limit our experience of the world:

> He who cannot get rid of a thought is so far *only* man, is a
> slave of *language*, this human institution, this treasury of
> *human* thoughts. Language or "the word" tyrannizes over us
> because it brings up against us a whole army of *fixed ideas*.
> Just observe yourself in the act of reflection, at this moment,
> and you will find out how you make progress only by becoming
> thoughtless and speechless every moment. You are not thoughtless
> and speechless merely in sleep, but even in the deepest reflection;
> yes, precisely then most so. And only by this thoughtlessness,
> this unrecognised "freedom of thought" or freedom from thought,
> are you your own. Only from it do you arrive at putting language
> to use as your *property*. [13].

Even the the most comprehensive of concepts like truth and thought are, as the products of language, human and temporary constructs and do not

correspond to anything outside of the words used to express them. Thinking is "... "slave work" or the work of a "servant obedient to the word"" [14], and truth is as alien to the individual as the formal material with which it is identical. "The truth is dead, a letter, a word, a material that I can use up" [15], he wrote; and so language and its "fixed" truths, the only means of access we have to the world outside of ourselves and to our conscious social identity, becomes in fact a means of alienation from our own "living" ego:

> Truths are phrases, ways of speaking, words (*logos*); brought into connection, or into an articulate series, they form logic, science, philosophy.

> For thinking and speaking I need truths and words, as I do foods for eating; without them I cannot think or speak. Truths are men's thoughts, set down in words and therefore just as extant as other things, although extant only for the mind or for thinking. They are human institutions and human creatures, and even if they are given out for divine reflections, there still remains in them the quality of alienness for me; as my own creatures they are alienated from me after the act of creation. [16].

Stirner in fact envisages human consciousness as issuing from a kind of permanent conflict between the energy of the ego and the inertia of a social language which denies it and which attempts to enslave it to a system of "fixed" meanings. Within that dynamic, "progress" is the escape from language. And so political action, the action of the ego against the system which both defines it and denies it, is a permanent revolution or continual

rebellion against the "tyranny" of language forms. "Against me, the
unnameable," Stirner cried, "the realm of thoughts, thinking and mind is
shattered" [16].

The individual ego is "unnameable" because it is something which
exists only in terms of action; the very antithesis of words. Stirner
therefore, and perhaps the anarchists generally, were trying to do the
impossible with language in the sense that their work was the effort to name
the "unnameable": to use words to give expression to something which existed
only in terms of its capacity to "shatter" and break words. The language of
anarchism aimed, in a sense, to transcend words by loosening their hold upon
the mind, the "superstitious" hold of received ideas and beliefs; and
thereby to liberate man's creative capacity for action. Thus Stirner's
repetitive and tortuous formulations, like Sanguinetti's whirl of phrases
and Bakunin's "raging storm" of words, exist in one phase of that
paradoxical destructiveness that lies at the heart of the anarchist
discourse: that syncretic vision of violent action as the agent of creation,
which was most famously summed up in Bakunin's dictum, "the urge to destroy
is also a creative urge". The anarchists addressed that "urge to destroy"
directly to language because it was only by the alienation of man from
language that their ideal of individuality could be realized. It was in fact
extreme versions of this type of thinking that led, ultimately, to the
formulation of the theories and methods of terrorism for which anarchism has
become infamous.

The anarchist, then, situates the problem of language and the
philosophy of the way words relate to reality at the very centre of

political struggle. Words, it would seem, are the stuff of politics and any analysis of political matters must therefore address itself first of all to the way that language works. Yet this perception itself is not, of course, peculiar to anarchism and holds some authority in other traditions of political thought. Louis Althusser [17], for example, makes a very similar point in _Lenin and Philosophy_ (1971):

> Why does philosophy fight over words? The realities of the class
> struggle are "represented" by "ideas" which are represented by
> words. In scientific and philosophical reasoning, the words
> (concepts, categories) are "instruments" of knowledge. But in
> political, ideological, and philosophical struggle, the words
> are also weapons and explosives or tranquilizers and poisons.
> Occassionally, the whole class struggle may be summed up in the
> struggle for one word against another word. Certain words struggle
> amongst themselves as enemies. Other words are the site of ambiguity:
> the stake in a decisive but undecided battle. [18].

The distinction that Althusser is making here between words as "instruments" and words as "weapons" is based upon two notions of how language operates upon the reader and how words correspond to "realities". Words which are "instruments" in "reasoning", Althusser is saying, are consistent of meaning and are transparent, in the sense that there is a direct correspondence between the word in the mind and the thing or idea in the world which it "represents". Such words direct the mind out towards objects of sense or conventions of thought. Thus a "reasoning" discourse is one that employs a conventional relationship between words and things and, consequently, an

equally conventional relationship between writer, text and reader in which the reader is subjected to a fixed meaning: to a passive reception of knowledge. Words which are "weapons" in a political "struggle", however, have no such consistent meaning or transparency but depend for their reference upon their capacity to express a dynamic within a situation and the speaker's place in it: to give a concrete, formal "representation" to a complex of social and political conditions interacting with the subjective responses and orientations of the writer or speaker. Such words direct the mind back upon itself: they give a voice, direction, and hence an apparently objective existence, to the unspoken but struggling motivations and desires behind words -- Althusser's "realities" -- that are the opponents in the "undecided battle" of politics. Thus the discourse of "political, ideological, and philosophical struggle", like Sanguinetti's exhortation, employs words which represent nothing outside of themselves but which find their reference in the movements of the human temperament and mind: words which are like "weapons", that act like deeds, because they create and direct the "reality" they seem to represent. This, of course, leads to a more fluid and active relationship between writer, text, and reader in which the reader becomes, in a sense, the target of the text's activity: of the words which aim to engage, activate, and essentially to re-create his mental and ideological sense of reality.

Althusser, of course, was no anarchist but a hard line Stalinist philosopher about as hostile to anarchism as can be imagined; but it is with his formulation that the difference between anarchism and other traditions of revolutionary political thought on language can be appreciated. This is

not so much a difference of kind but of degree, since ultimately the Neo-Marxist like Althusser, just like the fascist or the capitalist, is faced with the same problem of language as the anarchist. In seeking social change, each must communicate a vision of the world at variance to experienced reality in order to gather the human will towards a particular end. Each must therefore experience political struggle as a battle of alternative and mutually exclusive languages or forms of discourse; each of which have their reference not in the world but in the mind of the speaker or of the speaker and his immediate associates. For Althusser, then, political struggle takes the form of a battle *for* words; in which control over the meaning of words or of what words are used is the source of power in the political arena. Thus the current meaning of a word will express the relative strengths of the political forces in society and, obviously, the specific meaning of a word like "justice" will vary in a period of revolutionary change to reflect the relative strengths of contending political forces. For the anarchist, however, the political struggle will always take the form of a struggle *against* words; in which freedom from the control of words is the source of creative power for the individual who has withdrawn from the political arena. The specific defined meaning of a word will express society's static hold over the individual mind and so, in opposition to that, anarchism yields a vision of a non-authoritarian society in which the particular meaning of a word is constantly under attack from the individual who uses it. Words are "consumed" by the individual and immediately surpassed by or alienated from him.

The individual anarchist, therefore, is constantly forced to question and reject the ultimate validity of even his own theoretical constructs and propaganda. Again this is something that all political actors must do, but with anarchism the need is intensified by the fact that anarchism itself runs on a theoretical axis between society and the individual who rebels against it or between language and the isolated energy opposed to it; whereas for the authoritarian communist, or indeed for any authoritarian political ideology, the effective theoretical axis is expressed by oppositions between principles, groups, classes, or races in society, each possessing its own competing language systems or discourse conventions. The anarchist's very lack of a language to describe his vision of the creative but isolated individual whom he opposes to society, made him still more aware of language; and this is also the source of that familiar charge of theoretical poverty or "simplicity" so often levelled against anarchism. Since the consistent anarchist cannot speak with authority to his fellow men he cannot construct strong and binding theory, but must resort to mere exhortation and a "raging storm" of words. This, of course, is also what makes anarchism interesting; in the sense that anarchism's very extremity and simplicity, its refusal to engage in distracting theory, lays bare most clearly the fundamental and essential contradictions at the heart of political experience. The language of anarchism confronts those contradictions more directly, more "simply", than other types of political thought. And, of course, it does so in terms of that tension between the individual and his society that is so often the subject of artistic fiction.

Althusser's formulations, then, also point us to the other side of the anarchist paradox. Given the anarchistic rejection of language and rational concepts as ultimately binding, given that words are analysed not as "divine reflections" of reality but as the agents of power, then the complementary potential exists to use language irresponsibly. Anarchist propaganda often exists on a knife-edge between the desire to liberate and the desire to possess the individual. Indeed, since political language does not correspond to any external reality other than power, what is to prevent the propagandist like Bakunin from employng rhetoric which combines a regard for maximum effect with no regard for the actual needs and immediate desires of mankind? The history of terrorism teaches us that the criticism of force and power, taken far enough, can issue in a view of the world in which force and power is *all* there is. Thus, to the desperate anarchist bent upon liberation at any cost, Althusser's linguistic analysis of political struggle is an attractive and tempting idea: a world in which words are "weapons and explosives" would seem to provide him with the freedom of action he desires and a political arena like a blank page upon which his dreams and visions can be writtten and hence realized. And if, as it would seem, political and philosophical struggle is a matter of words and if the political meaning of an event is only a product of the words that are used to describe it, then the possession of political and social power must be dependent upon the possession of an effective and eloquent voice. "Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world" [19], could just as easily be the cry of the anarchist revolutionary as that of an artist like Conrad.

One can begin to see, therefore, why the philosophy of language
is so central to a proper understanding of anarchism and to the way that its
discourse operates. Anarchism operates on the very boundaries of what we can
speak about and the anarchist must constantly search for a language in which
to express himself. One can also see why anarchism has historically so
preoccupied the minds of artists and writers. Politicians, if one uses an
Althusserian or a related anarchistic analysis, present us with statements
that are epistemologically equivalent to fictions and their activity is
directed towards changing the world to make it conform to visions which have
their source in the imagination and in the language which gives it power.
Similarly artists in words, novelists and poets, present us with statements
whose purpose is to give expression to imaginative visions through the power
of language; and, just as the politician must accept the fictional nature of
his statements, the artist working in a political society must acknowledge
that his words have inescapable political implications. In other words, the
difference between the work of the political ideologue and that of the
literary artist is, if one looks close enough, a merely formal one: the
ideologue works in the material of fiction which he presents to us as if it
was fact, and the artist works in the material of politics which he presents
to us as fiction. The concerns of these two figures are unavoidably
interconnected.

And so Sanguinetti's words, for example, do not refer to the
external world of empirical fact, are not directed to the elucidation of
reality as it exists in an observable sense; but instead they locate social
and political reality, and find their referents, in the mind or imagination

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of the reader. They aim, with startling phrases, to move and re-create that reality. In this sense, propaganda is the attempt to bridge the gap between reason and faith: between the perception of empirical fact and the belief that one can see some truth in those facts. Thus the artist, similarly, aims to convey truth through constructions of words which have their reference purely in the imagination: the words of a literary text, no matter how closely it observes theories of realism, do not directly correspond to anything to be met with in empirical reality and so the truth that they convey must consist in the impact they make upon the mind of their reader. The central point in the connection between the ideologue and the artist is, therefore, in this indirect use of words. The discourse of political ideology and the discourse of art are equally dependent upon the power of words to inspire in their reader, what one might call, a surrender or a suspension of disbelief. They depend upon that magical quality which inheres in words and which allows the eloquent voice to use them apart from their primary referential function as "instruments of knowledge"; which allows them to be used in their creative function to construct their own reality and as "weapons and explosives" with which the speaker can act upon the world.

II.

One could, of course, seem to push this comparison too far. In the attempt to argue the similarity of one aspect of the work of the

political and artistic thinker, one could seem to be merely ignoring all those things which actually divide them. Consider, for example, Conrad on this subject:

> The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks
>
> the truth and makes his appeal. Impressed by the aspect of
>
> the world the thinker plunges into ideas, the scientist into
>
> facts -- whence, presently, emerging they make their appeal to
>
> those qualities of our being that fit us best for the hazardous
>
> enterprise of living. They speak authoritatively to our common
>
> sense, to our intelligence, to our desire of peace or to our
>
> desire of unrest; not seldom to our prejudices, sometimes to
>
> our fears, often to our egoism -- but always to our credulity. [20].

For Conrad, the "thinker" and the "scientist" inhabit the world of things external to the human being. The "thinker" works in "ideas", in intellectual constructions, and speaks with authority to the external manifestations of the human temperament, to its "prejudices" and "fears" and "egoism", but not to the temperament itself. He speaks to and not with humanity. Conrad continues:

> It is otherwise with the artist.
>
> Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle the artist descends
>
> within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if
>
> he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal.
>
> His appeal is made to our less obvious capacities: to that part of
>
> our nature which, because of the warlike conditions of existence,
>
> is necessarily kept out of sight within the more resisting and

hard qualities -- like the vulnerable body within a steel armour.

His appeal is less loud, more profound, less distinct, more stirring

-- and sooner forgotten. ... the artist appeals to that part of our

being which is not dependent on wisdom; to that in us which is a

gift and not an acquisition -- and, therefore, more permanently

enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the

sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and

beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all

creation ... [21].

The artist seeks a deeper engagement with humanity and "appeals to

temperament" [22]. He inhabits that internal "region" of the human being,

beyond the "acquired" externals of the personality: beyond "wisdom",

"intelligence" and the "aspect of the world". The artist "appeals" to the

most fundamental senses and feelings that compose the human temperament and

aims to "stir" and move them. On a level of temperament, he speaks as one

individual human being to another and seeks to engage his reader in a

"feeling of fellowship". As such, he speaks without the interference of

"ideas" and without the "authority" that they bring. Art, in other words,

gives experience to the reader rather than merely interpreting it; and the

artist speaks with, not to, humanity.

It would seem, then, that the comparison between the political

ideologue and the artist founders upon these observations. Art, according to

Conrad, is more profound than any of the other works of the human mind in

language because, uniquely, it can make a direct and living impact upon its

reader. Art alone can release that creative and magical power of words

because it alone has the formal capacity to turn them into a fluid and living medium of communication between one human being and another. As Conrad goes on to say:

> ... it is only through complete, unswerving devotion to the
> perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an
> unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of
> sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to
> colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be
> brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace
> surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced
> by ages of careless usage. [23].

Art mixes "form and substance": it refracts the words of which it is composed through a "plastic" formal arrangement, the effect of which is to change the reader's normal pattern of relationship to the words presented to him in a text and hence to change the impact they make upon him. Literary art is a form of discourse which acknowledges its own artifice and fictionality, a statement which self-consciously declares itself to be an invention, and which thereby disrupts the reader's assumptions about the words he reads. The reader of a Conrad novel, for instance, is constantly reminded that what he is reading is fiction and, consequently, that the words on the page do not directly refer or correspond to anything to be met with in empirical reality. He cannot, therefore, surrender himself to the illusion that what he is reading is a description of reality or regard those words as working in reference to anything which exists outside of him. He is forced, in other words, to make a living response: to actively question and

challenge the words presented, to ask what they mean to him, and to direct his attention away from their referential capacity to the formal "shape and ring of sentences". In this way a dialogue develops between author and reader on an equal status and deeper than the level of "ideas" or "i elligence" or "wisdom". Words are thereby released from their primary referential function and become a truly effective and direct means of communication between one human being and another.

The discourse of art, Conrad is saying, is a "magical" and creative use of words because it does not speak "authoritatively" and therefore forces the reader to actively seek and create his own meaning for the words presented to him. The discourse of the "ideas", however, cannot use words in this way because it is totally dependent upon the assumption of "authority"; and is therefore unable to conduct a dialogue with the reader to create its own meaning. Obviously political ideology, or any other kind of "thinking" discourse about the world, can never admit its own fictionality; no matter how fantastic or constructed of the stuff of fiction it might be. To do so would be destroy its own purpose and effectiveness since it is, of course, dependent upon the reader believing that it is a direct representation of empirical reality. A "thinking" discourse of "ideas" is based, in other words, upon the capacity of words to project an "illusion of reference" and to seem to correspond with a reality outside of the mind of the individual reader. Such discourse, therefore, cannot truely use words creatively to construct meaning, but can merely impose a pre-existent meaning on the mind of its reader. Its words assume the "authority" of an external world, of "ideas" and "facts" and "theories", and thereby

establish an unequal relationship between author and reader in which the latter is merely the passive receiver of information. It is, in other words, fiction that pretends to be fact.

For Conrad, then, literary art is greater than and different fr the discourse of "ideas". Art alone can set up an exchange between author and reader which creates its own meaning and is free of the illusions of reference and authority which inhere in the "old, old words". The work of the artist is, in fact, radically different to the work of the political ideologue. But to clarify this point further, it is perhaps worth looking for a moment at some discourse theory.

It is easy to recognise Bakhtin's notions of "monological" and "dialogical" discourse in the points that Conrad makes. In his criticism of the discourse of "ideas", for example, one can plainly see a parallel with what Bakhtin was later to call "monological discourse". For Bakhtin, this was any discourse which employed a traditional relationship between writer, text, and reader in which the act of reading was seen as a subjection to a fixed meaning: to a passive reception of "monologue" delivered by the writer. The writer directly addresses the reader and attempts to anticipate his responses and overcome his objections; and so the meaning of the text is transmitted, unchanging, from the creator to the passive receiver. "Monologue" is "... deaf to the others response; it does not await it and does not grant it any *decisive* force" (italics in original) [24]. "Monologue", of which the discourse of "ideas" is an example, is therefore premised upon the writer's assumption of authority over the reader through an assumption that the words of which it is composed have an objective

reference outside of the text. And that is all very well, of course, if

those words do have a good claim to reference, if they are part of a

scientific statement for example; but when those words do not have such a

claim, if they are part of a political statement for example, then

" nological discourse" becomes a dangerous force in the world whose aim is

to possess and dominate humanity.

Similarly, in Conrad's practise as a literary artist, and in his

statements about his art, one can recognise what Bakhtin was to call

"dialogical" or "heteroglossic" discourse. As in a novel of Conrad, this is

discourse which disrupts that traditional relationship between writer, text,

and reader and set up a dynamic in which the reader enters into the

discourse process and helps to create it. "Dialogical discourse" thus

acknowledges its own status and the fact "that there exists outside of it

another consciousness, with the same rights, and capable of responding on an

equal footing; another and equal I" [25]. Such discourse foregoes, or

actually works to undo, the assumption of authority and hence becomes a true

and living dialogue.

It is, then, on this point, of the writer's assumption or non-

assumption of authority over the reader, that our comparison between the

works of the political ideologue and the artist would appear to fall down.

But it is also upon this point, however, that we come to the strangely

complex and apparently contradictory nature of anarchism which helps to

explain just why it was that anarchism, as opposed to any other form of

political thought, historically so preoccupied the minds of writers seeking

to move humanity: seeking to make a deeper impact upon men than could be attained through conventional forms of language use.

III.

The word "anarchism" means, literally, without a leader or without authority. As a political and cultural movement, anarchism rejects the principle of authority, totally and absolutely, and in all its forms. It presents us, then, with the paradoxical phenomenon of a philosophical intellectual, like Bakunin, haranguing us with a highly idealistic rhetoric the authority of which, if he is consistent, he must himself deny. What is the purpose, then, of this langauge of anarchism? Perhaps a brief look at some of the things the anarchists actually did say can answer this question. Consider Bakunin, for example. Here he is making a serious philosophical point about the materialist foundation of anarchism, which condemns idealists as "slaves" of their own ideals:

Materialism denies free will and ends in the establishment

of liberty; idealism, in the name of human dignity, proclaims

free will, and on the ruins of every liberty founds authority. [26].

It is worthwhile to note, in passing, that Bakunin sounds not unlike Conrad at times and that he, too, pays attention to the "shape and ring" of his sentences: his proclamations are always, even in translation, measured and self- consciously balanced. To understand the full implications of this formulation we must remember that anarchism, equally with the writer seeking

the truth through art, utterly denied the ultimate validity of all forms of intellectual discourse. It consistently and often quite effectively attacked the sciences -- physical philosophical and social -- and rejected them as unable to grasp the complex and contradictory nature of human experience. To th anarchist, the "monological" discourse of philosophy and science, which claims authority and hence a singularity of meaning by the apparently referential function of its language, is inadequate to the multiplicity and paradoxical nature of the truth. Thus Bakunin's rhetoric, of which this is a fair example, characteristically aims to evolve through a series of conflicting points to a final paradox which illuminates the anarchist conception of the truth. Its purpose, on one level, is thereby to point out the inadequacy of language to the understanding of truth and to give the reader the experience of seeing the confusions of language for himself. This formulation, for instance, is composed of two apparent paradoxes placed together, which are two aspects of the same point (paradox was a favourite device of Bakunin as can be seen in his most famous dictum: "the desire for destruction is, at the same time, a creative desire"). The first paradox brings together three terms which are connected in a causal sequence and made to seem as if they contradict one another by using them with different connotations: "materialism" and "free will" are used as terms from philosophy, "liberty" a term from political science. Thus "materialism" does deny "free will" but it does so in a physical and economic sense and not with the social and spiritual implications suggested by Bakunin's "liberty". And materialism, one could argue, can indeed lead to the establishment of economic liberty, but that it does so has nothing central to do with its

denial of free will in a philosophical sense. The statement, then, makes

perfect sense and in fact contains no contradictions. The second paradox

merely extends the implications of the first and makes more explicit the

linguistic nature of Bakunin's concerns. His paradoxes, then, do not exist

in the "reality" to which the words apparently refer but are linguistic

devices constructed for effect. Bakunin is playing with words and, on one

level, parodying the discourse of intellectual ideas (more specifically he

was attacking the language of Hegelian metaphysical "idealism", which was

his own early philosophical background). The purpose of this is, of course,

to free us from the surface meaning of words and from the constructions of

them which we use to explain our lives: to make us question them and thus

recognise their artificiality.

The anarchist rhetoric, then, is directed towards opening a gap

between our sense of how we experience our life and the way we represent it

to eachother or ourselves in intellectual, and hence authoritarian,

language. To clarify this point, consider a more extreme example: Emile

Henry's famous court speech in 1894, just before he was sentenced to

execution (this was an important moment for many previously obscure

anarchists who at last found a public platform for their opinions, albeit at

the cost of notoriety and death). Henry was a spanish anarchist responsible

for two major bombs in Paris in the early eighteen-ninties. The first killed

several policemen and caused public outrage but it was with the second, an

attack upon the crowded Cafe Terminus at rush hour, that Henry shocked the

world. At the trial he justified his actions with a fierce logic and

concentrated, as he said, on anarchism in its "destructive and negative

aspects". He described his sudden conversion to violent anarchism as a result of a rapid process of disillusionment with the values and rhetoric of established society:

> I was not slow to understand that the grand words I had been taught to venerate: honour, evotion, duty, were only the mask of the most shameful basenesses.
>
> The manufacturer who created a colossal fortune out of the toil of workers who lacked everything was an honest gentleman. The deputy and the minister, their hands ever open for bribes, were devoted to the public good. The officer who experimented with a new rifle on children of seven had done his duty, and, openly in parliament, the president of the council congratulated him! Everything I saw revolted me, and my intelligence was attracted by criticism of the existing social organization. Such criticism has been made too often for me to repeat it. It is enough to say that I became the enemy of a society that I judged to be criminal. ... At this moment of embittered struggle between the middle class and its enemies, I am almost tempted to say, with Souvarine in *Germinal*: "All discussions about the future are criminal, since they hinder pure and simple destruction and slow down the march of the revolution ..." [27].

Henry's speech is at once a piece of powerful rhetoric and a condemnation of the rhetorical hypocrisy of society. As in the Sanguinetti passage quoted earlier, the author's aim here is to make a direct assault upon his audience and to terrify them with a sense of the drastic and apocalyptic urgency of change at any cost. Unlike Sanguinetti, however, Henry was not a writer but

an active terrorist, and he makes explicit the implications behind that anarchist call to action: that the "old, old words", of which Conrad despaired, are themselves a conservative force in the world and represent a block upon or a substitute for action. Words are, in fact, "criminal" because they "hinder" a "p e and simple" response to the injustice of society by encouraging political ideas to be expressed in words rather than in de ds: to be "represented" at one remove from the reality of life rather than directly expressed in life itself. For Henry, then, the anarchist must substitute the language of "discussions" and "representation" for a language of demonstration and pure action: for what he called "the voice of dynamite" [28], the language of terrorism which moves its audience directly on a basic physical and "temperamental" level. Thus Henry refused to give his brutal actions any kind of authoritative ideological explanation and, refusing even to outline his vision of the world as it could be, restricted himself to the expression of an unmitigated hatred for his audience in the present. He finished on a threat:

> You have hanged in Chicago, decapitated in Germany, garotted in
>
> Jerez, shot in Barcelona, guillotined in Montbrison and Paris, but
>
> what you will never destroy is anarchy. Its roots are too deep. It
>
> is born in the heart of a society that is rotting and falling apart.
>
> It is a violent reaction against the established order. It represents
>
> all the egalitarian and libertarian aspirations that strike out
>
> against authority. It is everywhere, which makes it impossible to
>
> contain. It will end by killing you." [29].

This -- like a bomb -- is a political discourse whose meaning is in the impact it creates. His purpose in distancing and so terrifying his audience was, of course, to deliberately deny his own authority and hence to deny them a simple acceptance or denial of the meaning of his words; to force them to question and lo k for the "anarchy" that is "everywhere" and to experience it as the response of terror or answering hatred it engenders. H e, in the language of hatred and violence, is something that words cannot "represent" to the individual because its reference is not outside of him in the objective world of facts and theories, but within his mind or imagination in terms of the response it creates. Henry's terrorism then, both verbal and physical, was directed to obliterating that assumption of a "representational" relationship between words and deeds, that he saw as sustaining a criminal society; and to developing an unmediated and honest mode of expression for the human "aspirations" that emerge from it. In the terms of Henry Brewster (whom I will examine later), Henry's speech does not "represent" something, "it is something" [30]: it is a special use of language which creates its own meaning.

It is, therefore, this somewhat strange example of a committed terrorist that provides us with the terms in which we can more closely formulate the connection between the work of the political ideologue and the literary artist. The connection, more specifically, is between the revolutionary anarchist and the literary artist; and it helps, to some extent, to explain the attraction of anarchism for artists.

These two figures resemble each other, and are in similar positions, because each is committed to elaborating a vision of the world

which is based on a model of direct communication between individuals and is thus dependent upon a free and equal interaction between speaker and hearer, writer and reader. Each must forego the use of any form of authoritarian discourse which places the audience in the role of passive receivers of information; on the co trary, each must activate and move the audience into co-operating in the creation of meaning. And each is forced to confront and fight against the limitations of a theory of language which sees it as working in reference to a reality outside of itself and as therefore "representing" pre-existent truth. In other words, the artist is most like the anarchist because the work of both of these figures is the attempt to use language in a special way which creates its own meaning: in which words "act" like deeds to resolve the dichotomies between ideal and real, and between theory and fact. The reality of politics, like that of fiction, is all in the mind and is identical to the means of its expression:

> "An artist is identical with an anarchist," he cried, "you might
> transpose the words anywhere. An anarchist is an artist because he
> prefers one great moment to everything. He sees how much more
> valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder,
> than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen. An artist
> disregards all government, abolishes all conventions. The poet
> delights in disorder only." [31].

It is uncertain how much G.K.Chesterton knew of anarchism, but this identification of these two figures in The Man Who Was Thursday (1908), is in a long tradition both as a method of ridicule by conservative commentators, and as a histrionic pose by the anarchists themselves. It

also, of course, quite nicely corresponds to Conrad's description in "A Familiar Preface" of the artist's experience of descending within himself for the material of his expression: of entering an internal world without limitations and without "policemen". And, as we have seen, on a linguistic level the correlation h lds: the anarchist is most comparable to an artist, not only because he too stands outside of his society, and in his work a rts an alternative vision of the world which his fellow man can either accept or ignore, but because the means of his expression are identical to what is expressed. His "one burst of blazing light", his illuminating negation, is identical to what is expressed, negation.

Stepniak, the Russian nihilist terrorist turned novelist, made much the same point in a different way:

> ... the terrorists did nothing more than proclaim aloud, amid
>
> the report and flames of their explosions, what everybody else
>
> either thought, or whispered with a timid and hesitating voice,
>
> amid a deluge of adulation and general compulsory reticence. [32].

Such is the actual process of political struggle that sometimes deeds can act like words, and say what they cannot; while words can function like deeds and create the reality to which they apparently refer.

Thus, for the anarchist, words and deeds are interchangable devices in a theatrical performance which aims to imitate the process of art, and to collapse the distinctions between illusion and reality and between ideal and real. Theatrical because, in the acute formulation of an advisor to the U.S. State Department on political conspiracy, "... terrorism is aimed at the people watching, not at the actual victims. Terrorism is

theatre" [33]. His choice of phrase is apposite. And thus, for the artist, words are the deeds by which he integrates himself into the world and imitates the work of the revolutionary: by which he moves his reader and subverts the authoritarian discourse of his society.

To sum thi point up, perhaps it is worth looking briefly at an anarchist who was also a literary critic to see how he related these two   pects of his thought. George Woodcock saw politics and art as merely different means of serving the same human needs. Politics is an activity which occurs at precisely that point which is so often the subject of art: at that point of tension between man and his society, between the individual human being struggling to express itself and the restrictions placed upon it by the world in which it lives. The pressure that generates the political idea equally generates the fictional. On the other hand, the writing of artistic fiction is an activity which is always imminently, if not always explicitly, political. Even the most apparently uncommited of novels or stories must take their elements from, and occur within the context of, a world which is ridden with political issues and problems. They offer representations which, however individualised or personal, are inevitably subject to political interpretation and so have political effects. Woodcock made this point forcefully in The Writer and Politics (1948):

> Even the writer who pretends to eschew political thinking and to
>
> devote himself to his art exclusively, is motivated in his
>
> actions by the importance which politics hold in the world
>
> where he works. The conscious avoidance of becoming implicated
>
> shows that in such a writer's mind politics holds a place, even

if an unpleasant one. The ivory tower is as much as symptom of

inescapable social problems as the air raid shelter is of the

inescapable evils of war. [34].

For Woodcock it is no more feasible to simply turn one's eyes from the

public world and dev te oneself to a world of private artistic values, than

it is to attempt to realize political ideas without respecting the private

d individual context in which such ideas actually occur. The sets of

formal distinctions between the private and public, the artistic and

political, into which we divide our activities and thoughts are ultimately

no more than cultural conventions whose effect is to limit or diminish their

impact upon the world. For Woodcock then all art is, in conception and

action, political or, more precisely, anti-political; and the fact that some

artists "pretend" to escape from politics into a world of pure art and

aesthetic values is indicative of the existence of a problemtic social world

from which they wish to be protected. Thus the "ivory tower" of art is

itself a fiction, a cucoon of fantasy, beyond which lies an implicit despair

of current society and a criticism of "political" methods of thinking about

the world.

Woodcock is, as I have said, an anarchist literary-critic and his

formulations are based upon his recognition of an opposition between the

values which govern the artistic writer's vocation, the values based upon

the individual's "sincere conception of the truth", and the values of the

politician, based upon the pragmatic and generalized half-truths of

propaganda and ideology. For the anarchist, these values are mutually

exclusive and so the only "true" art is "honest" art which acts against the "falsehoods" of political society. Woodcock continues:

> ... I consider the man who is ready to apply to any subject on which he writes a standard of values based on a sincere conception of the truth is bo nd to act in his writings against injustice and falsehood, even if he does not write for the specific purpose of expediting social change. The really independent writer, by the very exercise of his function, represents a revolutionary force.
>
> ... The novelist who shows the hollowness of middle-class life, the the poet who displays without comment the spiritual agonies of war, as well as the painter who shows on his canvass a symbol of the schizoid futility of a modern city, are all playing a part in subverting a corrupt society. To display the truth, even a limited aspect of the truth, is to elevate a criterion against which falsehood must be judged and condemned. In this way any honest writer is an agitator, an anarchist, an incendiary. By expressing an independent standard of values he attacks the principle of authority; by portraying the truth according to his own vision he attacks the factual manifestations of authority. [35].

Woodcock, it appears, would like to claim for his school of political philosophy all those artists in history who have expressed "independent" values, and within his own terms he is perfectly entitled to do so. All art has, at the deepest level, a political effect and all "valuable" art is anarchistic in that effect to the extent that it represents a renunciation

of and attack upon "political" values. But this, of course, is only true if
one accepts a definition of anarchism so wide as to make it relatively
meaningless, as implying nothing much more than the ideal of individual
truthfulness, and a definition of political values as necessarily dishonest,
undesirable and destru tive of individualism [36]. Woodcock, of course, is
not really claiming that all artists are anarchists, but simply that the
ture of the artist's task is to test all claims to truth and knowledge
against only the most un-political and irreducible values of individual life
and integrity.

What Woodcock is really attempting to do here is, then, to
establish what might be called an anarchist aesthetic, as opposed to more
formally "political" aesthetic theory like socialist realism (according to
The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia, "the method of literature and art that
expresses in aesthetic terms a consciously socialist concept of man and
society" [37]). It is a method of judging the value of a work of art in
essentially the same terms in which we would a political idea or tract, in
terms of its capacity to further the cause of individual and social
development; and the value of a political work as we would a work of art, as
tested against the truth of individual experience and the needs of
individual life. We judge both, ultimately, in terms of their truth and
sincerity; and, since for the anarchist like Woodcock the public political
world is *necessarily* deceptive and insincere, that means that we judge both
in terms of their promotion of the values of the private and individual
life. Obviously, then, for the anarchist the practise of art is superior to
the practise of politics as a channel for human ideals and actions; and the

anarchist aesthetic resolves into a modernized and more socially engaged
formulation of the artist's traditional alienation and withdrawal from the
political arena.

We can, therefore, identify a strand within anarchist thinking and
practise which co-incides very closely with a strand within the most central
concerns of the literary artist. It puts a new angle on our understanding of
the common terms in which anarchism is criticized and asks us to think about
it in a different way. In this chapter I have quoted from a wide range of
sources and times in order to demomstrate how widespread this strand of
thinking is. To interrogate this connection further, however, one needs to
look in more detail at the notion of the existence of an anarchist theory of
language. There is, clearly, an anarchist search for language, but obviously
a theory is something which exists largely by implication, since there is no
definitive or recognised formulation as such. There is, however, an
identifiable and quite consistent way of looking at and using language
within the anarchist tradition, but which was only ever systematically
described by now largely forgotten writers working in anarchism's heyday of
the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The conclusions of these
men developed in unison with, and in some cases significantly pre-date,
parallel advances in philosophy, psychology, and literary theory. They are
essential to an understanding of the revolutionary mentality in our time as
much as in theirs, and in art as much as in politics. They also go a long
way towards explaining both the terms in which anarchism is criticized and,
conversely, why it was an important way of thinking for so many artists. In

the next chapters, therefore, I will concentrate more specifically on the

work of a few relevant theoreticians.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

Notes:

1. For a particularly virulent but otherwise quite representative

   example of the criticism of this kind, see Benjamin R. Barber's

   Superman and Common Men (London: Penguin, 1972); whose criticism I

   have condensed. See especially chapter one, which begins "Anarchism is

   dead" and proceeds to argue that Anarchism is little more than the self-

   indulgent fantasy of a literary and aristocratic elite.

2. For an amusingly timed example of this kind of an attitude, consider

   this 1916 excerpt from John Buchan's spy thriller The Power House:

   Nihilism, Anarchy ... a few illiterate bandits in the Parisian

   slums defying the world, but inside a week they're in jail. Half

   a dozen crazy Russian intellectuals in Geneva conspire to upset

   the Romanov's, and they get hunted down by the whole police force

   of Europe. Civilization wins because it is a worldwide league. But

   suppose those moral imbeciles ever got organized ...

   (London: W.Blackwood, 1916), p.42.

3. Cited by L.Shapiro, The origin of the Communist Autocracy (New york:

Dover, 1955), p.182.

4. *Do it! Scenarios of the Revolution* (London: J.Cape, 1970), p.111.

5. From "Systems of Economic Contracts", cited by Paul Berman,
   Quotations from the Anarchists (London: Praeger, 1972), p.81.

6. From "Revolution and the Nation", included in *The Anarchist Reader*
   ed. George Woodcock (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p.318.

7. After the October Revolution of 1917, the Nabat Confederation, in
   that part of the Ukraine ceded by the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, declared
   its self-determination and divided the landed estates equally among the
   peasants. Nestor Makhno came to prominence as the the leader of a
   guerrilla army who harassed the German backed landowmers in the area
   and eventually defeated a German division sent to suppress them.
   Espousing anarchist ideas, they then moved north and replaced the
   Bolshevik commissions with libertarian communes and incurred the wrath
   of Trotsky, who ordered the imprisonment of all anarchist elements.
   Makhno and his army, theoretically democratic and strictly disciplined,
   held out for nine months against the Red Army until the invasion of
   Wrangel when, in exchange for a Soviet promise to free anarchist
   prisoners, they switched sides and helped defeat the last White
   invasion. After victory, the Makhnoists were invited to a conference in
   the Crimea where all, except Makhno himself and an escaping cavalry

unit, were shot or arrested. Makhno finally fled to Paris, where he died
of chronic alcoholism in 1935.

8. On Terrorism and the State: The Theory and Practise of Terrorism
    divulged for the first time, Trans. Lucy Forsyth and Michel Prigent
    (London: B.M.Chronos, 1982). (All page references are to this edition).

9. "I take my desires for reality, because I believe in the reality of
    my desires" declared a slogan in the occupied Sorbonne, during the
    events of June 1968. It was against the optimism of these times that
    the Situationist movement first came to prominence. Founded in the early
    nineteen fifties by a group of artists and intellectuals, the
    situtionists began publishing their periodical Internationale
    Situationiste in 1957 and rapidly developed their critique of art and
    culture into a radical critique of consumer capitalism. Heavily
    influenced by Marx's theory of alienation, they argued that
    industrialized western capitalism had compounded the economic and social
    division between capitalist and proletariat, producers and consumers, by
    the further cultural and intellectual division of the population into
    two groups of actors and spectators. The industrial process had
    alienated the vast majority of people in these societies, not just from
    the product of their labour, also from their own creativity to the point
    of transforming them into the mere passive receivers of culture and
    ideas in much the same way as they receive products. The result was that
    life had frozen into the mere "spectacle" of life, the passive reception

of experience; and that the imaginations of the vast majority of people were thereby rendered incapable of action. The Situationist remedy for this was the construction of "situations": unusual and shocking events, whether theatrical or terroristic, which activated and empowered the imagination by disrupting the normal passive course of life and thought. Indeed, for the Situationists, the revolution was a revolution of and for the power of the imagination to construct its own experience and truth; and thereby to transform everyday life into a permanent celebration of individuality and pleasure. "Who wants a world," they could optimistically ask, "in which the guarantee that we shall not die of starvation, entails the risk of dying of boredom" [Raoul Vaneigem, The Revolution of Everyday Life, trans. J.Fullerton and P.Sieveking (London: The Rising Free Collective, 1979), p.8].

10. On The New Stage. issued as a pamphlet.

11. Quoted by Peter Marshall in Demanding The Impossible (London: Fontana, 1993) p.279.

12. Perhaps it is worth stating briefly that Stirner was an anarchist, albeit of a somewhat strange and contradictory kind. His notion of an ideal society was of a "union of egotists" in which state control and social power would be replaced by the peaceful co-operation and competition of selfish individuals; each pursuing their own interests. The difficulty here is that, while Stirner has an effective critique

of the state and social institutions as destructive of individuality, there is nothing inherent in his position to suggest that those institutions should not be used as the instruments of the ego of the particularly strong or powerful individual in a situation where strength equals the ultimate right. Stirner's anarchism tends to teeter on the brink of despotism.

Anarchism, of course, is most effective when it transcends its criticism of institutions and directs itself to the criticism of the authoritarian consciousness which is both shaped by and expressed in those institutions. For the anarchist the destruction of one necessarily entails the destruction of the other; and both must be transformed before the libertarian society can be realized. Thus Stirner, an anarchist in his opposition to the domination of the individual by the state, fails to pursue his principles as consistently as he might and seems prepared to countenance the domination of the individual by the individual.

13. Max Stirner The Ego and His Own ed. J.Campol and trans. S.T.Bylington, (London: Jo$nathan Cape, 1971) p.245.

14. ibid., p.245-6.

15. ibid., p.244.

16. ibid., p.247.

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17. Althusser's blend of scientific Marxism and structuralism was, in fact, fundamentally opposed to the anarchist position. For Althusser, the anarchist ideal of the creative individual standing out against the system that oppresses him, could have no currency or value; since meaning itself could only emerge form the structure of the social body and not from the individual who forms a component of it.

18. <u>Lenin and Philosophy and other essays</u> (London: N.L.B., 1971), p.21.

19. "A Familiar Preface", <u>A Personal Record</u> (London: Dent, 1921), p.xiii

20. "Preface" to <u>The Nigger of the Narcissus</u> (London: Dent, 1902), p.3.

21. *ibid*., p.3-4.

22. *ibid*., p.4.

23. *ibid*., p.4-5.

24. <u>The Dialogical Imagination</u> Ed. M. Holquist, Trans. Holquist and Emerson, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.272.

25. Tzvetan Todorov, <u>Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle</u>, Trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Presss, 1984), p.107.

26. God and the State (New York: Dover, 1970), p.48-9.

27. From "A Terrorist's Defence", included in Woodcock as above, p.190-1.

28. *ibid*., p.192.

29. *ibid*., p.196.

30. Henry B. Brewster, The Theories of Anarchy and of Law (London: Northgate and Williams, 1888), p.19.

31. The Man who was Thursday (London: Simpkin, Marshall and co., 1908), p.8.

32. Underground Russia, translated from the Italian (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1883), p.271.

33. The Carlos Complex: A Pattern of Violence (London: Hodder and Stouton, 1977), p.174.

34. The Writer and Politics (London: The Porcupine Press, 1948), p.10

35. *ibid*., p.17-18

36. Woodcock, we must remember, was writing in the years directly after the second world war and his pessimism about the politics which had led to

such disaster was therefore entirely justified. To a man in his position it must have appeared self-evident that if political thinking could assume forms so anti-human as to sponsor a war, the only safe channel for human values was a form of artistic thought which measured all claims to truth and knowledge against the most irreducible values of individual life and integrity.

38. _The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia_ (London: Collier Macmillan, 1976), Vol.24, p.244.

Chapter Two:

Bakhtin, Vološinov, and the Marxist
Philosophy of Language.

For the anarchist, man and his society are mutually
dependent. Man discovers himself in the experiences which society offers: in
ork, in company, in security, but most centrally of all in language.
Society, reciprocally, is composed of individuals and its character,
language and ideology are fashioned by the relationships between those
individuals acting in groups or alone. In natural or ideal conditions, this
does not present a problem: there is no tension between man and his society
because each is attuned to the needs of the other and volutarily adapts to
them, as each curbs its excesses. Thus Godwin imagined a world where men
would temper their deepest passions and "propagate their species, not
because a certain pleasure is annexed unto this action, but because it is
right that the species should be propagated" and in which "the manner in
which they exercise this function be regulated by the dictates of reason and
duty" [1]. Such simple-hearted rationalism must seem to us today naive. But,
say the anarchists, that is only because, in the ieal conditions in which we
live, the dynamics of the relationship between man and his society have been
frozen and distorted by authority. Society, or elements within it, create
conflict and tension as soon as they stop changing and try to assume a
permanent character or a meaning which carries authority. In the anarchist

theoretical model, the assumption of authority is the denial of dialogue and

interaction; and of the mutual understanding and coperation which emerge

from them. It is the denial of the very dynamics of social life; and the

tension between it and the lifeforce which tries to escape from it, is the

true subject of anarchism.

Any body of thought which analyses these matters in this way

must have, at the the centre of its thought, a medium in which these

individual and social forces meet; and this medium is, of course, language.

For the anarchist, language is the public domain in which man and his

society interact, conflict and create. Thus if the language that we use, our

vocabulary and its nuances of meaning, is predominantly set and defined by

one social interest group or class, then what we end with is a form of

social "autism" [2]: an incapacitated communication system and the

consequent fragmentation of society into isolated and mutually

uncomprehending units. The final result, of course, is meaningless conflict

and violence.

As a result of this, anarchism has to explain and analyse the

function and power of words as a central part of its discourse. Bakunin, for

one, expended a lot of time on this question and concerned himself with

attacking the referential idea of language in which words impose a rigid and

fixed interpretation on life, because they seem to correspond to an external

and hence authorized "reality". For Bakunin, such a use of words was

naturally a denial of the dynamics of life and he associated it

predominantly with the authoritarian abstractions of scientific discourse.

Thus, in God and the State, he "preached" against the language of science as

giving to its statements the status of eternal truths and hence denying the

real and fluid nature of life. In reality, the claims of science are like

the claims of any body f thought and dependent upon the limited and

temporary nature of human understanding. I quote at some length from Bakunin

t give a flavour of the iconoclastic tone of his prose, which goes hand in

hand with his rational point:

> Upon this nature (of human thought) are based the indisputable
>
> rights and grand mission of science, but also its impotence and
>
> even its mischevious action whenever through its official
>
> licensed representatives, it arrogantly claims the right to
>
> govern life. The mission of science is, by observations of the
>
> general relations of passing and real facts, to establish the
>
> general laws inherent in the development of the phenomena of
>
> the physical and social world; it fixes, so to speak the
>
> unchangable landmarks of humanity's progressive march by
>
> indicating the general conditions which it is necessary to
>
> rigorously observe and always fatal to ignore or forget. In a
>
> word, science is the compass of life; but it is not life. Science
>
> is unchangable, impei sonal, general, abstract, insensible, like
>
> the laws of which it is but the ideal reproduction, reflected
>
> or mental -- that is, cerebral. ... Life is wholly fugitive and
>
> temporai y, but also wholly palpitating with reality and
>
> individuality, sensibility, sufferings, joys, aspirations, needs,
>
> and passions. It alone spontaneously creates real things and
>
> beings. Science creates nothing; it establishes and recognizes

only the creations of life. And every time that scientific men,

emerging from their abstract world, mingle with living creation in

the real world,   that they propose or create is poor, ridiculously

abstract, bloodless and lifeless, still-born, like the *homunculus*

created by Wagner, the pedantic disciple of the immortal Doctor

Faust. It follows that the only mission of science is to enlighten

life, not to govern it. [3].

The essence of Bakunin's point, here, is that science can claim only a

limited and provisional authority because it cannot fully capture life: it

describes "passing and real facts" only from the outside and so cannot

attain to a proper appreciation of the living and "palpitating" relations

between those facts and others, and between those facts and the human mind

which "observes" them. Science, of course, has its importance for Bakunin as

a specialized branch of knowledge, but he was careful to warn against the

application of its spirit to politcal matters:

What I preach is, to a certain extent, the *revolt of life against*

science, or rather against the *government of science*, not to

destroy science -- that would be high treason to humanity -- but

to remand it to its place so that it can never leave it again. [4].

His fear is that the discourse of government and politics can be infiltrated

by the discourse of science, and impart an authoritarian status to political

ideology [5]. For Bakunin any political ideology which claims the authority

of science seeks a bogus status in order to ultimately deny life; and his

"sermon" is thus the attempt to unmask such claims as expression of the

desire to tyrannize over the mind of mankind. All totalizing theory is a

misrepresentation of life by its very nature because, like science, its language cannot represent both the "palpitating" reality of individual life and the relations between those individuals which is the life of society. Language is a limited social construct, and always presents a fiction in some sense because it describes only one of the antagonistic terms of reality, the individual and the social, which together totally describe a man. This is why Bakunin thought the language of art infinitely superior to the language of science in the discussion of political matters: since art is a more plastic use of language and acknowledges its own fictionality, it provides a formal space for the individual's contribution to the creation of meaning.

The anarchist then, according to Bakunin, must reject the use of scientific methods in the formulation of his thoughts and political propaganda, and aim to merge his rhetoric into some kind of artistic discourse. This rejection of scientific representation is a central aspect of a larger attitude to language that exists within the anarchist tradition; and which I have previously refered to as the anarchist theory of language. That such a theory exists, as a definitive theory, is itself questionable since anarchists themselves denied the validity of such "scientific" verbal constructs. However, an identifiable attitude does exist, but it is a complex matter and anarchist linguistic theory tends to be extremely eclectic and difficult because it is often eccentrically or indirectly expressed. Before we approach it, therefore, we need to define some terms and to establish the subject matter. To provide a background, then, it is useful to look at a corresponding attempt to construct a theory of language

around a revolutionary ideology in V. N. Vološinov's <u>Marxism and the</u> <u>Philosophy of language</u> (first published in The Soviet Union, in 1929). It is similar in many respects to anarchist theory.

I.

Vološinov, along with Medvedev, has become the most prominent member of the Bakhtin circle of linguists and literary theorists working in Russia in the early part of this century. There is much speculation as to how much influence Bakhtin exerted over his colleagues, but questions of the physical authorship of texts do not matter as much as the tremendous unity of thought, concerns, and method which runs through these writers' theories; and which is sufficient to justify our viewing them as the work of one voice but given different registers and directions. The principle of this unity is what Bakhtin called "metalinguistics".

And yet "metalinguistics" is itself a very eclectic term and represents at once a sociological theory of language, a social and individual psychology, a metaphysic, and a literary theory. But behind all these things which it becomes, "metalinguistics" makes one fundamental assertion about human life out of which its theories grow: "To be means to communicate," claimed Bakhtin, "Life is dialogical by its very nature. To live means to engage in dialogue, to question, to listen, to answer, to

agree, etc." [6]. In other words, just as an individual physical body is not a self-reliant and self-existent entity living in a void, but rather a piece or fragment of an ongoing organic process which includes the whole of the universe; so the human mind, consciousness, is a piece or fragment of the mind of society and comes into existence only in interaction or dialogue with another consciousness. It is a conception of human life in which the individual exists as a sentient and self-conscious being only within a social context and in which, therefore, other people play an essential role in creating the self:

I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to another, through another and with another's help. The most important acts, constituitive of self-consciousness, are determined by their relation to another consciousness (a "thou").
Cutting oneself off, isolating oneself, closing oneself off, are the basic reasons for loss of self ... It turns out that every internal experience occurs on the border, it comes across another, and its essence resides in the internal encounter ... The very being of man (both internal and external) is a profound communication ... to be means to be for another, and through him for oneself. Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself he looks in the eyes of the other or through the eyes of the other ... I cannot do without the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me. [7].

The individual human life, physical and mental, is a set of relations to other things and other people; and so the independent individual, free of such relations, is an impossible fiction and a contradiction in terms. Language, as the material of mental relations, is therefore more than a tool of analysis by which we understand the world: it is the mental world, the only "internal sovereign territory", in the sense that it is only in it and through it that the world exists at all. Language is a means of life, and life is a "dialogue" because life exists only through the means of communication.

Bakhtin is very close, here, to the anarchist version of the mutual dependence of individual man and his society, but he pushes his analysis of the role of language within it in a different direction to an anarchist and activist like Bakunin. In "metalinguistics" language does not struggle to capture and impose a resolution upon the antagonistic terms of reality, as represented by the individual mind and the social world, but effectively does away with the opposition by subsuming them both under the one heading, "dialogue". In "dialogue", language becomes the arena in which all the material and political forces alive in the world meet and contend for possession of the individual's mind. "The individual consciousness", asserts Volosinov, "is a social-ideological fact" [8]. He thereby formulates a different version of the anarchist ideal of the peaceful integration of the individual into his society; and language, as the integratoı, is one of the factors of reality, like flesh and bone, of which man is made and which bind him into the world. For Vološinov, therefore, the integration is one in which the individual is invaded and structured by his society and in which

the bonding between mind, word and ideology is absolute. An anarchist like Bakunin, more an activist than a theorist, would have substantially concurred with this analysis but would also have posited the existence of something in the mind of an individual beyond the realms of language and ideology: some notion of innate pre-linguistic awareness, ego, or intuition, to explain the consciousness of the Stirner-esque revolutionary anarchist in revolt against the "social-ideological" facts of which it is supposedly constituted. Obviously, I do not use the term "anarchist" here to mean a proponent of anarchist communism, as that term is understood by the political scientist, but more in the sense of Emile Henry's highly individualistic anarchism in its "destructive and negative aspects": a pure individual energy and idealism, transformed into a blind fury against the frustrating terms on which society operates and the dream or aspiration to somehow be free of them. Certain strands within the anarchist movement refused to formulate a vision of a future and better society because they restricted themselves to attempts to blow away, literally or linguistically, that bonding between mind, word and ideology that is the source of all social ills in an authoritarian society. The difference between Vološinov and the anarchist is, then, one of temperament, practise and the intention of their work: Vološinov's task is to explain the conditions of man's domination by language, the anarchists' to show him a way out of it. Nevertheless, Vološinov's "metalinguistics" raises many important questions also central to anarchism: How does "metalinguistics" explain the fact of ideological growth and change? Where, within it, is a place for that dynamic of destruction and creation so central to revolution, especially in the

anarchist version? And, since change obviously does occur, where does its
first cause lie: in the individual's use of words, that is in an individual
source, or in some abstract change in language itself, in a social source?

These are all questions which lie at the centre of Marxism and
the Philosophy of Language which applies "metalinguistcs" to questions of
social and political ideology and, more specifically, examines the light it
throws on the Marxist ideological method. It is not, of course, an anarchist
work but rather the product of scientific linguistics which conducts its
analysis at so abstract a level and employs such a severe and dogmatic tone,
that it at times justifies Bakunin's complaint about scientific language.
Yet, despite the technicality, the nature of its concerns bring it very
close to the anarchist analysis and prompt us to define some of the terms
and concepts with which we can begin to formulate an anarchist philosophy of
language.

The problem to which Vološinov addresses himself is, most
immediately, that of the relationship between the individual and ideology;
and his findings raise the question of what he has done with individual
volition, so central to the anarchist notion of rebellion. The purity of the
individual man standing out against his society in idealistic revolution or
in revolutionary art, a model so dear to the anarchist dream of freedom,
seems impossible in the face of Vološinov's claims:

> The reality of ideological phenomena is the objective reality of
>
> social signs. The laws of this reality are the laws of semiotic
>
> communication and are directly determined by the total aggregate
>
> of social and economic laws. Ideological reality is the immediate

superstructure over the economic basis. Individual consciousness

is not the architect of the ideological superstructure, but only

a tenant lodging in the social edifice of ideological signs. (p.13).

Volosinov's vision of the individual's relationship to the "ideological

superstructure", that of "tenant", is one that would seem to preclude the

possibility of effective individual action against it by the revolutionary

or the artist. To do so would be to destroy himself. But it is important to

be clear about what precisely is being claimed here, as it has many

parallels with the discussion of the connection between fiction and

politics. One claim is a straightforward conclusion of "metalinguistics":

that the individual consciousness comes into existence within a set of

abstractions, language and its inherent ideology. The other claim, however,

is more complicated and its key lies in the phrase "ideological reality",

whose meaning is not obvious. We already know what "ideology" is, a set of

signs which embody a set of ideas about the world ("the word is the

ideological phenomenon par excellence" p.13), but what is the significance

of the addition of "reality"? The answer to this lies in understanding the

two principles of Marxist thought which underpin this work. Dialectical

materialism is "the science of the general laws of motion, both of the

external world and of human thought" [9], and central to it is the

transformation of quantity into quality: it states, in other words, that

consciousness and ideas evolve from the dialectical interaction of mind and

matter in the process of work. Thus "true" or real consciousness is that

which exists in terms which properly reflect the conditions of work in the

world. Issuing from it is the ideological method, which is a way of

analysing an ideology in relation to those same conditions of work: it declares that any idea, or any statement, which does not reflect the "economic basis" of society is non-dialectical, an unreal ideology and the pioduct of false consciousness. Thus all ideology is a verbal rationalization of material impulses and conditions; but whereas true ideology is based on and conscious of the nature of those impulses and conditions, false ideology is not (remember Sanguinetti's unmasking of capitalist "democracy" as representing "the forces of unconsciousness"). For Vološinov, therefore, "ideological reality" is only accorded to that set of ideas or words which reflect the structure of the "economic basis":

> Production relations and the socio-political order shaped by those
>
> relations determine the full range of verbal contacts between people,
>
> at work, in political life, in ideological creativity. (p.21).

Here we have, on one level, a political theory of consciousness, language and knowledge. There is no ideation free of material motivation, but neither is there pure material motivation free of ideological distortions. True consciousness, and the truth of any statement of which it is composed, is a political phenomenon which reflects the structure of social and economic power dynamics within society. Thus to be conscious within a capitalist society is to think as a capitalist, unless conditions favour a change; in which case capitalist ideology will be "unmasked" as ideological or unconscious fiction and a mere elaboration of words which possess no more than an illusion of reference. The definition of "reality" is therefore itself a political and ideological phenomenon, a construction of words, with the only difference being that it claims that it is not. It is a fiction

that declares itself to be constructed of the material of fiction, but

moreover declares itself to be a reflection of facts based upon a political

definition of what those facts are. Here we once again come to that capacity

of political language to create the "reality" that it apparently describes.

Language then, for Vološinov as for Althusser, is the

battleground of ideological struggle, or more precisely of the class war as

that manifests itself on a level of consciousness:

> Existence reflected in sign is not merely reflected but refracted.
>
> How is this refraction of existence in the ideological sign
>
> determined? By an intersecting of differently oriented social
>
> interests within one and the same sign community i.e. by the
>
> class struggle ... Various classes will use one and the same
>
> language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect
>
> in every ideological sign. Sign becomes the arena of the class
>
> struggle. (p.23) [10].

Language is, of course, as mutable as the material interests it reflects,

and the import of any word at any one time is determined by the relative

strength of the material interests at that time. It is in the dialectics

between accent and abstract pre-defined meaning that import evolves:

> The very same thing that makes the ideological sign vital and mutable
>
> is also, however, that which makes it a refracting and distorting
>
> medium. The ruling class strives to impart a supraclass, eternal
>
> character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inwards
>
> the struggle between social value judgements which occurs within it,
>
> to make the sign uniaccentual. (p.23-24).

The loss of contact with "ideological reality" and the changing of language from a reflecting to a distorting medium, are just two of the ill-effects of the pre-dominance of a ruling class in society. "Uniaccentual" language is dominated disproportionately by the "accent" of one group or "social interest", which gives it an "eternal character" and too great a rigidity of meaning for it to remain a truely ideological -- that is, dialectical-- sign.

To be clear about what Vološinov means here: "accent" is a term whi h broadly denotes the injection of tone and feeling into a word, which creates its unique orientation towards reality in any real and unique situation in which it is used. "Accent" is itself the product of a combination of the material impulses of the individual speaker, his emotional or temperamental state for example, and the *complex of ideological* "accents" already inherent in the word and with which he enters into a "dialogue". Vološinov makes the technical distinction between "theme" and "meaning" on the basis of "accent":

> Theme is a complex, dynamic system of signs that attempts to
>
> be adequate to a given instant of generative process. Theme
>
> is a reaction by the consciousness in its generative process
>
> to the generative process of existence. Meaning is the
>
> technical apparatus for the implementation of theme. Of
>
> course, no absolute mechanistic boundary can be drawn
>
> between theme and meaning ... it is impossible to convey
>
> the meaning of a particular word ... without having made
>
> it an element of theme i.e. without having constructed an

"example" utterance. On the other hand, a theme must base

itself on some kind of fixity of meaning; otherwise it loses

its connection with what comes before and what comes after --

i.e. it altogether loses its significance. (p.100).

"Meaning" is pure abstract reference which, strictly speaking, does not

really exist until a word is used in a real situation. "Theme" is "meaning"

as it is actually encountered in existence: as it is applied with "accent"

in the "generative process". Any expression has, therefore, a dual

orienation as directed by the need for "fixity of meaning" to retain

significance, and by the need for themeatic "accent" to make it a living

"utterance".

Once again Bakhtin's notion of "heteroglossic" discourse can

help us here. "Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject", he wrote,

"serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are

brought to bear" [11]; where "Centripetal" or "monologic" forces press

towards singularity of meaning, and "centrifugal" or "heteroglossic" forces

fragment and disrupt that singularity of meaning. And it is in the

dialectical interaction of these forces and needs that ideological creation

and destruction occurs:

> The outcome is a constant struggle of accents in each semantic
>
> sector of existence. There is nothing in the structure of
>
> signification that could be said to transcend the generative
>
> process, to be independent of the dialectical expansion of
>
> social purview. Society in process of generation expands its
>
> perception of the generative process of existence. There is

nothing in this that could be said to be absolutely fixed. And

this is how it happens that meaning -- an abstract, self-identical

element -- is subsumed under theme and torn apart by theme's

living contradictions so as to return in the shape of a new

meaning with a fixity and self-identity only for the while,

just as it had before. (p.106).

Here, then, we have the answer to two of our questions. Ideological growth

and change, and the dynamic of creation and destruction, takes place in what

Volosinov calls the "generative process": that is, as a result of the myriad

of social and material conditions, present in any "real" situation,

dialectically interacting with ideology already inherent in language.

Vološinov, like the anarchist, imagines this struggle to exist in every

moment and to inherently contain, because it is a dialectical process, an

orientation or intention towards the future. So the reference of any

ideological statement exists partly in what it tends to create, the new

"theme" it embodies; and its subject is the movement between the present and

the future, if it truly is a "real" reflection of the material movements

which are its base.

Marxism and the Philosophy of Language is, then, a very

consistent and logically rigorous work, but can sometimes seem to suffer

from the strength of its own argument and appear rather sweeping and

dogmatic. For example, to go back to the original point, Volosinov's theory

seems cold and somewhat unreal in that it lays so little emphasis on

individual will and volition in the creation of truth and meaning. He does

not ignore the individual but observes him from the outside and groups him

under the heading of "social accent", along with other aspects of the "real"
situation, and thereby tends to reduce him. This makes the work operate on
that extremely remote level of abstraction and generality that, for Bakunin,
invalidated scientific language: it has none of that "palpitating" sense of
reality that is conveyed by the language of art. And yet this abstraction
is, of course, inherent in the form and purpose of Vološinov's book, which
represents the attempt to apply a scientific method to questions of social
and political ideology; with the result that the very methodology he employs
is itself a political construction and a product of Marxism. Vološinov would
therefore contend that what we apparently refer to under the term
"individual" is a nebulous and indefinable thing which cannot be discussed
by scientific language, since language is a social construct which can
contain only social realities. To push this Marxist analysis to its absolute
extreme (which, naturally, nobody in practical life would do): the very
notion of individuality, our thinking of ourselves as separate and discrete
consciousnesses, is no more than a tenet of capitalist ideology which
promotes it as a reflection of its economic base in the private ownership of
property. The romantic ideal of the individual, asserting his own vision of
reality against his society, is the stuff of fiction and false-consciousness
for Vološinov; unless, by some unimaginable chain of events, that individual
happens to be the only consciousness in his society who is in tune with
"ideological reality". And this last point answers our other question. The
initial cause of ideological change comes from a change in the relationship
of class or social "accent" and material conditions, and the individual is
the instrument but not the cause of change. So the individual, as

individual, has no interest for Volosinov whose philosophy works on a theoretical axis radically anatagonistic to anarchism.

Thus the only charge which can properly stand against Volosinov is not that he is cold or too severely logical, although they are vaguely part of it. It is essentially the emotional charge that he leaves us no fictions, what Conrad would have called "sustaining illusions", or at least that he insists that we recognise them as fictions and "false-consciousness" even if we retain them; and that is not the same thing. We are left with a sense of unease at a total loss of idealism, as Volosinov brings us to the very limits of language and commands that either we define individuality, whose essence is that it is indefinable, or else recognise and acknowledge it as a product of false consciousness. This is, perhaps, grammatically correct from the perspective of scientific linguistics, but it is also a negative and reductive way of making the point that the essence of human life lies beyond what words can capture. It is essentially inhuman and anti-intuitive, and it is exactly these principles of humanity and intuition, vague though they be, that are lacking in Volosinov and which accounts for that sense of discomfort which accompanies some of his arguments; particularly his definition of "ideological reality".

Yet the "marxist philosophy of language" propels us towards the construction of a general revolutionary theory of language. Volosinov's analysis touches upon and clarifies nearly all the major issues involved in the explanation of how political and ideological language functions. Political ideas, truths, or notions of reality exist firmly in the mind and only reflect and contact empirical reality in times or process of change,

because only then is the grip of the ruling class over language -- which imparts to it that "supraclass, eternal character" -- loosened sufficiently for it to express the real material motivations of humanity in general. Any political statement, therefore, is self-referential in the sense that it translates quantity into quality and creates the reality, the mental-ideological reality, to which it apparently refers. Truth itself is a politically defined quality of any statement and is a reflection, not of objective facts, but of the human will to act. And this, of course, brings us back to the whole question of authority, words, and the formal arrangements in which political discourse is presented to us.

Volosinov's formulations do not describe the anarchist position, not just because of what they actually say, but because of their formal presentation and the things that it implies. For the anarchist, as I have already shown, the discourse of science was problematic or inadequate because it lacked that "palpitating" sense of human reality to be derived from the discourse of art. Science uses words that claim to directly represent an empirical reality outside of themselves and which therefore carry with them assumptions of authority: words which use an illusion of reference to force the reader into the role of a passive receiver of information uninvolved in the creation of meaning. Volosinov's scientific form, then, goes directly against the grain of what he himself points out as the ill-effects of the pre-dominance of a ruling class in society; and the alienation of the reader that he achieves, exposes the limits of his form when used to discuss political or ideological matters. Thus the problem with political statements, especially when cast in the form of scientific

statements, is that they always claim to be true outside of the dialectics
of the conditions which created them. Political language denies its own
nature as spontaneous verbal communication, which occurs only in a unique
and real situation, and purports to describe something real in other than a
linguistic sen e. It is a distorting and controlling medium and cannot
properly reflect the complexity of the world.

It is wi h this point, therefore, that we can begin to
inderstand how the revolutionary struggle against the established system of
social order ould present itself to the revolutionary as a linguistic
struggle; and how, given the uniquely individualistic orientation of
anarchism, the eed arises for a specifically anarchist theory of language.
Not lea t, it helps u under tand the anarchists' constant attack upon
the "verbal uperstitions" that uphold established powers. That a dominant
social group protects it elf against rev lutionary change through the power
and cove t a s mptions of language 's, as I have stated before, a common
perception Fo insta e i is e of he c lusions of Jack London's
socialist didactic novel, The Iron Heel (1914). His narrator, an ultra-
rational and s ientifi hi ia , disse ts the p litical confusion of the
early twentieth century form a post-revolutionary perspective, several
thousand years in th f tu e:

> The people of that age were phrase slaves. The abjectness of
>
> thei se v' ude is in mprehen ible t u . There was a magic
>
> in word g eater than the c njur r's art. So befuddled and
>
> chaoti were their minds that the utterance of a single word
>
> could nega ive the gene ali ati ns f a lifetime of erious

research and thought. Such a word was the adjective "utopian".

The mere utterance of it could damn any scheme, no matter how

sanely conceived, of economic amelioration or regeneration.

Vast populations grew frenzied over such phrases as "an honest

dollai" and "full dinner pail". The coinage of such phrases was

considered strokes of genius. [12].

Political catch phrases, like "utopian", have little or no information

content, but they express or evoke a turn of mind by exploiting cultural

associations. In Vološinov's terms they are "uniaccentual", and therefoie a

distorting non-dialectical medium, which limit thought by denying the

reader's or hearer's own "accent"; and thus cutting them off from

"ideological reality" and from the conditions for meaningful action. In this

way, a passive conservative vocabulary, in which "utopian" always means

unattainable, produces passive conservative minds.

This conservative vocabulary is, then, one of the central

problems which the revolutionary activist has to face. In response to it,

many anarchist thinkers rejected all political theory and discourse as

riddled with inherent political structure and as the product of that "supra-

class, eternal character" which dominant systems impose on words. In its

extreme phase this became the basis of that seaich for a new conception of

language and a means of radical expression, which eventually issued in the

theory of propaganda by the deed and the justification of extieme violence.

Behind the explosions and assassinations, however, were a number of writers

and theorists who attempted a quieter iconoclasm and directed their

attention to breaking down the superstitions and iigid formalisms that they

saw as stunting language as an expressive medium. Vološinov was one such iconoclast who tried to break that "magic in words", by demonstrating that language has its source in material conditions working through the human individual, rather than in the psuedo-supernatural origin which many established powers implicitly claimed to sanction their ideas and regimes. His was one type of attempt, the high theoretical and "scientific" attempt of the intellectual Marxist, and many other thinkers made similar efforts in accordance with their natures and beliefs.

Of the theorists who confronted essentially the same set of problems as Vološinov, but from a more personal and specifically anarchist position, perhaps amongst the most remarkable were two relatively unknown thinkers, Henry B. Brewster (1850-1908) and Georges Sorel (1847-1922). What distinguishes these two men from the many philosophers and psychologists writing in the same spirit of iconoclasm, are three major qualities which they share. The first is the highly individual turn of thought which they possessed, and which profoundly influenced the style and form of their writings. The second is the considerable originality of the ideas that they formulated, which often pre-date their more common acceptance by established schools of philosophy and psychology. The third, and the quality which most closely connects them, is the semantic emphasis which each employs in discussion of all social and political questions; and which was, for their time, unique in its insistence on approaching such questions directly through an analysis of the form and status of language.

Brewster and Sorel were, then, writers who in very different ways represent a particular revolutionary approach to the relation of

thought and language, which I have chosen to call the anarchist theory of language. This is, essentially, a systematic development (as far as these things can be "systematically" developed) of the attitude to the language of political and social ideas that we have seen inherent in the pronouncements of Bakunin and other anarchists. It resembles in many respects the "marxist philosophy of language" developed by Volosinov, but with an element of formal self-consciousness attached to it.

Thus the works of Brewster explicitly direct our attention to the formal patterns or systems in which words reconstruct and explain our experience, and ask us to compare them to the actual nature of our experience itself. Brewster's main notion is that words are one thing, and "reality" quite another; and that the cause of social conflicts and problems lies in our inability to accept this difference and so distinuish between "formal" fictions and "real" experience. For Brewster, language must be valued and used mainly as the material of art, which gives form to our lives and expresses our greatest capacities. Language is not a medium through which we view an empirical reality but is itself empirical reality. The works of Sorel in a sense represent the natural extention of Brewster's ideas into their implications for political activity (even though Sorel almost certainly had never even heard of Brewster). For Sorel, the work of the political activist was identical to the work of the artist, in that his function was to inspire and activate mankind with "myths" and fictions; the empirical reality of which he had no obligation to believe in. Together, the works of these two men represent a coherent revolutionary theory of language and its use, which takes us from a basic epistemology to a theory of

propaganda. The terms in which they develop it are very different, as befits

their radically different social and intellectual backgrounds (with certain

key similarities), but the most fundamental concepts are the same.

Crucially, both locate the springs of human action in any

transcendent cause in the actual mechanics of explanation and expression.

Like Vološinov, they see "ideological reality" as a purely linguistic

phenomenon and not as a representation of any non-verbal reality; but,

unlike him, they renounce the possibility that language can ever become

s ientific and accurately represent anything -- any notion of "truth" or

"reality"-- outside of itself. On the contrary, they formulated a new way of

evaluating ideological and political statements, which involves a radical

attitude to power and to the way we live our lives; and in which the value

and true purpose of the things we say lie, not in anything it represents of

the world outside the speaker, but in the formal patterns it constructs and

in the human needs and aspirations it reveals. Political language must, like

the language of ai t, be considered an aesthetic and poetic medium. Thus they

both stress the fundamental importance of the "fictions" that inhere in

language: ideological statements must still be unmasked as false in a

referential sense, but are all the more important for that and must be

valued as foi ms like art. As a basis for this, both employ a type of pre-

scientific, pre-rationalistic psychology in which instinct and intuition are

the only means to the perception of reality, and in which truth is only

beheld in intuitive flashes: in patterns of imagery rather than in objective

knowledge or logical explanation (Bergson's ideas, recognizable here, were a

major influence on Sorel and bore many similaries to Brewster's). Both saw

language as acting upon and creating reality, and so resisted very fiercely and in the name of freedom any authoritarian rhetoric which attempted to reduce the laws of human happiness to a straight line or unified concept.

"Opinions are not true or false," said Brewster in an unpublished note, "neither are beliefs or theories. They are quick or dead ... Truth here is irrelevant; it is a question of reality or ghostliness" [13]. Thus we have to revise the terms in which we think when reading Brewster: the conventions of true and false, for example, are peripheral and only divert our attention away from the true importance of a statement, which is its expressive or vital quality (this raises, of course, the question of what it is expressive of, and is that not therefore the truth? But Brewster means true or false as absolute; as representation of something external, with value for all time and all places; whereas the reality that any statement expresses is as fleeting and provisional as the unique situation in which it occurs, where both are part of an ongoing process). The value of any statement is measured only in terms of "quick" or "dead"; of, not what it says, but of what it forms.

The central theme of Sorel's social and political criticism is the breaking down of all intellectual theories of unity and progress, all rational historical narratives, in favour of a perspective on life which sees it as riddled with antagonisms and conflicts. Ideologies are exposed as no more than "high sounding words" which mask the dialectical nature of reality, and so distort man's moral and creative freedom. There is a streak of virulent anti-intellectualism in Sorel which results in an antipathy to all theoretical elaborations claiming to explain life, and eventually to the

evolution of his own intellectual method, "diremption" [14]. This is the practise of studying an aspect of reality in isolation and disconnected from the confused context in which it is found in life. It looks at reality in fragments and so is the only source of knowledge for Sorel, because our experience of life is itself fragmentary and one experience is disconnected from another as far as our intellectual grasp of it is concerned. Any theory which claims to connect experiences intellectually, to explain life, is therefore unfaithful to its subject, dishonest, mere verbal artifice, and conveying no knowledge. Sorel's thought evolves out of a set of antagonisms between intuition and intellect, "diremption" and connection, "myth" and theory.

A similar set of antagonisms obtains in Brewster's work. It is mainly the terms that are different, as now the oppositions operate between "polytheism" and "monism", poetry and truth, anarchy and law. The main thrust of his thought is an attack upon notions of universal truth and law and their unmasking as fictions, which are valuable only so long as they do not deny their own nature as purely verbal artefacts and claim to be factual or authorititive. The stated aim of his best work is the "dethronement" of the "idol of truth", in favour of an extremely eclectic system of values in which "poetry" and expression are more important qualities of a statement.

But any such bold and abstract comparisons of Brewster and Sorel, though useful as a kind of map when approaching them for the first time, is little more than a violence done to the spirit of their work. Neither is susceptible to paraphrase, since both inhabit the border between literature and political theory, and the actual style and form of their

works are more important to the elucidation of their worldview than any abstract philosophical statements. In the next chapter I shall look, therefore, at their actual work in some detail, and at Brewster in particular since he is so little known.

*

Notes:

1. William Godwin, <u>An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, 3rd Edition</u> ed. Kay Codell (Oxfo d: The Clarendon Press, 1971), p.264.

2. This is a term used by Gianfranco Sanguinetti in <u>On Terrorism and the State</u> (London: B.M.Chronos, 1982), to describe the results of the "schizophrenic psychopathology" of tate power in a consumer capitalist society. For Sanguinetti, the authorized system of representat' n that the powerful (those that he calls the "masters of the spectacle" use to discred't and silence opposition leads only to so ial isolation a d atrophy.

Gabel says ... "the pol'ce c eption of history repre ents the most complete form of political al'enation. ... : the u fav u able eve can only be explained by exter' r action 'the pl t , it i experienced (by the pati t) as an unexpected catastrophe, "unmerited". A d so it is that any spontaneous strike be omes an insult to the "working class", so well represented by the trade unions, and any wildcat struggle is "provocative", "corporative", "unjust" and "unmerited"

All this fits exactly into the clinical framework of autistic

schizophrenia: "the *syndrome of external action* ... is the clinical

expression of the irruption of the dialectic in a reified world which

cannot admit of the event unless as a catastrophe" (J.Gabel, *False*

Consciousness). The irruption of the dialectic corresponds however to

nothing other than *the irruption of struggle* in a reified world, which

it is more exact to call a spectacular-commodity world, which cannot

admit of struggle, *not even in the realm of thought.* So this

spectacular society is not even capable of *thinking* any more ...

(italics in original) (p.94).

Ultimately, power leads its possessor into egotistic and psychopathic

fantasy: an activity in which communication between the self and the

world is replaced by a form of purely self-referential expression, and

in which the world is interpreted only in terms of the needs and desires

of the self. This fantasy is inevitably sponsored by the current

political practise whereby the words of the holder of power are bestowed

with the "illusion of reference": where there is a God-like bonding

between word and deed, between the language of the individual law-giver

and the law itself. Language thus ceases to be a form of communication,

and becomes instead an instrument of power.

3. Gод and the State (New York: Dover, 1970), p.54-5.

        ibid
4. Ibid., p.59.

5. What Bakunin is most directly attacking here, of course, is the "scientific" socialism of Marx and Engels, his foremost opponents in the First International. Bakunin was the dominant figure in the secret International Alliance of Social Democracy, which effectively constituted a secret society within the larger International, and consistently criticized the Marx dominated General Council for hierarchical and authoritarian tendencies. As a result Bakunin and his closest associate, the Swiss anarchist James Guillaume, were expelled from the International at The Hague conference of 1872.

6. _Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics_, Trans. C. Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.318.

7. _ibid_., p.311-2.

8. _Marxism and the Philosophy of Language_, Trans. L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik (New York and London: Seminar Press, 1973), p.12. All page references are to this edition.

9. As defined by _The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia_ (London: Collier Macmilan, 1976), Vol.16, p.209.

10. For a very elaborate version of this idea, written by an anarchist, see Basil Bernstein's _Class, Codes, and Control_, Vol.1 (London. Routledge and Kegan, 1971). Bernstein argues that the language spoken in any

society can be divided into "restricted" and "elaborate" codes, with
the obvious evaluative differences that the terms imply. Which one the
individual speaks depends upon, and partly determines, their social and
economic power.

11. The Dialogical Imagination, Ed. M.Holquist, trans. Holquist and

    Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.272.

12 The Iron Heel (London: Methuen, 1914), p.62.

13. Quoted by Martin Halpern, The Life and Writings of Henry B. Brewster

    (Doctoral Thesis, Harvard University, 1957), p.309.

14. This is a notion defined in Reflections on Violence (Illinois:

    The Free Press, 1950):

       Social philosophy in order to follow the most considerable phenomena

       of history, is obliged to proceed by a diremption, to examine certain

       parts without taking account of all the ties that connect them to the

       whole, to determine, in some way, the type of their activity by

       pushing them towards independence. When it has thus reached the

       fullest understanding, it can no longer attempt to reconstitute the

       broken unity. (p.415-6).

Chapter Three:

Henry B. Brewster and Georges Sorel:

"syntactism" and "social poetry".

You, who cannot conceive of unity without a whole apparatus of
legislators, prosecutors, attorneys-general, custom house officers,
policemen, you have never known what real unity is! What you call
unity and centralization is nothing but perpetual chaos, serving
as a basis for endless tyranny; it is the advancing chaotic
condition of social forces as an argument for despotism -- a
despotism which is really the cause of the chaos.
                                                        Proudhon. [1].

Anarchism is a very broad and imprecise philosophy. We never

quite know what an "anarchist" thinks and believes; except that the term

itself has been used to refer to thinkers as diverse as Prince Kropotkin,

"that beautiful white Christ ... coming out of Russsia", and Seigei Nechaev,

that "revolutionary Jesuit ... ready for every vileness in order to achieve

his goal" [2]. Indeed anarchism, as a clearly defined political philosophy,

is something which exists largely by implication: as the abstraction of

certain consistent strands of thought and attitude from a bewilderingly

diverse set of works and deeds. Thus the anarchist viewpoint can be

expressed by the atrocious violence of Ravachol and by the moral pacifism of

Gandhi [3]. What unites these very different thinkers, and what constitutes

anarchism, is an analysis of the state and state power as the major source

of social evils.

Similarly, and as I have said before, an anarchist theory of

language is something which exists only by implication. My intention in this

chapter is to draw the outlines of such a theory by abstracting from the

works of two radically different thinkers who were united by an anarchistic
resistence to the language of authority: by an analysis of the world which
discovered the genesis of all problems and evils in our misunderstanding of
the mechanics of speech.

I.

The amount of critical attention that has been paid to the works
of Henry B. Brewster is sadly insufficient and he has in fact suffered
almost total neglect up to the present date. Brewster had five books
published in all, three philosophical dialogues in english and two plays in
french, and most of them probably at his own expense. Only one, The Prison
(1891), ever reached a second edition and even then attracted as little
attention as it did first time around. The most surprising aspect of all
this is not simply that works of considerable quality have been overlooked,
as must happen frequently, but that the works of so socially well known and
well connected a figure as Brewster should have been ignored, even for
questions of influence he might have had over his friends. Brewster was a
prominant figure in the cosmopolitan circles in which many famous literary
figures moved, and was a close personal friend of both Henry and William
James. Henry James regarded him with great fondness and, after his death
from consumption, said Brewster "... remains for me, with his
accomplishments, his distinction, his extraordinary play of mind, and his
too tragic death, the clearest case of cosmopolitan culture I was to have

known" [4]. William James, whose ideas bear many similaiities to Biewster's and aie significantly pre-dated by them, is known to have possessed, read, and carefully annotated a copy of The Theories of Anarchy and Law: A Midnight Debate (1887) [5] (hereafter, The Theories of Anarchy). We cannot know when William James read it, so the question of influence remains speculative, if suggestive. Yet, despite his connections, mention of Brewster in the history of literature is literature is sparse: one doctoral thesis written in 1957; thirty-five pages devoted to a consideration of The Prison in Father M.C.D'arcy's Image and Truth (1935); and a number of references of a biographical nature, mainly from his one time lovei Ethyl Smyth [6].

Henry Brewster was the son of William Star Brewster, a pioneering American dentist who worked at the St.Petersburg couit for many years befoie moving to Paris, where Henry was born. The young Henry spent his formative years, and indeed the rest of his life, moving between Fiance, Italy, and England, and he spoke all three languages fluently. There is little biographical infoimation available on his early years, but it is known from family correspondence that he became from an early age a quiet, meditative type, and much addicted to isolation, metaphysics and literature. His early literary endeavours were mostly contributions to Belles-Lettres, all of which remain unpublished despite Henry James's tribute to him as "the last of the great epistolarists" [7]. They weie mostly written in Fiench, as was his first published work, The Theories of Anarchy, which Brewster translated into English in the final version. This was followed by The

Prison, The Statuette and the Background (1896), and finally by the two

French verse plays, L'ame Paleme (1902) and Les Naufrageurs (1911) [8].

All of these works are of value and interest, but for our

present purposes it is The Theories of Anarchy which is of importance.

According to Ethyl Smyth, the impetus for the work grew out of the conflicts

of Brewster's triangular romantic involvement with her and with his wife

Julia; and was, it appears, intended to some extent to be a justification of

polygamy. She said the work was written "partly in the hope of making his

point of view intelligible to her (Julia) in the only language she

understood -- that of metaphysics" [9]. Polygamy is mentioned once in The

Theories of Anarchy, in very favourable terms as an extention of polytheism,

and perhaps this uniquely personal genesis accounts for its extremely

eclectic tone and its intense opposition to any notions of limitation or

restriction of human passions. It is, however, much more than a discussion

of marital relations and Smyth's explanation seems unreliable.

Any detailed account of the literary or philosophical influences

on Brewster would, I believe, be of very little use. The Theories of Anarchy

contains no clear references to anybody and one of the characters is rebuked

at one stage for quoting Emerson. Its basic ideas were generally current at

the time, and the real interest of the work lies in the very personal and

original slant which Brewster puts on them (having said that, however,

Buddhism and Toaism were obvious influences on the general lines of

Brewster's thought. German romanticism, especially Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche

are also clearly an influence, but it is difficult to be more specific than

that).

The most remarkable quality of Brewster's thought, especially

The Theories of Anarchy, is its at times astonishing modernity and its

anticipation of the thoughts of much later and now respected thinkers.

Remember Bakhtin's definition of life as "dialogue" (dated at the earliest,

1922), and then consider this from 1891:

> Dialogues, autobiographies, and letters are the only pure, true,
>
> sincere forms ... The real thing is a scathing mass of thoughts
>
> and impressions struggling with one another; our thinking as far
>
> as it is alive and genuine is a conversation with our different
>
> selves, aye, and a fight ... the rest of it is professor's work;
>
> second hand goods even if extracted from our own brain" [10].

Here, in germ, are the central principles of Brewster's thought: the

conception of experience as a "scathing mass" of separate "thoughts and

impressions"; and, complementary to it, the idea that man's conscious

activity is the construction of a dialogue or a "fight" between those

disparate elements. Genuine thought is a "conversation", which is to say

that thought is the medium in which all the fragments of real experience

meet and interact in dialogic form. So thought, and language, since the

emphasis is overtly linguistic, is an undetermined, open-ended process which

connects and reflects the chaos of real experience; and must be free of

"second hand" preconceptions and general ideas if it is to remain alive.

The intent of The Theories of Anarchy is, therefore, the

construction of one such dialogue, or "conversation", on the theme of "What

is the use of living?" But it is not the usual Socratic form of

philosophical dialogue in which one voice dominates and unearths the truth

by subjecting the others to logical analysis. On the contrary, _The Theories_ _of Anarchy_ is dialogic in its form and consists of an interplay of four strands of discourse; each representing one temperamental or instinctive response to the problems of experience and each enhancing and expanding the others' perspectives. No one discourse dominates and, ultimately, the significance of the debate lies not so much in its findings but in the experience of their unfolding; like the aesthetic pleasure provided by the theatre. The drama, however, is all internal: essentially _The Theories of_ _Anarchy_ is the externalization of an internal process of thought, with each figure embodying an element of the human temperament and each voicing a different phase or "key" of a single temperamental response to the problem of living. So Brewster makes a bare minimum of concessions to setting and no characterization beyond names. The result is that it is like a conversation between ghosts, set as it is at midnight, and much of the beauty which certainly belongs to _The Theories of Anarchy_ evolves from the extreme level of abstraction and the rarefied atmosphere in which this takes place

The Theories of Anarchy, then, is a monologue cast in the form of a dialogue, "C'est un monologue qu'il y sit quatre voix -- un sceptique un progressiste, un mystique et un nihiliste" [11] The names assigned to these four voices or positions are, respectively, Wilfred, Ralph, Lothaire and Harold. Harold opens with the initial question and warning that he does not want "purchased jewels" for an answer, asks each to "strike me your keynote" [12]. The terms of the coming debate are thus set and it is established that what is sought for here is not truth or knowledge but a revelation of how four different temperaments or four aspects of the one

complex temperament, react instinctively to experience. It is impossible to recreate through paraphrase the actual flow of the dialogue, so I will restrict myself to a few long quotations to afford a flavour of the aesthetic surface of the work and to give an account of the general shape of the dialogue.

Much of the dynamic of the dialogue comes from the shifting patterns and relations into which the voices are placed, react to each other, and reform into a different pattern, to take up the subject from a different angle. Thus the first major orientation comes from the opening conflict between Harold and Ralph, the nihilist and progressive, over the doctrines of law and progress. Yet this operates at the same time as Harold and Ralph, as empiricists, are united in opposition to Wilfred and Lothaire, as irrationalists.

Ralph answers the question initially by recommending a practical approach, and bringing the issue down from the "metaphysical key" in which it is posed, he argues that the answer can be found in the ways that it is implicitly answered every day by thousands of people. He finds his answer in common sense utilitarianism and in the doctrines of law and progress:

> All we have to consider is, firstly, whether there be certain
>
> paths or, if you will, certain combinations of inward doings,
>
> and outward events that cause some men to thrive; and secondly,
>
> whether some lives are profitable to the community ... I do
>
> not anticipate any paradise on earth. The social state of
>
> things will never be absolutely good. What matter provided
>
> it always improve? Its progress is worth striving for. There

will always be unhappy men. Because some fail are we to

conclude that there is no such thing as success and that

life is not worth living? Take human nature as it is with

its imperfections, see if any good is to be got out of it,

and, if so, look upon that good as the true reason of our

existence. (pp. 8-9).

This is the argument of the earthy practical man of the world and it comes

clearly from the rationalist tradition of thought, as that was developed

into the nineteenth century philosophy of unity and progress. It represents

one half of an antagonism to be completed by Harold.

The thought of Harold, his chief opponent at this point, seems

based in German romanticism. He refutes Ralph's easy assumption that men

have an instinctive sense of the value of life, and rejects all laws of

progress on the basis that they leave half of life unaccounted for; since

death, imperfection and suffering find no explanation in terms of utility.

Yet despite that, Harold still recognises essentially the same set of terms

as Ralph: for both, man discovers himself in terms of the oppositions

between the individual and society and between anarchy and law. For both,

man is torn between these two poles of his being; but, whereas for Ralph

thought and human feeling naturally orient a man towards society and law,

for Harold they pull in the opposite direction and "genuine" thought

alienates the thinker from the recognition of law. The thinker is:

... doubtless a perfect man inwardly. But I am a solitary being

as far as the social commonwealth is concerned, for there is no

dogmatism of any kind, intellectual or moral, left in me, and a

good riddance it is with regard to my communion with psyche; but,
with the error I have avoided, the conditions of persistent, limited
and effective work are gone -- the blindness, the unconsciousness
that would have assigned me an alloted place and thanks to which
I should have represented one of the functions of society. Being a
world of myself, I stand alone. And this solitude is poverty ...
Ah! But wait a minute; for shall we not say rather that this
solitude of mine exists only in my feelings and in the visible
character of my relations to society, but that in reality a man
can never step out of humanity; however little in harmony with his
immediate surroundings he may feel, he cannot do otherwise than
take his part in a higher unity. Do you see what this leads to?
That there is an opposition between the social fabric, which is
the work of individuals in whom thought is but a factor, and who
consequently are dogmatic, and some larger work at which all must
perforce labour, and wherein those individuals in whom thought is
all absorbing, tyrannic, have a great part to play precisely in
virtue of their antagonism to dogma, that is to say, to law. Human
sympathy awakes in them as soon as they become destroyers of
society. Thought begins in doubt and ends in revolution. Its
essence is revolt. (pp.50-1).

To understand the purpose of The Theories of Anarchy it is necessary to
appreciate that Harold's answer here, his reaction to the problem of living,
is the elaboration of another phase of the answer Ralph offered. Thus the
opposition between thought and action, implicit in Ralph's answer, is

developed here until thought becomes a hindrance to constructive action:
until "effective work" is seen to be dependent upon "blindness" and
"unconsciousness" (Brewster is like Conrad in certain respects [13]).
Practical thinking, in which "thought is but a factor", involves
constructing a theory of social unity which negates half of reality: which
ignores the bad and offers the good as the "true reason of our existence".
On the other hand, the development of thought, in which "thought is all
absorbing", is antithetical to social order and unity because thought is
that principle in the human psyche which seeks to resolve the antagonisms
inherent in existence; and which therefore resists the "dogmatic" forced
resolutions and unity based upon negation. The "essence" of thought is
"revolt", because thought is an evolving process of rebellion against the
"dogmatic" forms that men impose on life. The end of this "revolt" is, of
course, the search for a "higher unity", a final synthesis of the
antagonistic terms of reality. And so Brewster's point is implicitly
registered: that the purpose of rational thought at all its levels of
development is to search for some such vision of unity.

So the opposition between Harold and Ralph is, on one level, the
standard philosophical opposition between pessimism and optimism. But, as
Brewster develops the dialogue, their positions are gradually modified and
extended, in reaction to the "metaphysical ether" of Lothaire's and
Wilfred's contributions, until we begin to discover a deeper level upon
which they are more united than divided. Essentially they are both
empiricists who base their thoughts upon direct observation of the world and
the assumption that the individual is a self-sufficient entity, a "master of

himself", who can choose his relations with the world. As befits their different temperaments, Ralph perceives the general tendencies and laws which operate in the world and believes that thought leads to "marching in step" with them; whereas Harold perceives the same laws and believes that thought leads to a denial of them, in the name of some "higher unity". Both, in other words, posit the possibility that the individual can rationally attain to a unified vision of existence; and both, crucially, can do so because they fail to distinguish between the world in which they locate that "unity" and the actual "thought" which locates it.

Lothaire, on the contrary, does not fail to make that distinction and puts into question the very premise upon which Ralph and Harold have disputed. His is the voice of the religious mystic: of that strand within human nature which responds to experience intuitively through the medium of the sense of a higher spiritual reality, which is felt but not seen and which is inexplicable in rational terms. He thus denies the value of rational argument itself:

> ... I ought not to appeal to an argument as to a voucher for
>
> the superiority of faith; I cannot ask an inferior power to
>
> give credentials to a superior one. I think, as you do, that
>
> our trust will always go to the broader testimony, not to the
>
> closer knit argument. And it is, in reality simply because the
>
> rationalistic view of life seems to me narrow that I turn to a
>
> more complex and less artificial way of thinking. What I mean
>
> by faith is probably something very different from what you put
>
> under the word. (p.6).

"Faith", Lothaire's answer to Harold's question, is of course yet another phase of the answers given by Ralph and Harold, in the sense that it also seeks the *reason for existence in a vision of unity*. But, just as Harold argued for the "development of thought" as offering a wider and hence truer vision of life than Ralph's selective and limited thought, Lothaire argues for an intuitive and religious method of thinking as offering a "broader testimony" to the mystery of life than "rationalistic" thought. Thus Lothaire brings us to another level of abstraction and the key to what "faith" means in terms of the ongoing dialogue is contained in this distinction between "the broader testimony" and "the closer knit argument". For Lothaire, all "rationalistic" thinking is inadequate to experience precisely because it fails to distinguish between itself and the world: because the "narrow" and "artificial" arguments it constructs claim objective reference in the world and hence to explain the world in terms of a medium which is foreign to it. This is anti-intuitive. "Faith", however, makes no such error since it claims to find the reason for our existence not in the world but outside of it; and thereby offers a vision of resolution and unity truely beyond the antagonisms of existence because beyond the world. "Faith" is, therefore, another "more complex" form of response to life and another type of search for unity.

The dialogue becomes, then, one version of the ideological method: unmasking thought and language as a rationalization of, and over, a set of temperamental impulses or drives. Brewster's political theory of language is based upon this practise and upon his literary "dialogue" form. His tactic, therefore, is to give the reader the experience of watching a

"conversation" develop: of seeing how words work to form patterns which claim to interpret or to represent life, but which in fact get further and further from the actual experience of life in the process of word generation. The reader's attachment to the surface reference of the words the characters use is thus broken down as the conversation gets more and more abstract, and the attention is directed more towards the oppositions between the characters than to the objective facts in the world about which they converse.

The catalyst of this unmasking of the dialogue and of the distancing of the reader is the contribution of the fourth voice, Wilfred. At first, Wilfred's seems the voice of the Humean sceptic but as the dialogue develops it becomes the vehicle of something much more, and one senses that he becomes the spokesman of the dominant tendency of Brewster's own thought. This is not because he is more right than the others or because he is more eloquent, but rather because the subject of his contributions becomes the process of the dialogue itself, and he tends to mediate and direct the contributions of the others. He comes to be something like a principle of self-consciousness placed in the text to put the very process of philosophical debate to question and to direct our attention to the formal dimensions in which the search for unity occurs.

Brewster described Wilfred's philosophy as "syntactism" [14], which may be defined as an extreme scepticism combined with elements of romanticism. Ethyl Smyth described Brewster as "the most inveterate enemy of creeds I ever knew" [15], and "syntactism" is the philosophical development of that enmity. It denies the validity of any rational explanation of life,

or any moral or metaphysical system of values, on the basis that they are verbal artefacts only: that they are insulated from the reality they purport to represent by the very material of representation -- language. It therfore discovers the genesis of all theories to reside in the mechanics of language.

Wilfred's answer, and "syntactism", begin with a kind of negative epistemology in which abstract words do not in fact connect to reality at all. I quote at length to give a sense of how this develops:

... what a philosopher undertakes to give us is the most comprehensive scheme of thoughts possible, in which every thing shall have its allotted place; he does not seek for information, he takes that which special inquirers give him, and tries to make order; the soul of his enterprise is a desire to connect. Now, whatever a thought may contain or express, something goes with it that it cannot possibly impart, to wit: the relation in which it stands to its neighbours. It cannot at the same time express a given sum and the interval between that sum and others.

But this relation, this connection, is the very thing philosophers crave for. The very core of their desire is the instinct of something unobtainable directly, a formal element connecting and not to be identified with any one of them.

This is also the character of a work of art. Can you reduce a poem to a formula like a law of mechanics? I don't deny phlosophy, or think less of it than anyone, but I say it is all poetry and teaches us nothing ... disconnected utterances conveying information

owe their strength to a previous work of some of our sense simple or combined, which they translate into words. Connected utterances bearing strength with them owe that strength to the fact that they embody, instead of translating, a primary reality. They express nothing, they are something. They form part of the stock and riches of the world, even as the organic forms. Far from being products of our mind, that is to say, secondary or manufactured wares like our knowledge, they exist not by us but we by them. Behold in the connective power which they display, one of the threads which man spins not but of which he is woven. (p. 19-20).

Wilfred's answer consists of a commentary upon the answers of the others, and he asks us to tranfer our attention from the referential to the formal aspects of the words of which explanations and statements are composed. For Wilfred, there is no knowable reality outside of language and to which it refers, except for particular facts and impressions: discrete events, actions, material forces, are things we know to be real because we can sense them and which we can represent to ourselves in language, because the words we use connect, not to the actual things, but to the human senses which perceived them. However, any statement which attempts to explain and place them within the context of a theoretical or narratorial structure is merely a construction of words and a fiction which has no reference to anything outside of itself. In this case words connect only to other words, and not to realities. Thus "disconnected utterances" reflect the shape of our experience and direct the attention out towards objects of sense, so that the truth of any statement is a clearly discerned matter of fact. "Connected

utterances", however, disguise the reality of experience and act only in

reference to other utterances, so that the attention is directed away from

objects of sense to the mental or aesthetic patterns which words form.

Wilfred takes Bakunin's analysis of the limitations of language a stage

further: not that it cannot contain the object and its relations at the same

time, but that those relations exist only in and through language. Human

thought is itself a thing of form and catagories like true and false

disappear, as the value of any statement becomes more an aesthetic question:

> Either truth is to be got at directly without any concatenation
>
> of thoughts, by immediate flashes of intuition, or else any
>
> answer we may give to whatever question is, besides the answer
>
> it claims to be, part of a situation, it is one of the possible
>
> cases of the concatenation of thoughts. (p.17-18).

Every explanation is an ordered formulation of thoughts, not of reality, and

so our sense of existing in an sensible coherent world is totally dependent

upon the formal capacity of language. Human consciousness is "woven of

words" and all beliefs and thoughts are to some extent fictitious, in the

sense that they are poetic elaborations which try to impose form and order

on chaos. Truth is a quality only of particular thoughts and impressions and

so is only a part of any complex statement.

> Yet despite this negative view of language as an interpreter of

our experience, Wilfred turns this "connecting" and falsifying capacity of

language into an affirmation of its importance and power:

> For this reason I decline to look upon philosophy as a work of
>
> the mind in the same sense as our knowledge may be said to be, and

unless some better term be suggested propose to call it a work of speech, setting up speech as that one of the primary ingredients of the universe that creates all synthetic thinking, and therewith a good part of the world in which we live. And I go so far as to say that I can only conceive the opposition between the mind and the world, the subject and the object, as that of two halves pertaining to a common unity in which alone they exist truly . I would neither get the world out of man's mind nor our mind out of the progressive integration of matter. I would get them both out of speech and say to those who discuss their priority: You are expressing no reality, you are creating one: you are singing after a fashion -- go on."

(p.20).

Wilfred's point is that once language has been established as a "connecting" medium and all theoretical or philosophical elaborations of words have renounced their claim to being vehicles of general objective truth, then the "work of speech" can be recognised for the "primary reality" that it is. In other words, only once social and political discourse has renounced its claim to authority and acknowledged its own fictionality as a "work of speech", only then can men perceive that "common unity" which lies beyond the oppositions which are inherent in existence because inherent in words. Ultimately of course Brewster was an anarchist, albeit of a strange variety, and the end of all this is a vision of a society in which men have learned to free themselves from the authority and power of langauge, because they have learned to regard all intellectual thought as a formal and poetic exercise carrying no ultimate authority. It is a Babel-like and artistically

conscious society in which men enjoy perfect freedom because they enjoy perfect freedom of expression.

To Ralph's criticism that he is merely setting up a "new god", Wilfred replies:

> You fear that my god of speech is only a false god? Perhaps
> he is as soon as I have named him; he certainly would be a
> false god if I assigned to him an independent position, the self-
> supporting virtue of and regal solitude of a principle. But, mark
> you, he is only a little chieftain. I have no desire to make the
> world we look at evolve out of speech. I am not talking of the
> world we see and touch. I am alluding to the world we think about,
> and I say that when we try to get it out of a mystical egg ... or
> a law, or a force, or a catagory, or whatever else you please ...
> at all such times we are misunderstanding the nature and over-
> stepping the boundaries of truth, which are ever fragmentary ...
> I simply deny the possibility of an all embracing point of view;
> I am a polytheist, deeming that no expression can be that of the
> total, and that any great doctrinal unity is a misuse of
> language. (p.33-34).

Ralph's accusation is itself a demonstration of the difficulty of freeing language from its inherent dogmatism and structural connotations: from its illusion of reference, which suggests that any theory must be based on a "self-supporting" principle and an objective reference in the world. There is not a God, but many gods.

"Syntactism", then, looks forward in obvious ways to the thought
of many twentieth century philosophers and psychologists: to Bergson,
Bakhtin, and Wittgenstein especially. In it the thinker sets up a fiction as
soon as he connects separate experiences, and that fiction is self-
referential in the sense that the reality it expresses is more than the sum
of the experiences connected, and is a combination of those experiences with
the speaker's own essence or temperament. It is, like the work of the
artist, a union of content and form:

> There is no complete life without some great lie of romance, some
>
> dream of love or grandeur, whose value is in its falseness. There
>
> is no idealless reality. There is no true world of here below unless
>
> there is, under some form or other, a kingdom of heaven. (p.39).

Dreams are necessary to existence because they are the formal work of the
imagination and make a coherent mental life possible. Significantly the
speaker here is Lothaire whose discourse has now deepened in response to the
dialogue, and he now recognises that even his faith is a fictional or verbal
artefact, though none the less valuable for that. He has become conscious of
form.

Once Wilfred's "syntactism" is elaborated, the rest of The
Theories of Anarchy is concerned with how the other three voices orientate
themselves and their philosophies towards this "primary reality of speech".
Lothaire's "mysticism" becomes "polytheism", "a many sided sympathy with the
whole", and a philosophy of love in which the notion of one god is
antithetical to love, because love is a total response to the whole of

creation and not just aspects of it. Harold's anarchism, also, is traced to the instinct of love:

> ... the instinct of love plays a great part in the rebellion we see growing around us against the law in all its forms.
>
> I can understand that natures in which this instinct is predominant should be incapable of accepting our system of thought; it is too analytical and too materialistic for them; our cut and dried social adjustments seem to them inexplicable. I do not think they can have the same feeling of personality as men who have the virtues and faults of dogmatic characters. If they are so made that whatever holds in one field of mental vision, whatever can be grasped in one thought, appears to them as a fragment of a reality that cannot be contained in any of its parts, it is that to them all perceptions wane into insignificance by the side of the fuller contact love gives them with reality. They say, with the Persian poet, "Listen to the flute lamenting itself in the stillness of the night: it wails because it is cut off from its bed of reeds" ... We all have moods of this depth. But with some they are just passing gusts, as when some popular enthusiasm or patriotic pride makes hearts that will be estranged tomorrow beat to a common pulse.
>
> In others they penetrate to the core, and will fashion the whole temperament. These are the lovers of eternity, in whose eyes our first and greatest error is the belief in a distinct personality, the notion and feeling of a primary self. (p.117-8).

Love is opposed to law, and issues in anarchy, because love's source is an intuitive response to the whole of another person or to mankind generally and is, therefore, beyond the negation which creates subject and object, the "me" and the "other". Harold's instinctive anarchism also becomes a philosophy of love in which love exists in the "silent interval" between people and is based on the recognition of the unique complex of fragmented passions and temperamental movements which obtain in every unique situation. Thus the destructive work of revolution becomes a creative work of love to emancipate man from the "tyranny of forms", and to replace accepted ideas of personality with an acknowledgement of the uniqueness and equal dependence of every individual on the forms of language. Love, therefore, depends upon an escape from language and Brewster's "love", the equivalent of Conrad's "feeling of solidarity", is beyond definition: beyond the descriptive power of words, and beyond the presciptive demands of law.

The dialogue continues in this way and elaborates the positions of the voices in response to each other and their own philosophies, until the whole performance ends with the one central point which Brewster himself sums up in an abstract summary:

> The above given opinions equally legitimate as natural products,
> but their value denied as expressions of truth; any attempt to
> decide between them is a misdirected effort. The error of
> criticism. Abstention from theories the result of particular
> conditions of thought, in which our interest is transferred
> from the contents to the mode of grouping of ideas.
> (punctuation as in original) (p.xii).

This describes, of course, the model of the philosophy of love and freedom of which The Theories of Anarchy becomes the vehicle. Brewster's attempts to place the reader at one remove from the debating voices, to prevent him from passively accepting what any one of them argues as "truth", is the equivalent to what he calls upon all men to do: to be conscious of the formal nature of all ideas and hence to be free of the "false god" of authority which "naming" creates. For Brewster, the way to freedom lies in a more self-conscious and direct use of language in which words are considered a "primary reality" which express human needs and which do not need the authority of a reference outside of themselves.

And this brings us back to my original subject. Given that Brewster was a philosophical anarchist, and given that his philosophy was based on this particular view of language, what is the anarchist theory of language as that could be derived from The Theories of Anarchy? Obviously it is not the same thing as "syntactism", but very close to it. "Syntactism's" principal notion that the source of all ideation and consecutive thinking can be found in the mechanics of language has several political consequences. The relationship between ideological statements and the empirical reality to which they refer is not a matter of simple representation, although the dogmatic systems in which we live make it appear as if it is. Indeed, the very notion that such a relationship can exist is itself a fiction and the product of man's desire to rule and tyrannize over his fellows (the only evil in Brewster's eyes). There can be no ideological reality in Volosinov's sense of that term, of language accurately reflecting the economic and social power basis, because the very

nature of the language which composes ideology is that it is structured by the desire to "connect"; whereas the structure of our experience of that basis is "disconnected". Neither does language properly reflect the relationships between people, because such relationships each involve a unique interaction between people on a level of temperament and the language that is used to describe them can only capture and rationalize aspects of them. The language of all ideation is a denial of reality and little to do with life as it is actually lived.

"Syntactism", therefore, issues in a political stance which is classically anarchist and which calls for a regression to a simplified form of society based on simplified forms of expression and communication, and marked by a resistence to the corrosive intellectual complexity of modern life. For the anarchist, the individual's search for integration into his society through intellectual "thought" and language is a self-defeating activity since it establishes the very oppositions, between the self and the other and between subject and object, which it ostensibly seeks to resolve. "Syntactism" is premised on the imagination of a different attitude to language use in which the speaker seeks, not to explain what is outside of him, but to discover himself in terms of the formal and aesthetic capacities of language. Amongst Brewster's papers the following interesting note was found:

> Myths are neither images of exterior realities *nor symbols of* interior ones. Their value lies in the collective desire they embody. A collective desire is neither an exterior fact nor an interior one; it effaces the distinction between the two by doing away with the

isolation of the individual. [16].

"Myths", the fictions upon which we base our social and political life, offer what one might call a positive loss of self in the sense that the individual's surrender to them is not coerced by an external authority, but a voluntary integration into society and a means of giving social expression and direction to individual "desire". Thus the real function of political language is to feed the imagination and to educate and direct desire. We should judge it not as a description of the world but as an expression of intention towards it: not by facts but by its aesthetic appeal and desirability, as we would a work of art offered up for our dispassionate critical appraisal.

So, according to "syntactism", to judge anarchism or anarchist "myth" by facts or empirical reality is a misunderstanding of how its discourse works and a dishonest application of a psuedo-scientific ideology. No wonder that anarchism seems a failure if what we judge it by is its ability to describe reality, when what it really seeks to do is to provide ideal forms to direct and "embody desire". No wonder anarchist "myth" seems incomprehensible if we take Shelley's vision of man, as "Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king over himself", as a description of man as he has been, is, or could be in history. A man cannot be "king over himself" since the word king represents a social power relation unavailable to the individual in relation to himself, but it would be pedantic and false to say that because of this we do not know what Shelley means. He is using words apart from their referential function to evoke certain human aspirations and

to construct an image or projection of their desired fulfillment. For the anarchist, the discourse of politics is identical to the discourse of art.

So the anarchist theory of language must be "syntactism" along with an active method which tells the activist how to frame his address to his fellow man. It is like a version of the ideological method which turns back upon itself and denies its own authority; with a very eclectic system of values thrown in, and all scientific pretentions thrown out. It unmasks ideology as a rationalization of desire and leads to a theory of propagandistic language use which, forsaking all claims to objective reference, addresses the passions and imagination of men very directly. Thus the creation of a revolutionary state of mind in the masses depends upon the ability of propagandists to provide "myths" adequate to their subconscious desire:

> These results (the revolutionary state of mind in the proletariat) could not be produced in any certain manner by the use of ordinary language; use must be made of a body of images which, by intuition alone, and before any considered analysis be made, is capable of evoking in an undivided whole the mass of sentiments which corresponds to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by socialism against modern society. [17].

The writer here is Georges Sorel. His point is that in response to the fragmented nature of experience, and of the "sentiments" to which it gives rise, the role of the revolutionary is to provide a poetic framework or "myth" which aims to gather up into an "undivided whole", fuse, and formally express all the seperate frustrations and desires felt by the individual in

society. For Sorel, whose writings are full of theatrical imagery, politics is a form of art and the revolutionary is like the dramatist in that he must unite and move his audience en masse solely by the presentation of fictions.

II.

> ... the system of the laws of justice is the same as the system of the laws of the world, and they are present in the human soul not only as ideas or concepts but as emotions or feelings.
>
> Proudhon. [18].

Strange though his vision of the world is, Henry Brewster could be said to represent the positive side of the anarchist struggle for ideals in the world: the optimism born of the hopeful idea that the world can be changed simply by a change in our understanding of language. If so, then Georges Sorel can be said to represent the reverse side of that idea: the fear that language will replace action as the principal means of man's engagement with the world and making of history. All of Sorel's works are marked by a fierce resistance to what he saw as the "decadent" and "effete" intellectualism of the modern world, in which human free will and the aspiration towards greatness is smothered under a "veil" of linguistic and ideological complexity: in which words, and the "illusory" philosophies which they are used to construct, merely intimidate the individual intellectually and discourage him from action against the "authorized" structures of society. In response to this, Sorel saw the purpose of the

social revolutionary as the formulation of propaganda in the form of "social poetry" [19] or "myths" which are aesthetic and not intellectual products, and which aim to gather up and direct the will of the masses towards some "epic" moral and historical goal: constructions of words which inspire rather than replace action.

Sorel is of interest to us here because his work represents, to some extent, the attempt to systematically develop the practical consequences of the anarchist attitude to language; and because, in doing so, the vision of the world that emerges from his work comes curiously close to fascism in the way it aetheticizes politics. Like Dostoyevsky's Shigalyov, whose "solution to the social formula" moves from "unlimited freedom" to "unlimited despotism" [20], Sorel illustrates perfectly that seemingly unbridgable gap between words and deeds, between fantasy and reality, that exists in politics. In Sorel we can see all the "irreconcilable antagonisms" [21] inherent in the anarchist position which force him, in a sense, to step back from the political world and assume a stance towards it resembling that of the artist comunicating with men through a different use of language. Thus, in order to resolve the conflict between his despair at what men are and his vision of what men could be, Sorel constructs imaginary scenarios for the future: "images" of struggle which rehearse man's aspiration to fight against his present condition and attain a moral grandeur; "myths" which are not models or blueprints for the future, but simply the embodiment of the feeling of being presently engaged in a creative struggle for a high moral cause.

Sorel does not require quite the introduction so necessary for Brewster, since there has been some recent interest in his work which recognises him as an original and interesting thinker. He began his intellectual career quite late in life, publishing his first article at the age of thirty-nine, and not until he was forty did he retire from his career as an engineer to devote himself to writing. Even so he produced an enormous quantity of books and articles which covered everything from biblical commentary to theories of revolutionary anarchism, and which have been claimed to have influenced figures as diverse as Lenin and Mussolini [22]. Influences upon him are also diverse: Marx, Bergson, and William James, but predominantly the puritanical moralist strain in socialism, most obviously embodied by Proudhon.

Sorel's public career was very erratic and he was seen, at different times, as an anarchist, a Marxist, and later in life as a fascist. He would perhaps have denied all of these perceptions of his position, for behind his rapidly changing interests was a consistent view of ideology, even the ones he espoused, as ultimately no more than a tool or method with which to work upon people's perception of reality, but in no sense an objective account or explanation of it. His changes of political allegiance do not reflect changes of principle so much as episodes in his search for an effective means of propaganda. Thus in 1906 Sorel was a revolutionary syndicalist and a proponent of the "myth of the general strike", but this did not exhaust his view of ultimate social and political truth. "In accepting the idea of the general strike", he wrote in _Reflections on Violence_, "all the while knowing it to be a myth, we are operating exactly

like a modern physicist who has full confidence in his science, all the while knowing that the future will consider it antiquated" (p.220). Sorel often employed images from the physical sciences to illustrate his view of all human thought processes. The precise sciences create knowledge on the basis of models men construct and produce: the physicist, for example, constructs models for experiments which create an "artificial nature" which is closed off from the rest of "natural nature". Such an isolation inevitably changes the nature of the thing under investigation and so gives us only a partial and temporary view of reality; and, most importantly, makes an all embracing point of view impossible. Similarly, the theories of the social and political thinker create an "artificial nature": a vision of the world which is structured, not by the world itself, but by the models or patterns of human thought. Such theories must be judged, therefore, not on the basis of "truth" but of their moral and aethetic effect; and so any ideological position that Sorel assumed was only provisional and temporary, and strikes one as a kind of theatrical role through which he attempted to express his own individual view of life. Yet it was in relation to anarchist syndicalism that he elaborated most clearly his theory of propaganda and the political "myth" and so it is to the major work of his syndicalist period that I shall turn: to Reflections on Violence, first published in French in 1906.

Sorel's conception of life, of which this work is an expression, was constructed upon two basic principles. The first, shaped by the influence of Bergson, but instinctive in its intensity, was the belief that life was inherently chaotic and so could not be reduced to any unified

theoretical formula: no laws or purposes of human behaviour can be posited

and believed as anything but a temporary hypothesis, because life itself is

a continually changing phenomena. Sorel therefore directs the attention

always towards the present moment in which the creative act occurs in the

world and changes everything which came before it, including human

consciousness. In Bergson's terms, which Sorel freely borrowed, life is a

constant movement from present to future or a constant process of becoming:

> In order to acquire a real understanding of ... psychology we must
>
> "carry ourselves back in time to those moments of our life, when we
>
> made some serious decision, moments unique of their kind, which will
>
> never be repeated -- any more than the past phases in the history of
>
> a nation will ever come back". It is very evident that we enjoy this
>
> liberty pre-eminently when we are making an effort to create a new
>
> individuality in ourselves, thus endeavouring to break the bonds of
>
> habit which encloses us. It might at first be supposed that it would
>
> be sufficient to say that we are dominated by an overwhelming
>
> emotion; but everybody now recognises that movement is the essence
>
> of emotional life, and it is then, in terms of movement that we must
>
> speak of creative consciousness. (p.55) [23].

Consciousness only arises in the process of creation: in the movement from

one state of affairs to another, which involves the destruction of the

"bonds of habit" and the creation of a "new individuality". This leads to

the second principle of Sorel's thought which is that now old fashioned

insistence upon morality as the primary motivation of social and political

action, and the dependence of "lofty moral convictions" not upon "reasoning

or any education of the individual will, but upon a state of war in which

men voluntarily participate and which finds expression in well-defined

myths" (p.254) [24]. It was in the tension between these two principles,

seeing life as a chaotic flux and the need for a well entrenched moral

position, that Sorel elaborated his theory of a "language of movement" which

can be seen as a practical extension of Brewster's "syntactism".

In a classically anarchist manner, Sorel's thought describes a

kind of backlash against the false complexity and rigid intellectualism of

the modern world, and the corresponding reversion to an idealized vision of

a primitive form of human society. Thus in The Illusions of Progress,

published in the same year as Reflections on Violence, Sorel attacked the

"charlatan dogma" of progress which he saw as a source of confusion and

moral weakness in modern society, since truly creative action can only be

possible outside of the action of determining historical forces and in a

perceived state of undecided war. Like Sanguinetti, one of Sorel's main

concerns was to "unmask" the ideology of democracy as a static

rationalization of certain interests or groups within society:

> Democracy is succeeding in throwing minds into a state of confusion,
>
> preventing many intelligent people from seeing things as they truly
>
> are, because democracy is served by apologists who are clever in the
>
> art of beclouding questions. This is due to cunning language, smooth
>
> sophistry, and a great array of scientific declamations. It is above
>
> all of democratic times that it can be said that humanity is governed
>
> by the magical power of impressive words rather than by ideas, by
>
> slogans rather than by reason, and by dogmas whose origin no one

thinks of looking into rather than by doctrines founded on
observation. [25].

Democracy creates only "confusion" because its "cunning" and vitiating
rhetoric obscures man's existential and political freedom behind a
philosophical rationalist discourse: a discourse which leads to quietism and
"moral lethargy" because it alienates the individual from his own creative
responsibility and denies the fluid nature of life itself:

> ... a philosophy of history appeared which took its definitive form
>
> at the time of the liberal bourgeosie and which had for its object
>
> to show that the changes undertaken by the champions of the modern
>
> state possess a character of necessity. Now we have descended to the
>
> arena of electioneering tommyrot that permits demagogues to have all
>
> powerful direction over their supporters and assure them a successful
>
> life. Sometimes, polite republicans try to conceal the horror of this
>
> political system under philosophical appearances, but the veil is
>
> easy to tear apart ... One of the tasks of contemporary socialism is
>
> to demolish this superstructure of conventional lies and to destroy
>
> the prestige still accorded to the metaphysics of the men who
>
> vulgarize the vulgarization of the eighteenth century. (p.152).

The "vulgarization" to which Sorel objects here is the outcome of the notion
that there is a law of history or a definable direction in which it tends:
that the fractured and war-like conditions of existence can be contained and
expressed in any one of its parts or phases. For Sorel, any such belief is a
gross simplification of reality and a denial of the dignity of human life
itself, and the true task of socialism is the rescuing of life from this

vulgarity. Socialism is, therefore, nothing less than the moral regeneration of the world and an essential part of its process is the destruction of the linguistic superstitions which disguise man's true position as a free and potentially creative being.

Having said this, however, it is important to be clear about exactly what Sorel meant by "socialism". As we can see, in The Illusions of Progress, Sorel employed the ideological method against democracy in the cause of socialism, but what he understood by socialism was not so much a coherent political system based on equal property or rights as the dominant focus for opposition to the current political system at the time that he lived. What he valued was not the future political system that socialism outlined, so much as the moral opposition to the status quo for which it became a focus. His real ideal was of life as a permanent revolution and struggle in which the most basic and primitive virtues are foremost: life as a continuous process of "ricorso" [26], when "the popular soul returns to a primitive state, when everything is instinctive, creative, and poetic". Socialism, he believed, "could not claim to renew the world if it did not take the same form" [27].

Thus his use of the ideological method against democratic ideology is, in a sense, the model of his opposition to all theoretical ideas which "vulgarize" life by suggesting that it can be explained in terms of predictable and definable laws; including, of course, the idea of the historical inevitability of the socialist revolution out of which the method first arose. Like Brewster's "syntactism", Sorel's ideas turn back upon themselves and deny their own authority. His intention is the exposure of

all intellectual theory, and all intellectual language, as merely obscuring

man's real moral freedom and the real conditions in which he lives. Thus in

Reflections on Violence, perhaps his most important work, he devoted his

intention to the method of propaganda which was to bring this exposure

about.

Reflections on Violence is on one level an apology for violence

and the attempt to establish it as the true language of politics. "It is to

violence", he wrote, "that socialism owes those high ethical values by means

of which it brings _salvation_ to the modern world" (p.249),(emphasis in

original); in response to a society run by demagogues, in which the spread

of revolutionary ideas was limited by the "superstructure of conventional

lies", the revolutionary must transfer the formulation of ideas from

intellectual into "sentimental" and spectacular terms. Inevitably that

involves some brutality, and the idea that violence is integrally wrong was

therefore opposed by Sorel:

> Everybody agrees that the disappearance of the old brutalities is
>
> an excellent thing. From this opinion it is easy to pass to the idea
>
> that all violence is an evil, that this step was bound to have been
>
> taken; and, in fact, the great mass of people, who are not accustomed
>
> to thinking, have come to this conclusion, which is accepted nowadays
>
> as dogma by the bleating herd of moralists. They have not asked them-
>
> selves what there is in brutality which is reprehensible. (p.213).

The point that Sorel is making here is an important one to the understanding

of anarchist propaganda. Violence is a characterizing feature of life

itself: it is inherent in man's "battle" against natural conditions and in

the social structures wherein men "battle" with each other. He therefore
differentiates between "old brutalities" and "violence" on the basis of
their moral and imaginative effect. The former are gratuitous acts of
violence committed outside of any purposeful "mythic" framework and as a
result of the conditions in which men live under capitalism: they are acts
without political effect and include all the negative violences and
destruction, like machine-breaking and cruelty to men of one's own class,
which are caused by undirected frustration. The latter, however, are acts of
violence against men of a different class and are the true language of
politics which promotes the consciousness of the true conditions, the state
of war, in which men exist. They are the source of that "body of images"
which the proagandist aims to orchestrate into political "myths", giving
each act of violence a purposeful dimension and real moral force.

Yet violence is only a part, not the end of Sorel's theory of
political language, and its real importance lies in the fact that it
provides imagery for the revolution, rather than in anything it may achieve.
The disjunction between words and deeds in politics is complete for Sorel,
and so even an apparently "real" political phenomenon like class warfare is
only a verbal and mental reality which occurs on a linguistic level and not
necessarily on the plane of empirical fact. Thus Marx's description of the
collapse of capitalism, and the violent class struggle which attends upon
it, is "social poetry" and "metaphysical social myth" which creates the
reality, emotional and ideological reality, which it apparently describes.
It is not what words describe, but what they do which interests Sorel:

... myths are not descriptions of things, but expressions of an

intention to act ... contemporary myths lead men to prepare

themselves for a combat which will destroy the existing state of

things ... A myth cannot be refuted, since it is, at bottom,

identical with the convictions of a group, being the expressions

of these convictions in the language of movement; and it is, in

consequence, unanalysable into parts which could be placed on the

plane of historical descriptions. (p.57-58).

Unlike Utopian ideals which are intellectual products, "myths" cannot be

refuted because the political reality they describe is psychological in its

nature and a result of the images of which they are composed. The power of

words was greater for Sorel than for the conventional Marxist, for he saw

ideas as arising independently of matter in the realms of dreams and fantasy

and being adopted and adapted by interests groups within society rather than

being directly caused or invented by them. Words, therefore, are not just

rationalizations of material forces, but expressions of the human will and

they can have a very real effect in the world when the propagandist forms

them into "myths", like the "myth of the general strike" as it is adopted by

the prolatariat as a tool to express its "self-interested aspirations".

"Myths" are constructions of words which empower humanity to act upon the

world: a means of providing a symbolic rather than an objective knowledge,

sufficient for our practical ends and abandoning all claims to truth:

The myth must be judged as a means of acting upon the present; any

attempt to discuss how far it can be taken literally as future

history is devoid of sense. It is the myth in its entirety which is

alone important: its parts are only of interest in so far as they

bring out the main idea ... We know that the general strike is indeed

what I have said: the myth in which socialism is wholly comprised,

i.e. a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the

sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the

war undertaken by socialism against modern society. Strikes have

engendered in the prolatariat the noblest, deepest and most moving

sentiments that they possess; the general strike groups them all in a

co-ordinated picture, and, by bringing them together, gives to each

one of them its maximum of intensity; appealing to their memory of

particular conflicts, it colours with an intense life all the details

of the composition presented to consciousness. We thus obtain that

intuition of socialism which language cannot give us with perfect

clearness-- and we obtain it as a whole, perceived instantaneously.

(p. 144-5).

Here is the essence of the anarchist view of language and the theory of

propaganda which issues from it. Language, when used referentially or to

"represent" something outside of itself, is inadequate to the anarchist

vision because anarchism addresses the human will and aims to destroy the

formal distinctions between dreams and life, fantasy and reality. Like

Brewster, Sorel works from the assumptions of a primitivistic, pre-

rationalistic psychology in which man perceives the world, and his desires

in relation to it, in terms which are essentially poetic and imagistic

rather than logical and rational. The "reality" of any wish for change or

revolution, being a product of material conditions combined with human

willing, can therefore only be grasped by the intuition "as a whole" in what

are concrete images rather than logical concepts; "artistic images intended

to make or assimulate an idea" [28] rather than transparent words. Such

images exist neither wholly in the world nor wholly in the mind, but, like

art, in a formal dimension of their own. Thus Sorel rejects "ordinary

language" as a tool for "acting in the present", in favour of a more

concrete form of discourse which actually embodies and creates its own

referent. Notice Sorel's terminology here: "a co-ordinated picture",

"maximum of intensity", "appeals to the memory". What he is describing is an

aesthetic use of language and a form of activity for the political

revolutionary which is, in all essentials, identical to the work of the

literary artist.

III.

It would seem, then, that the anarchist theory of language, if

one chooses to construct such a thing out of otherwise unconnected works,

would be like an amalgam of the linguistic ideas of Bakunin, Brewster and

Sorel. As a critical perspective upon the way we think about the world, it

challenges the very notion of objectivity. For the anarchist, all thought is

subjective in the sense that all of our thoughts are expressions of our will

to power: are reflections, not of the world, but of what we want the world

to be. Any ideological position that we assume is, therefore, an attempt to

take power over the world and to impose our dreams upon it. For the

anarchist, the political world is a mental and verbal arena in which

ideologies contend for supremecy. Nothing particularly revolutionary about

that: but, the anarchist goes on to argue, all of these ideologies are

equally valuable as expressions of human ideals, equally worthless as guides

to action, and equally evil as attempts to take control over others. As a

way of demonstrating this, the anarchist aims to expose and attack the

assumptions which lie behind all philosophical and political discourse: to

subvert the implication of knowledge and authority which rational and

intellectual language tends to bring with it, as if it were a scientific

discourse or as if the words of which it is composed worked in direct

reference to objective facts in the world. He points out that this is not

the case: that such language formulates but does not describe experience and

is always, to some extent a "fictitious" rearrangement of life. Intellectual

language is a purely formal element of our consciousness and is valuable for

the sense of shape and coherence it gives to our lives. That value, however,

is what also makes it worthless, since life, for the anarchist, is a chaotic

flux and a permanent revolution of forms; and the problem with language is

that it always seems to claim to be true outside of the conditions which

created it and thereby tends to impose static and outmoded forms on life.

This, of course, is what makes language a potential source of evil in the

world: the effect of such impositions is to misrepresent the way that life

and history actually work, to promote confusion in the minds of one's fellow

man, and to thereby alienate him from his own free creativity.

As a way of providing a solution to these problems, the

anarchist theory of language outlines a different understanding of language

in which our attention is directed as much to the form as to the content of

any statement and in which we are thereby freed from the authority of other people's voices. Anarchist propaganda, therefore, is directed to the promotion of this formal consciousness and employs a very self-consciously over-wrought rhetoric: a rhetoric which, by virtue of its violent extremes of expression, draws attention to the role that human will and emotion play in our judgements of what the world is or what it could be. Anarchist propaganda aims to move mankind through the formal arrangement of images.

It is easy to see, then, why literary theories of language use would be attractive to the anarchist as a way of contacting men on an individual level outside of the reach of social authority and power. Similarly, one can see why anarchist political theories would be attractive to the artist as a way of placing his own practise of constructing fictions in the mainstream of social life. Such ideas solve his alienation and set up the power of linguistic invention as the primary source of social and political power. Also, of course, the writer is uniquely free, under the license of art, to indulge in and express anarchistic visions of the world while maintaining a formal commitment to his society. For the artist the temptations of anarchism must have been strong, and in the following chapters I intend to show that for many writers who we would not usually think of as anarchists it was too strong: that, consciously or not, even conservative writers flirted with anarchism.

*

<i>Notes:</i>

1. From "The Old Society-- And The New", included in George Woodcock's
   <u>The Anarchist Reader</u> (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p.290.

2. The description of Kropotkin is Oscar Wilde's in <u>De Profundis and</u>
   <u>Other Writings</u> (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.80. That of Nechaev
   is by Natalie Herzen and is taken from "The Diary of Natalie Herzen"
   [(<u>Encounter</u> XXXIV, No.5, May 1970), p.21].

   Nechaev was, of course, the author of the infamous pamphlet, the
   "Catachism of a Revolutionary", in which he declared himself "an
   implacable enemy of the world". He is also thought to be responsible
   for another pamphlet, the "Principles of Revolution", which argues
   that the revolutionary must exist only in violent action:

   > We recognize no other activity but the work of extermination,
   > but we admit that the forms in which this activity will show
   > itself will be extremely varied-- poison, the knife, the rope etc.
   > In this struggle, revolution sanctifies everything alike.
   > [cited by E.H.Carr in <u>Michael Bakunin</u> (London: Macmillan, 1937),
   > p.379].

   The tremendous appeal of Nechaev's brand of direct action and revolutionary
   fervour can be gauged by the influence he held over Bakunin and his
   followers in the late 1860's and early 1870's. He also, of course, became
   the model for Dostoyevsky's Peter Verkhovensky in <u>The Possessed</u>.
   Dostoyevsky acknowledged his own attraction for Nechaev's mixture of

brutality and seductive charm both in the novel and in his autobiographical writings: "I could never have become a *Nachaev*, but a follower of Nachaev, I am not certain; it may be that I could have ... in the days of my youth." [The Diary of a Writer vol.1., trans. Boris Brasol (London: Cassell, 1949), p.147]. More recently Nachaev became a hero for Eldridge Cleaver and the Black Panthers.

3. Francois-Claudius Ravachol achieved legendary status when he placed bombs in the houses of the prosecutor and judge in an industrial dispute case, in which workers had received harsh treatment. His actions inspired many imitators and his name became a verb: to "ravacholiser" meant "to blow up". At his trial he received extenuating circumstances, because he had for many years supported his mother and family after his father's desertion. However, it emerged several months later that he had also strangled a hermit to death for money and, in July 1892, he was executed. At his second trial Ravachol established the model for anarchist court appearances and assumed the role of the accuser and victim of a society which had made his violent actions a necessity of his very survival. He swore that he would be avenged and, in the spate of terrorist attacks that followed, he was.

Gandhi, of course, needs no such introduction; but it is worth stating here that he was an anarchist. Gandhi was heavily influenced by Thoreau's trancendental philosophy and ideal of civil disobedience; and, as his career developed, he came to identify that ideal with anarchism: "The ideally non-violent state will be an ordered anarchy."

[cited by George Woodcock in <u>Gandhi</u> (Glasgow: Fontana, 1972), p.80).

4. Henry James, <u>The Notes of a Son and brother</u> (London: Macmillan, 1914), p.409.

5. This information is derived from Martin Halpern's <u>The Life and Writings of Henry B. Brewster</u> (Doctoral Thesis: Harvard University, 1957). So far as I know, Halpern is the only person to have recieved access to what remains of Brewster's letters and papers and to have spoken to his, then, remaining relatives (unfortunately Henry James is known to have burnt a large amount of correspondence from Brewster). Unless otherwise indicated, Halpern is the source of all the biographical information on Brewster that I use in this chapter (hereafter, <u>Halpern</u>).

6. The texts refered to are: <u>Halpern</u>, as above; Father M.C.D'arcy, <u>Image and Truth</u> (London: Heinneman, 1935); and Ethyl Symth, <u>Impressions that remained: The Memoirs of Ethyl Smyth</u> (London: Longmans, 1923) (hereafter, <u>Impressions</u>).

7. <u>Impressions</u>, p.42.

8. All published in London by Northgate and Williams. <u>The Prison</u> was later published by Heinneman.

9. Ethyl Smyth, introductory memoir to <u>The Prison</u> (London: Heinnneman,

1938), p.27.

Smyth is the only contemporary of Brewster to have left any
substantial information on the kind of man he was. Unfortunately
her love for him tends to colour her account and cause it to
focus predominantly on his relationship with his wife. However, she
does provide an amusing picture of the imaginative and eccentric
Brewsters who locked themselve away from the world in order to
experience as many sensations as possible. His wife, the daugther of a
prominant German politician, had high hopes for her husband:

> Her (Julia) great idea is that he is to be a sort of prophet,
>
> for which reason she encourages him in the bad habit of
>
> stooping from the neck, declaring it makes him look scholarly
>
> and unsmart! On the same lines she, the diplomat's daughter,
>
> is fond of assuring him that he has not the knack of associating
>
> with his fellow creatures, but this I think is partly because
>
> she herself loathes the world and wants his company in a dual
>
> solitude. (_Impressions_, p.108).

The idea of Brewster that emerges from Smyth is of a somewhat
reluctant other-worldly dreamer. His wife's hope that he would become
a "prophet" is toned down by Smyth; who recognizes his limitations at the
same time as evincing an obvious respect for his thought:

> Henry Brewster, holder of views unworkable in the social scheme as
>
> we know it, writer of books which, though full of passages and pages
>
> of incomparable beauty, can only appeal to the few; Henry Brewster,
>
> able at a touch to ease even a stranger's burden; Henry Brewster, one

of the wise men of the world! ... His life, an uneventful one, will

never be written, but some day, through what agency I know not, his

letters-- letters unlike any others-- will be edited. And I think too

that in the fullness of time, maybe many, many years hence, someone

will stumble across the mine of his thought and work it ...

(*Impressions*, p.263-4).

10. Letter to Ethyl Smyth of 6-2-1891. *Halpern*, p.149-50.

11. Letter to Julia Brewster of 9-5-1886. *Halpern*, p.152.

12. *The Theories of Anarchy and of Law* (London: Northgate and Williams,
    1887), p.2. All page references in the text are to this, the only,
    edition.

13. For a discussion of the links between Brewster and Conrad see
    chapter 7.

14. According to Smyth in her introduction to *The Prison*.

15. *Impressions*, p.466.

16. *Halpern*, p.309.

17. Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. T.E.Hulme and J.Roth

(Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p.50. All page references in the text
are to this edition.

18. Proudhon, Selected Writings ed. Stewart Edwards and trans. Elizabeth Fraser
(London: Macmillan, 1970), p.230.

19. Sorel uses this term in relation to Marx's description of the
collapse of capitalism, which he describes as "social poetry" or
"metaphysical social myth". In fact, his major contribution to Marxist
thought emerged from this willingness to acknowledge its religious
dimensions and to see its theoretical scenarios, not as the "scientific"
descriptions they claimed to be, but as "artistic images
intended to make or assimulate an idea" [from "Materiaux d'une
theorie du Proletariat", cited by J.R.Jennings in George Sorel
(London: Macmillan, 1985), p.189].

20. Shigalyov is Dostoyevsky's parody of the language of scientific
dialectics which reads its theories into, rather than out of,
the world. In the chapter "At Virginsky's", Shigalyov reveals the
findings of ten years of intensive academic research:

> I am afraid I got rather muddled up in my own data, and my
> conclusion is in direct contradiction to the original idea
> with which I start. Starting from unlimited freedom, I
> arrived at unlimited despotism. I will add, however, that
> there can be no other solution of the social formula than

mine. [The Devils, trans. David Magarshack (Harmondsworth:
Penguin, 1953), p.404].

21. The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad ed. F.R.Karl and L.Davies
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), Vol.2, p.348.

22. Such was the diversity of Sorel's influence (or maybe the ultimate
similarity of all political ideologies) that, shortly before
the tenth anniversary of his death, his relatives were approached
by the governments of The Soviet Union and the then fascist Italy,
who competed to erect a memorial to him in his home town of
Cherbourg. His family approved neither, and no memorial was built.
    Musolini said of him: "I owe most to George Sorel. This
master of syndicalism, by his rough theories of revolutionary
tactics, has contributed most to the discipline, energy, and
power of the fascist cohorts" [cited by Edward Shils in his
introduction to Reflections on Violence, as above, p.28).

23. In order to grasp exactly what Sorel means here, Bergson's notion of
the elan vital is useful. For Bergson, "duration" is graped only by the
intuition and that is the sense which allows us to see the world in time:
to conceive of it as a plastic manifestation in a state of flux. The
intellect can only grasp the discrete and individual forms passed through,
but not the motion itself. There is, in Bergson's words, "... more in a
becoming than in the forms passed through in turn, more in the evolution

of forms than the forms assumed one after another" [Creative Evolution (New York: Modern Library, 1944), p.343]. The intellect is thus, as it was for Sorel, an imperfect tool for understanding life.

24. The extent of Proudhon's influence upon Sorel can be detected most easily in the stern and violent moralism they shared and argued for. Sorel's vision of the "general strike" was the ideal modern image of a condition of naked strife and battle that, for Proudhon, was the basis of all morality and human greatness:

> To me it is clear that war is linked at a very deep level and in a way that we are just beginning to understand, with man's sense of religion, justice, beauty, and morality. War is the basis of our history, our life and our whole being. It is, I repeat, everything ... people speak of abolishing war as they would taxes or customs duties. They do not see that if man takes away war, nothing in his past remains, and not an atom is left on which to build the future. I would ask these inept peacemakers, as I myself was once asked in connection with property, "what sort of society do you envisage once you have abolished war? What will become of mankind in a state of permanent siesta?" Selected Writings, as above, p.207.

25. The Illusions of Progress (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p.xiv. All page references in the text are to this edition.

26. The primitive moralism of Sorel's thought can, perhaps, most easily

   be understood in relation to his influence by the work of the

   eigtheenth century Italian thinker Giambattista Vico. Vico saw

   history as developing in spirals: in cycles of the decline and

   rebirth, "corso" and "ricorso", of civilization. He was certainly

   no anarchist, but shared with the anarchists a deep distrust of

   complex political systems and particulary of what he saw as the

   vitiating legalism and rhetoric of "democratic" societies. His ideas

   look forward to those of the Situationists and, particularly, to

   their use of that post-modern notion of hyper-reality or "spectacle",

   in which the "real" becomes subordinate to its representation in the

   media of communication.

   For Vico, civilization inherently contains the seeds of its own

   destruction and at the hieght of its development will always fall

   back into a primitive state. Like Sorel, he used the example of the

   decline of classical civilization to illustrate his point that

   advanced political democracies promote their own corruption and

   decline through their development of a dominant political and

   intellectual discourse of unity and progress. The purpose of such a

   discourse is, of course, to impose order on chaos and to provide the

   sort of bonding which defines a human community. Ironically, however,

   Vico believed that all that this really achieves is the promotion of

   a sophisticated ironic consciousness in the mass of the people: a

   consciousness of the gap between words and deeds; or between the

   vision of the legally unified and peaceful society constructed by public

discourse, and the actual facts of human competitiveness and inequality. Once this ironic consciousness is established, when philosophy has descended to scepticism and public discourse to eristic, then words lose their meaning and the decline of civilization begins:

... as the popular states became corrupt, so did the philosophies. They descended to scepticism. Learned fools fell to calumniating the truth. Thence arose a false eloquence, ready to uphold either of the opposed sides of a case indifferently. Thus it came about that, by abuse of eloquence like that of the tribunes of the plebs at Rome, when the citizens were no longer content with making wealth the basis of rank, they strove to make of it an instrument of power. And as the furious south winds whip up the sea, so these citizens provoked civil wars in their commonwealths and drove them to total disorder. Thus they caused the commonwealths to fall from a perfect liberty into the perfect tyranny of anarchy or the unchecked liberty of the free people ...

The democratic ideology of Rome engendered its own destruction and fostered a return to barbarism, "in ... those unhappy centuries (when) the nations reverted to communicating with each other in a mute language". It did so because it established a system of public representation in which the representation of virtue became more socially important than the existence of virtue: in which the actions of groups or individuals within society are judged more in relation to how they are described in a public context, than to what they actually do. Moral choices, the choices which determine the character of society, are

thus transformed into purely verbal actions and civilized society is
thereby undone by the very sophistication of that distinction, between the
public and the private, which is the basis of its civil order:

> If the people are rotting in that ultimate civil disease and
> cannot agree on a monarch from within, and are not conquered
> and preserved by better nations from without, then providence
> for their extreme ill has an extreme remedy at hand. For such
> people, like so many beasts, have fallen into the custom of
> each man thinking only of his private interests and have
> reached extreme delicacy, or better of pride, in which like
> wild animals they bristle and lash out at the slightest
> displeasure. Thus no matter how great the throng and press of
> their bodies, they live like wild beasts in a deep solitude of
> spirit and will, scarsely any two being able to agree since
> each follows his own pleasures or caprice ... In this way,
> through long centuries of barbarism, rust will consume their
> misbegotten subtleties of malicious wits that have turned them
> into beasts made more inhuman by the barbarism of reflection
> than the first men had been made by the barbarism of sense.
> [cited by Hayden White in "The Tropics of History: The deep
> Structure of the New Science"; collected in Giambattista Vico's
> Science of Humanity, ed. Tagliacozzo and Philip (Baltmore and
> London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.81-2]

Vico resembles the anarchists in this insistence on the "barbarism of
reflection" in a complex political system, which uses language to

clothe its vicious exploitation and conflict in an acceptable

representation. His apocalyptic notion of "corso" and "ricorso",

whereby "in the returned barbarian times the nations again become

(analphabetical or) mute in vulgar speech" before the conditions

for virtue are re-established, is one in which the capacity for

irony in language is a measure of the level of corruption in society.

It is a model of social development which can be clearly related

to that anarchistic insistence on destruction as a precondition for

creative action and to the notion of the need for a new language of action

which re-unites the word and deed.

Sorel and his friend, the Italian socialist Bendetto Croce, were important

influences in establishing Vico as a significant political thinker in the

early years of this century. Sorel's relationship Vico is similar in many

respects to his relationship to Marx in that while he rejected his notion

of "corso" and "ricorso" as over deterministic, he nevertheless respected

Vico greatly. Sorel wrote of him that "Great men have the good fortune

that their errors are fertile and merit being studied with the greatest

care" [from "Le Devenir Social" (1896) cited by Jennings, as above]. The

results of Sorel's study of Vico can most clearly be seen in his

conception of moral action and value as emerging only out of a

situation of naked strife and conflict unmediated by intellectual, and

hence ironic, discourse. "Ricorso" became, for Sorel, another source for

that mythical and poetic language he sought to describe his vision of

the "epic" potentials of human nature..

27. From "Le Syndicalisme Revolutionaire". Cited by Jennings, as above, p.273.

28. See note 19.

_____

PART TWO:

Anarchism and Popular Fictions.

Whatever form of mental degradation I may (being but
human) be suffering from, it is not the popular form.
I am not gullible.

                              Conrad, "An Anarchist" [1].

Notes:
1. A Set of Six (London: Methuen, 1908), p.122.

Chapter Four:

Introduction:

The Myths of the Revolution, 1880-1910.

In 1866, the brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, reflecting
upon the events of the French Revolution and upon the hopes and
aspirations which were expressed at that time, could only conclude with
a disenchanted and bitter dismissal of their significance:

> And what hypocrisy, what lies, this revolution was made up of!
>
> The mottoes, the walls, the speeches, the stories-- everything
>
> was then a lie. *The humbug of the Revolution*: there is a book
>
> to be written! ... Is there one fact about the Revolution that
>
> patriotism and party passions and journalism have not turned
>
> into legend? ... And out of all the gulls and simpletons in
>
> society and in the streets who have their catechism of the
>
> Bastille by heart, how many know the number of prisoners that
>
> these horrible and devouring dungeons actually released to
>
> the light of day? Three, wasn't it? or was it four? [1].

Echoing Metternich's famous formulation, "all revolutions are lies" [2],
the de Goncourts were unjustly unmindful of the real problems and needs
that the revolution addressed in French society. Yet their pessimistic
attitude towards it is nevertheless of interest to me here as a kind of
conservative parallel to the type of ideas and visions which, as we have
seen in preceding chapters, possessed the minds of many revolutionary

thinkers in the later nineteenth century: thinkers who were themselves heavily influenced by the lessons of the French Revolution.

The de Goncourts were, of course, reacting not so much to the fact as to the myth of the Revolution: to its transformation into a heroic "legend" by the lying "passions" of men, so that the "actual" facts and realities of the time are lost sight of within a network of fantasies and "lies". Indeed, their vision of a Babel-like public world, where the "mottoes, the walls, the speeches, the stories" overwhelm direct perception, can be seen as a grim realization of the linguistically revitalized and "poetic" post-revolutionary society envisaged some forty years later by their fellow Frenchman, Georges Sorel. His ideal was of a society structured and dominated by precisely the type of "myths" and "epic" fictions that the de Goncourts dismiss as "hypocrisy" and "lies".

It would seem that between the revolutionary and the conservative there is an antagonism of vision which can be accounted for only in terms of their differing emotional or instinctive reactions to the world; yet it is interesting that at the centre of the criticism of both types of thinker lies that same acknowledgement or fear of the power of myths and fictions in the social organization of our lives. In times of great or potentially great social and political change, fictions or "lies" become formidable political forces which transform our understanding of the world and, hence, the world itself. In looking back at such times it is, therefore, never possible to clearly and objectively distinguish between the myths themselves and the "reality" which they are said to represent.

My intention then, in this section of the thesis, is to give
an account of a large body of popular fictional and journalistic
writings about the prospect of revolution, which appeared in England
during the latter years of the nineteenth century and the early part of
the twentieth. At this time, of course, England was not going through
such a great political upheaval as the French Revolution, but it was a
time when the British public were becoming increasinly concerned by the
cry for revolution which seemed to be coming from Russia, America,
Spain, Germany, France, and increasingly from within Britain itself.
This concern, together with the openly acknowledged presence in Britain
of a large number of foreign revolutionaries and the escalation of Irish
terrorism in London, combined to create a sense of deep social and
political crises which found expression in myths or "legends" about the
threat of being overwhelmed by revolution: myths which were voiced most
clearly in the press and popular fiction of the time.

The problem with discussing such popular representations is,
of course, the difficulty of distinguishing between the "legend", "the
speeches, the stories", and the facts about which they "lie". To compare
different forms and examples of the accounts that were given of the
threat of revolution in England is, inevitably, to encounter the problem
of how novelistic or journalistic representations relate to what might
be termed social "reality" or "actuality". Clearly, any idea of
scientific realism or straightforward reflectionism, whether in truth or
distortion, are inadequate here; since popular representations have a
controlling effect on what might be identified as "reality" or
"actuality". It cannot be simply a case of comparing, on the one hand,
fictional representations and newspaper reports with, on the other, the

"facts" that they are said to represent. What we really see here is the construction of cultural norms in relation to the activities and desires which are their subjects.

The major source of my interest here is, therefore, the interest in the writer as an actor in the political arena and, more specifically, in fiction as a vehicle of political power and control. Yet, as we shall see, in the fictional works that I look at there is often little overt political content and what there is is usually commonplace and repititious. My interest lies elsewhere: not in the content but in what might be described as the overriding shape or drift of the accounts; in how these accounts rehearse or reflect the underlying myths and culturally significant narratives which structure our perception of the world.

Myth, of course, can be variously defined. It can be quite simply a set of false beliefs which influence the way in which we think or feel about the world or it can be a "traditional narrative ... embodying popular ideas on natural and social phenomena" [3]. Myths, whether based on actual past events or pure fabrication, control the culture and psychology of a nation because they congeal into dramatic narrative form, into emotionally charged images and mental pictures, the beliefs and desires which provide social bonding and inspire emotional tension. As we have seen in the last section, Georges Sorel argued that men control the future through myths which "must be taken as a whole, as historical forces, and ... we should be especially careful not to make any comparison between accomplished fact and the picture people had framed for themselves before action" [4]. His particular favoured myth,

that of the revolutionary "general strike", rehearsed the coming of the

event it described in order to concentrate the human will towards it:

> In employing the term myth, I believed myself that I had
>
> made a happy choice, because I thus put myself in a position
>
> to refuse any discussion whatever with the people who wish to
>
> submit the idea of a general strike to a detailed criticism,
>
> and who accumulate objections against its practical
>
> possibility. [5]

The power of myths, as Sorel points out, lies in their combination of

vagueness, blind assertion and repetition: in that they evoke what is

essentially a religious response which protects them from criticism,

even when the evidence seems to contradict them.

Popular fiction, of course, does not evoke such a religious

response. Nevertheless, it does provide one of the conventional spaces

in which social myths find implicit expression. In "Literary Formulas

and Cultural Significance" [6], John Cawalti considers the public's

continual fascination with stories that follow a predictable plot

structure and fulfill conventional expectations. Popular fiction, he

argues, typically combines certain of a number of cultural stereotypes

with larger plot structures which maybe have an archetypal or cross

cultural significance. The result is a "literary formula", a synthesis

of conventional perceptions with a universal story type, which is at

once a cultural product and a factor determining culture through

reproduction and repetition until it becomes the conventional way of

representing or relating certain images, beliefs and ideas. In "literary

formulas", myths and stereotypes congeal into a typical plot structure

so that it becomes possible to make clear connections between the

conventions of popular fiction and the values of a society. Indeed the very popularity of these formulas is based upon the fact that they exploit the same "network of assumptions" which hold society together; and which Cawalti defines as "an expression, first, of the basic values of a culture, and on another level, of the dominant moods and concerns of a particular era, or of a particular subculture" (p.204-5). As he goes on to argue, "... the basic cultural impetus of formulaic literature is towards the maintenance of conventional patterns of imaginative expression" (p.208).

Here, then, is one way of formulating the most significant aspect of the novels and journalism which it is my task to consider. The political purpose of "formulaic" popular writing, its function as political action, is to maintain the culturally dominant modes of perception and thought by constructing imaginative worlds shaped by those perceptions and thoughts: worlds in which conflicts of value and the claims of the culturally forbidden are disarmed by being given purely formal or imaginative space within a larger value structure which condemns them; and thereby prevented from crossing into the "real" world. As Gramsci recognised, the forms of expression dominant in a culture are perhaps the "system's" most potent ally and the "system's real strength does not lie in the violence of the ruling class or in the co-ercive power of its state apparatus, but in the acceptance by the ruled of a "conception of the world" which belongs to the rulers" [7]. Popular fiction then, and the mainstream journalism which both inspires and reflects its representation of the world, are a central part of the cultural hegemony which determines both our social institutions and our aesthetic forms. To clarify and illustrate how this idea of "hegemony"

actually works, let us look briefly at one example of a criticism of the

public fiction or "mythology" of revolution which is especially relevant

to the work of the political novelist and explicitly discloses the

identity between imaginative representation and political power.

In On Terrorism and the State (1982), Gianfranco Sanguinetti

diagnoses what he calls the "schizophrenic psychopathology" of power in

the modern state. As he sees it, such a dramatic medical analogy is

justified because the possessors of power in society, "all those who

have the right to speak, politicians, the powerful and all their

lackeys, journalists and others", must inevitably lose contact with the

ideas and actions of "ordinary people", "all those who are denied the

right to speak" [8], by the very nature of that possession. Power erects

barriers between the rulers and the ruled, the physical barrier of

distance and the mental barrier of authority, with the result that

society splits into opposing groups who cease to converse, cease to

understand each other and end by imagining or interpreting the words and

deeds of the other solely in terms of their own isolated and egotistical

positions; in terms of, to borrow a phrase from Conrad on the same

theme, their own "passion, folly and conceit" [9]. The political life of

such a society, in Sanguinetti's medical imagery, thus shows symptoms of

"autism", the abnormal self-absorption and linguistic isolation of

particular classes and groups, so that the "schizophrenic" and

"paranoic" fantasy of those in power becomes the major determinant of

political reality. Sanguinetti is explicit about the sinister

consequences of such conditions, which for him include manifestations of

"artificial terrorism": state sponsored "spectacles" and representations

of terror designed to demonize revolt and to confuse the radical

elements within society. He provides a frightening vision of political

alienation and anarchistic state power, authorized and licensed by such

fictions:

> ... as Machiavelli says, "where one knows the least, one suspects
>
> the most": the entire population, and all young people in
>
> particular, become suspect in the eyes of power. At the same
>
> time if artificial terrorism claims to be *the only real*
>
> *phenomenon,* all spontaneous revolts ... become according to this
>
> "police conception of history" a plot, artificially hatched and
>
> led by "occult forces" yet "quite identifiable" ... Everything
>
> that power does not forecast, because it has not organized it,
>
> therefore becomes a "plot" against it; on the other hand,
>
> artificial terrorism, being organized and directed by the masters
>
> of the spectacle, is a *real* and spontaneous phenomenon that these
>
> latter continually feign to fight, for the simple reason that *it is*
>
> *easier to defend oneself from a simulated enemy than from a real*
>
> *enemy.* And for the real enemy, the proletariat, power would like
>
> to refuse it even the *status* of enemy: if the workers declare
>
> themselves to be against this demented terrorism, then "they are
>
> with the state", if they are against the state, then "they are
>
> terrorists", that is to say enemies of the common good, *public*
>
> *enemies.* And against a public enemy, everything is permitted,
>
> everything is authorized. (Italics in original) (p.93).

Ironically, of course, this vision of state paranoia and propaganda, of

"power" seeing and inventing terrorist "plots" where none exist, could

easily be turned back upon the writer as he employs exactly the sort of

inventive logic which he attributes to the powerful. It is impossible to

fix a boundary to fantasy here or to tell whether the reality of

"artificial terrorism" consists in the actual and conscious deeds of the

shadowy "masters of the spectacle" or rather in the false consciousness

of the terrorists who unknowingly serve their ends; or whether, indeed,

these do not amount to the same thing in a world where the power of

words and representation determine rather than reflect reality.

Sanguinetti then, whether consciously or not, captures perfectly the

position of one caught in the labyrinthine plots and fictions of power

politics: in the systems of charge and counter-charge, ignorance and

suspicion, "real" and "artificial" terror.

Sanguinetti, however, is an anarchist and beyond his most

obvious accusation of terroristic disinformation by the state, lies the

attempt to disengage his readers from the entire language of politics

and "plots" in order to realize his own disengaged and anarchistic

vision of the world. He therefore looks at the political world and

insists upon seeing it purely as a "spectacle", as an imaginative web of

fictional illusions, spun in order to conceal the crisis of a power

which has itself turned anarchistic and ceased to respect the larger

claims of society. Indeed, in the anarchistic vision, politics is no

more than a matter of artistic and theatrical performances: a process by

which power invents itself and in which "provocations, massacres,

assassinations and lies ... seek to camouflage a reality which is as

clear as daylight" (p.95). He continues:

> ... religion, which has always been a prototype of functional
>
> ideology for all the old powers, ... invented the devil, the
>
> supreme *agent provocateur*, who was to assure the most complete
>
> triumph of the Kingdom of God; religion did nothing other than

project into the metaphysical world the simple necessity of any

concrete and real power. ... For any power, the only real

catastrophe is to be swept out of history; and each power, once

weakened and feeling the imminence of this real catastrophe, has

always tried to consolidate itself in pretending to wage an

unequal struggle against a very convenient adversary: but such

a struggle always was also the last oration *pro domo sua* that

this power would declare. History is full of similar examples.

"Just as scandal is necessary for the greater glory of God--

says Paul-Louis Courier--, so are conspiracies for the

maintainence of the high police. Hatching them, stifling

them, setting up the plot and discovering it, this is the

high art of office; these are the ins and outs of the science

of statesmen; ... Politics known, is politics lost ... "

(italics in original) (p.95).

In a system where the ability to imagine and represent "plots" becomes

the expression of authority, the cyclical sequence of thoughts or

actions performed by those in power, "setting up the plot and

discovering it", becomes the model of all public discourse about

political struggle and ensures that "spontaneous" eruptions of struggle

against their power are domesticated and comprehended only within its

narrative form. It is as if we live our social and political life in a

kind of mental loop which always brings us back to the same point of

alienation and fear from which we began and so keeps us loyal to the

"system": a loop which is formally realized in terms of the pre-

conceived patterns of perception, the conditioned sets of mental

reflexes, embodied in those public narratives which bond our thought into historical and social fictions.

This is, of course, classic conspiracy theory of the "art" of politics but, in a modern anarchist version, transformed into a theory of "schizophrenic" power which knows no reality other than that of its own imagination and unconsciously invents the "plots", fictions, and acts of "artificial terrorism", which work as a kind of bulwark against the anarchy of itself and the world. Power, order, and authority therefore exist only through the fictions of an essentially mythological "police conception of history", in which the events and phenomena of the external world are subjected to control by narrative devices: by being placed within an ideological schema which seeks out the unjustifiable secret crime and guilty individual behind every mystery. Outside of those fictional "plots" and the power that they confer, however, the only role available to the individual is that of the disbelieving and alienated spectator of the public world: a process of powerless and unlimited identification with a formless and anarchistic vision of the world. Sanguinetti's world of political struggle dissolves into a world of popular fictions and we are ultimately presented with a political choice between enslavement to an external fiction of "artificial terrorism" and an individual and voiceless disconnection from society.

This anarchistic analysis of power and fiction in the public world also has, of course, a direct bearing on the purpose of literary works of political fiction and their relation to power. The choice that Sanguinetti poses for the individual is confronted on some level by everybody but, perhaps, most directly of all by the artist and the politician: by those whose most basic engagement with the world is

itself through fictions, and to whom therefore the power and commitment of external "plots" is a particular temptation and a particular danger. It is in terms of this such temptation, then, that one can begin to account for the existence and effect of the popular literary fiction which is my subject here. It is, indeed, quite tempting to apply Sanguinetti's notion of "artificial terrorism" directly to a great number of the works of popular fiction written during the late nineteenth century which had terrorism and revolution for their subject: themselves terrorizing fictions, controlled theatrical representations of political terror, which served to demonize revolt, to promote a disabling mythical confusion amongst those who were inclined to sympathize with it, and thereby to actually construct social authority and order in a narrative form.

Consider, for instance, Edward Jenkins's A Week of Passion; or, the Dilemma of Mr. George Barton, the Younger (1884), a particularly crude and transparent example of a novel which sets up an ideologically confusing "spectacle" and fulfills what might be called the aesthetic or narrative of "artificial terrorism" that Sanguinetti sees as the defining characteristic of the discourse of "political" fiction. It is a novel which ran to several editions in the 1880's and 1890's and forms a quite representative example of the dominant characteristics of the then very popular novel of revolution and terror. The particular popularity of Jenkins' novel was due, no doubt, to the author's extreme willingness to exploit the more sensational aspects of his subject, whilst propounding a rigidly ideological rejection of all forms of political resistance to his own ideas and a moral defence of established society. Jenkins, who was a Member of Parliament as well as a successful part-

time writer, was in fact shamelessly melodramatic and jingoistic in his

treatment of a rambling and tedious story of a young man's struggle for

his hereditary rights, in the face of the opposition of the combined and

confused forces of international crime, socialism and anarchism. It is

really not worth going into the details of the plot here, since the

whole narrative is centred around and given its sole interest by an act

of terrorism which occurs in the first chapter and which turns out to be

secretly linked to the young man's dilemma [10]. The discovery and

explanation of the "plot" behind this initially inexplicable act becomes

the substance of the novel and ultimately restores the young man to his

proper position; as well, of course, as allowing Jenkins to present a

terrorizing revelation of a secret criminal and socialist underworld

able to strike out invisibly and terribly against the average citizen.

As I have said, Jenkins was shameless and opens his novel with

the following evocations of an "unexplained explosion" at Oxford Circus:

> For a moment there was a hush, solemn and awful; then a universal
>
> outcry, as the shuddering crowds rushed from the centre, and
>
> palpitating foot-passengers dived into the nearest shops for
>
> shelter, while shouts of "Fenians", "Dynamiters", "Nitro-
>
> glycerine" were jerked into the air from thousands of pale and
>
> quivering lips. [11].

This melodramatic excess is sustained throughout the first chapter as

Jenkins repeatedly decribes this event from a number of different

perspectives and glories in the details of the outrage. Perhaps it is a

measure of the quality of the novel that he should imitate the

terrorists he so loathes, and resort to such desperate measures to grasp

the attention of his audience:

"Blood!"

Blood, sprinkled in a fine rain, and here and there in large

drops, on faces, on hands, on bright dresses, and light bonnets,

and silken sunshades, and delicate-tinted gloves, on shiny hats,

and ivory shirt fronts, and white waistcoats, and with it here

and there small knobs and particles of something which made people

instinctively shudder and cry out, when they became conscious of

it on shoes or clothing!

What had happened?

Modern science had achieved a fresh marvel. A horrible crime had

been commited in the presence of a thousand people; and there

appeared to be no traces left, either of the victim or the

perpetrators. (p.9-10)..

It is, then, this "spectacle" of terror which gives the novel its

central mystery and adds interest to what would otherwise be a very dull

tale. The process of its penetration is the framework and plot of the

novel and, in the usual melodramatic adventure style, its unravelling

involves the hero in a journey into the hitherto secret underground of

revolutionary struggle: a complex web of secret plots and conspiracies

lurking beneath the visible surface of society, which Jenkins' describes

at length and which express most closely his own political paranoia.

Apart from the hero, the novel's other main character is a

Mr.Sontag: a detective with Holmes-like powers of miraculous observation

whom Jenkins' introduces ostensibly to be his hero's guide into the

political underworld. Their investigations take them through the world

of a corrupt legal profession, through the organized criminal networks

of Europe and into the barely distinguishable organizations of

international socialism and anarchism. Along the way, of course, they propound many of what are obviously Jenkins' own mythical ideas about revolution.

It is Mr.Sontag, with his special detective's power of decoding the mysteries of the world and his "police conception of history", who becomes the voice by means of which Jenkins appeals to his reader's credulity and "invents" his own authority within the conventions of the novel. Thus Mr.Sontag is privileged to see the reality behind the myth of socialism and anarchism as being no more than a sophisticated form of criminality: one which is based solely upon the refusal to accept the doctrine of private property (and which links them, of course, to the young man's difficulties). Mr.Sontag makes many extremely long speeches in which he expounds upon this theme and others; and, in a tactic which betrays the parliamentary training of the author, freely interchanges his use of terms like "criminal", "socialist" and "anarchist" to deliberately promote confusion in the reader's mind. Here he describes the members of an international criminal gang, in what would seem to be a poorly disguised version of one of Jenkins' own parliamentary speeches:

> Many of these men are really political agitators as well. They
> have so befogged themselves with Socialistic ideas, that they
> have actually persuaded themselves that there is no difference
> between *meum* and *tuum*. A man, when he is persuaded of that, is,
> so far as criminal law is concerned, already a criminal in
> principle. Some go no further-- but it is not wonderful if many
> do not stop there, but become criminals in practise. The Irish
> agitator, for instance, in the House of Commons says that the

land which belongs to the Irish Landlords is that of the Irish

tenants. The Irish agitator in Ireland really believes this

doctrine, and falls back upon it to justify shooting the

landlord. I am not a politician, but I simply take note of

a fact which, as a policeman, I am bound to note, and which

is to me an alarming one, and it is this-- that the Socialistic

ideas now allowed to be freely propagated in all free countries,

and which are now being propagated in spite of authority in

others, are developing and producing a large number of

criminals, not of the ordinary kind-- low, vulgar, uneducated

villains, but men of intelligence and resource. (p.209-10).

In a variation of the usual condemnation, in which the apparent

socialist is exposed as a mere criminal who exploits noble ideals, here

the socialist ideal is criminal in the first place. Jenkins' consistent

ideological point is that socialism is wrong in principle and practise:

that it is merely another name for what Mr.Sontag reveals to be a a set

of criminal, avaricious and mischievous instincts, "befogged" and

encouraged by ideas. In order to prove this point Jenkins takes his

secondary characters from a traditional stock of political stereotypes.

Thus we come across a certain Schultz, a German chemist and mixture of

desperate revolutionary and secret agent of a number of unscrupulous

criminal gangs:

He would commit a crime, I verily believe, simply for the

excitement and peril of the thing. He took as much pleasure

in a robbery or a murder as a schoolboy does in robbing an

orchard. ... He was a socialist and anarchist or professed to

be-- had to cut for his life once from Berlin where he was mixed

up in a plot to kill the Emperor. He had invented small crystal

bombs, which when broken would send forth an odour so deadly

that all living things within its influence perished. Old

Kaiser William ... would have been done for-- old hypocrite,

if only it had once got within reach of his nostrils, and might

have saved Europe a good deal of anxiety. (p.174-75).

Schultz is a representative type of the mischievous chemist, addicted to

violence and terror from a technical point of view, which became one of

the most consistent features of this tradition of novels and which

found, of course, its most famous realization in Conrad's Professor.

Mr.Sontag's jingoistic attitudes are also part of the larger

tone of the novel, which seeks to speak to the reader in that down-to-

earth voice of the "ordinary man" which politicians so often adopt to

articulate their "common sense" values. In Jenkins's case, of course,

those values include that stubborn suspicion of European influences that

is another consistent feature of these novels; that resistence to

intellectualism, which for Jenkins merely leads to confusion and crime;

and that assessment of socialism as based purely on jealousy and

avarice:

"Yes," said Mr.Sontag, "Your disappointed socialist takes it

into his head that he cannot afford to wait for the millenium.

The general distribution of property is too far off. He justifies

himself on principles which too many respectable competitors for

political power give a kind of patronage, in taking for himself

what is next to hand". (p.210).

Of course the thing that is "next to hand" for the socialist, and

incidently for Jenkins himself in his quest for literary "power", is

that explosive power of dynamite that we have seen at the opening of the novel. Jenkins uses it to impose that standard ideological simplification in which sympathy with socialism is automatically associated with the approval of violence.

A Week of Passion is, then, a very obvious example of popular fiction put to a direct political purpose: Jenkins "sets up the plot and then discovers it", and gives a formal representation to a paranoid construction of anarchism, socialism and other "foreign" tendencies. Like many of the other novelists in this tradition then, Jenkins tactic is to blatantly exploit the sensational aspects of the melodramatic and formulaic stories he found ready made in the popular imagination, and to place within it his own political ideas and fantasies of violence. It is also then, in a sense, an example of that "artificial terrorism" which Sanguinetti saw as a symptom of political crisis: a "spectacle" of terror designed to represent a fictional enemy and thereby invent a "real" power. Thus, as Sanguinetti forecasts, Jenkins's means of commitment to social order and his assumption of "authority" within it necessarily takes the form of fulfilling external and terrorizing fictions of disorder.

The survey which follows is, therefore, a record of one of the ways that British society came to terms with a widespread social unrest and the threat of revolution at the end of the nineteenth century. The necessity of revolution against the established powers, which was being argued for throughout Europe and America, was represented to the mass of the British reading public only within the vitiating confines of the melodramatic adventure story. This is a form whose own narrative and dramatic necessities, one of which was the need for clearly identifiable

heroes and villains embodying obvious values and desires, were in conflict with the highly complex moral and intellectual claims of the revolutionary forces and persons it represented. And yet, on another level, the melodrama was also the perfect expression of the fascination that the possibility of revolution, particularly in its more dynamic and anarchistic aspects, exerted over the imagination of the age. This familiar structure allowed the public to imaginatively approach what was, from the perspective of mainstream establishment political culture, the alien and forbidden reality of a violent and revolutionary idealism that endangered society. It thereby either calmed or inflamed their fear, but in any case established the stereotypes and mystifications which effectively put an end to any meaningful public discusssion of revolutionary social change in Britain.

I should attach at this point, a few words about the organization of the following material.

My aim in this chapter has been to provide a kind of theoretical framework into which the novels I discuss in the next chapter loosely fit. My presentation of those novels predominantly takes the form of an account and I do not provide a detailed analysis of every work I discuss, but often just a summary of its most representative aspects and some quite long excerpts in order to give a flavour of its distinctive mood and style. This is partly for the sake of brevity and partly because many of these works have been covered at length elsewhere; notably in Barbara Melchiori's <u>Terrorism in the Late</u>

<u>Victorian Novel</u> (1985) [12], where a detailed account of the plot of many of the novels can be found.

For the sake of convenience, I have organized my discussion of the novels into several sections which represent some of their major thematic strands, but by no means form definitive categories or complete accounts of the issues raised by any single novel. I have made one major distinction between novels about revolutionary activity in Britain and those dealing with such activity abroad. Again this is partly dictated by convenience and partly by the fact that there is often a very different attitude on the part of the writer to violent revolutionary actions when they are directed against foreign governments, particularly that of Russia. In these latter cases there is commonly a perceived co-incidence of values and interests between the revolutionary struggle for justice and the British sense of "fair-play". In the case of revolutionary struggle against the British state, of course, such striving for justice tends to become the expression of "envy", "stupidity" and "insanity", or of a petulant "childishness"; or, just as commonly, of imported "foreign" ideas. Indeed the most common idea that runs through all of these works is that violent revolution is a process which happens elsewhere and that there was at that time no justification for it on British soil. Social unrest was therefore commonly thought to be imported and "fermented" predominantly by foreign anarchists and socialists, who were merely aided and abetted by their British dupes. In the light of retrospect, it could be said that there was a grain of truth in this idea, but not necessarily for the reasons that some of these writers suspected. In fact, contrary to the thesis of a novel like Henry James's <u>The Princess Casamassima</u> (1886) (James was, to be fair, an

American and particularly ignorant of British political conditions), and

despite the reality of social deprivation in Britain, the British

prolelatariat were not a revolutionary force at least partly because

they lacked precisely the international direction, violent traditions

and organization that were popularly attributed to them [13].

Ironically, the real dupes, those who did have contact with and got

taken in by foreign revolutionaries, were those who did not know the

British proletariat and were mostly members of the very class which was

most threatened by revolutionary ideas.

Also, the reader will notice that the terms "anarchist",

"socialist", "fenian", "revolutionist", "terrorist", or whatever, are

used somewhat interchangeably by both the writers I discuss and by

myself. This is because many writers, Henry James for example, tended to

not understand the difference themselves; or, if they did, to refuse to

legitimize the various groups by distinguishing between them.

<div align="center">*</div>

Notes:

1. Journal entry of 21-12-1866. Cited by Renee Winegarten in <u>Writers</u>
   <u>and Revolution: the Fatal Lure of Action</u> (New York: New Viewpoints,
   1974), p.172-3. Interestingly, Winegarten points out that the de
   Goncourts cynicism was specifically inspired by their reading over
   of old pamphlets from the time of the 1848 revolution.

2. From <u>The Memoirs of Prince Metternich</u> (1881), cited by Stewart
   Millar in <u>Modern European History</u> (London: Macmillan, 1988), p.53.

3. <u>The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English</u>, sixth edition,

1977.

4. Taken from "A Letter to Danial Halévy"; included in _Reflections on
    Violence_, trans. T.E.Hulme and J.Roth (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free
    Press, 1950), p.47.

5. _ibid_., p.50.

6. This is a chapter in _The Study of American Culture/Contemporary
    Conflicts_, ed. Luther Luedtke (Deland Fla: Elerett, Edwards, inc.,
    1977), p.177-217. All page references in the text are to this
    edition.

7. Cited by Giuseppi Fiori in _Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary_
    (London: New Left Books, 1970), p.238.

8. Gianfranco Sanguinetti, _On Terrorism and The State: The theory and
    practise of terrorism divulged for the first time_, trans. Lucy
    Forsyth and Michel Prigent (London: B.M.Chronos, 1982), p.92. (All
    further page references in the text are to this edition).

9. _Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad_ trans. F.R.Karl and L.Davies
    (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Vol.2, p.17.

10. _A Week of Passion_ is, of course, the type of novel that Conrad was
    parodying in _The Secret Agent_. The sinister inter-connectedness
    which, as so many critics have pointed out, characterizes Conrad's

London is the ironic extension of the type of complex and unlikely co-incidences that run through popular fiction.

11. Edward Jenkins, _A Week of Passion; or, the Dilemma of Mr.George Barton the Younger_ (London: Bliss Sands and Co., 1897), p.4. All page references in the text are to this edition. The novel was first published in three volumes in 1884.

12. Barbara Melchiori, _Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel_ (London: Croom Helm, 1985).

13. Given that Marx and Engels were actually living in London at this time and maintaining contact with many revolutionary groups worldwide, it is ironic that Britain was the only major European state which did not have a socialist party under their personal influence and advice. The reason for this, apparently, was that Marx felt personally slighted by H.M.Hyndman, the foremost British Marxist and leader of the Socialist Democratic Federation, who had written an article in which he had acknowledged the influence of a famous revolutionary thinker and original writer, but failed to mention Marx by name. As a result, Marx refused all contact with the S.D.F. for the rest of his life and Engels restricted his British contacts to more libertarian groups.

Chapter Five:

"The Voice of Dynamite":

Anarchism and Popular Fictions, 1880-1910.

We have preached dynamite. Yes, we have predicted from the
lessons history teaches that the ruling classes of today
would no more listen to the voice of reason than their
predecessors; that they would attempt by brute force to stay
the wheel of progress. Is it a lie, or was it truth we told?
        August Spies, "Haymarket Martyr", Chicago 1886. [1].

I believe in force just as you do. That is my justification.
Force is the supreme arbiter in human affairs. You have clubbed
unarmed strikers, shot them down in your streets, shot down
their women and their children. So long as you do that, we who
are anarchists will use explosives against you.
        Louis Lingg, "Haymarket Martyr", Chicago 1886. [2].

I.

The Anarchists and Dynamite.

In George-Bernard Shaw's novel An Unsocial Socialist (1884),

Trefusis, the socialist agitator of the title, introduces one of his

newly converted working class comrades to an educated friend:

"This man is one of my converts," said Trefusis apart to

Henrietta. "He told me the other day that since I set him

thinking he never sees a gentleman without wanting to heave

a brick at him. I find that socialism is often misunderstood

by its least intelligent supporters and opponents to mean simply

unrestrained indulgence in our natural propensity to heave bricks

at respectable persons." [3].

Shaw's direct and incisive irony could stand at the head of any account of the popular representation of socialism in late nineteenth century novels, journals and newspapers. The widely credited equation that he outlines, that socialism equals mere envious or retributive violence, was one that was to dog many radical movements and, perhaps, also the governments which opposed them. Indeed that temptation to pitch the political debate around socialism at its most dramatic extreme, as a simple alternative between the present social system and an explosion of anarchic violence, is one that had long proved too much for both conservative commentators and, curiously enough, for many of those revolutionary activists crying out for social change. The history of the struggles of the various revolutionary movements of that time to communicate their "message" to the ordinary people of England, and that of the political establishment's efforts to prevent them, reads like a record of perverse and mutual incomprehension which transformed the public domain of political debate into what Henry James called a "howling bear garden" [4]: into a theatre of useless aggression and meaningless rhetoric which ultimately merely fostered violence as a political weapon.

What follows is a survey of one aspect of that theatre: of a current within British popular fiction and journalism which concerned itself, more or less directly, with the spate of violent political agitation and terrorism which swept throughout Europe as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth. The late Victorian British public were becoming accustomed to tales of horror, injustice and violent despair issuing from Russia and the Nihilist struggle, but with the advent of what has become become known as the "Era of Propaganda by the

Deed" [5] that despair seemed to take on international dimensions as reports of terrorist plots and intentions came in from Germany, France, Spain, America and all over the Western world. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the newspaper coverage of this social unrest and terrorism in Europe and America, combined with the effect of the series of largely Fenian terrorist attacks on London in the 1880's and 1890's, produced a deep dis-ease and paranoia in British society which partly found expression in the press construction of the demomiac and sinister figure of the bomb-throwing anarchist, a kind of popular devil of the imagination, and in the birth of a tradition of "Dynamite" or "anarchist" novel concerned with his activities.

This genre of fiction was, of course, really a sub-genre of that prior tradition within English fiction which had long sought to demonize socialism with evocations of working-class militancy and mob-violence [6]. The "dynamite" novel, however, sought its impact in much more abstract and desolate images of destruction than its forbears: with the invention of dynamite, and its passage into the hands of terrorist groups and individuals, it now became possible for the writer of a political novel to convincingly present visions of the demolition of parliament in an instant or, indeed, the annihilation of an entire city or civilization at the hands of just one or two men. Consider, for example, Robert Louis and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's rendition of the potential power of this new explosive in their comic collection of stories, The Dynamiter (1885). Zero, the poetic prophet of the "star of dynamite" [7], surveys the city of London from a rooftop:

"Here," cried Zero, "you behold this field of city, rich, crowded, laughing with the spoil of continents; but soon, how

soon, to be laid low! Some day, some night, from this coign of

vantage, you shall perhaps be startled by the detonation of

the judgement gun-- not sharp and empty like the crack of cannon,

but deep-mouthed and unctuously solemn. Instantly thereafter, you

shall behold the flames break forth. Ay," he cried, stretching

forth his hand, "ay, that will be the day of retribution. Then

shall the pallid constable flee side by side with the detected

thief. Blaze!" he cried, "blaze derided city! Fall, flatulent

monarchy, fall like Dagon!" (p.123).

Dynamite brought a new dimension to British political life. Strip this

of its comic mock-biblical dimensions and one has the potentially very

real situation to which the power of dynamite seemed to lead: it gave a

voice to the violent extremist and potentially transformed the city into

a theatre of terroristic and destructive fantasy, with the terrorist as

its author and director.

The tempting power that such images and ideas held out to the

imagination of the writer can perhaps be compared only to the power they

had over the minds of the terrorists themselves; and their enthusiasm

for it became the subject of many an impassioned speech, as well as many

a popular novel. Thus, as in France where the verb *ravacholiser* (to blow

up) grew out of the name of the legendary dynamiter Ravachol, the very

word "dynamite" and the idea of violent explosions seemed to enter the

public consciousness and political language of the time. They terrified

the general public and held out to the modern revolutionary the promise

of a new method of communication involving the instantaneous

reconciliation of word and deed, of idea and action: instant assertion

of the "power" of his ideals and desires. H.M.Hyndman for one, not

himself a terrorist, but a Marxist revolutionary and the leader of the

militant London based Socialist Democratic Federation (S.D.F) from 1881,

had high hopes for the power of explosions in the dissemination of new

ideas and the foundation of new political systems:

> The dynamite of ideas is accompanied in the background by the
>
> dynamite of material forces. These modern explosives may well
>
> prove to capitalism what gunpowder was to feudalism. [8].

Hyndman captures quite forcibly the cataclysmic terms of reference in

which his age had begun to imagine social conflict and political change.

Here he was not, of course, talking of actual explosions but of

metaphorical ones; and yet, such was the atmosphere of the time, that

these very words were held up in the press by the Reverend M.Kaufmann as

an incitement to terrorism and evidence of "the kindling rage and

smothered resentment of anarchists and opportunists". Ironically, the

Reverend Kaufmann could have chosen many more precise examples of

terroristic rhetoric to illustrate his thesis that the whole world was

now threatened by the "force of dynamite and hate" [9]. Take the

following particularly lurid provocation from America for instance.

> "Dynamite! Of all the good stuff, this is the stuff!",

enthused an anonymous "member of the International" in a letter to the

Chicago newspaper, The Alarm, of February 1885. The Alarm was a pro-

anarchist publication which gave publicity to even the most extreme of

radical opinion, and this particular anarchist did not equivocate in his

advice to his fellow men:

> Stuff several pounds of this sublime stuff into an inch pipe ·
>
> (gas or water pipe), plug up both ends, insert a cap with a
>
> fuse attached, place this in the immediate neighbourhood of

a lot of rich loafers who live by the sweat of other people's
brows, and light the fuse. A most cheerful and gratifying
result will follow. In giving dynamite to the downtrodden
millions of the globe, science has done its best work, ...
It is a formidable weapon against any force of militia, police,
or detectives that may want to stifle the cry for justice that
goes out from the plundered slaves. It is something not very
ornamental but exceedingly useful. ... It is a genuine boon
for the disinherited, while it brings terror and fear to the
robbers. ... A pound of this good stuff beats a bushel of
ballots all hollow, and don't you forget it. [10].

One must assume that the writer is not entirely in earnest here, since
the whole thing reads so like a grotesque parody of the type of
terroristic rhetoric it would seem to be. Yet he does effectively
express his hatred and, whether ironically or not, manages to distil
that quality in violent political language and propaganda which is most
disturbing to its audience. The syncretic thinking of the terrorist, his
willingness to violently reconcile anatagonistic principles with a
blinding verbal formula or a reckless deed, is cynically flaunted by
this eulogy to dynamite. Thus the adoration of "this sublime stuff", of
explosive substances as the material and agents of human ideals,
registers that almost religious disregard for the distinctions between
ends and means, and between the ideal and the real, which is perhaps the
most fundamental defining characteristic of irrational political thought
and desperate political action. The terrorist, the iconoclast of such
formal nicetíes and rationalizations, is a man who, himself enthralled
to the greater power of his bombs and bullets, sweeps aside all

obstacles to his own desires and ideas with *intoxicating phrases and spectacular acts of violence.*

It is a vivid and shocking performance with the deliberate intention, of course, to terrify the likes of the Reverend Kaufmann. The propaganda of word and deed goes hand in hand; and by implication anarchism, as a social and political theory of revolution, is presented as speaking to the world in a strange and contradictory voice which almost comically confounds fantasy with reality. But then, as we have seen in previous chapters, the anarchist has traditionally and historically been perceived in this way: as an eccentric prophet and apostle of violence, whose message to his fellow man has unaccountably veered between the extremes of a sentimental, idealistic love of humanity and violent threats to life and limb. The invention of dynamite breathed new dramatic life into this stereotype and, both in British fiction and in political life, it became the dominant image in the explanation of terrorism and revolutionary politics. The psychopathic anarchist, unable to distinguish between his desire and the world and confounding his ends with his most violent means, became the tragic hero, villain or comic butt of a remarkable number of novels; ranging in type from the most cloying of romances to detective stories to serious fictional attempts to represent the political and social ideas of socialism and anarchism. It was, of course, also a figure that was also used by the British establishment to imaginatively represent the forces which really did violently attack it, predominantly the Irish Republican Fenian Movement. That equation, anarchism equals "the force of dynamite" equals all non-conventional political resistence, was one which proved effective in quelling all serious debate in the mainstream media about

new ideas of social organization and often gave implicit support to the government's foreign policy.

But, of course, truth here is a complex matter and it is often difficult to distinguish between the stereotype and the sometimes equally fantastic reality it is said to explain. Indeed, one of the ironies in the history of anarchism worldwide is that while the anarchists were certainly the theoreticians of political violence, and therefore received the attention and vilification of the press, they themselves were not often the perpetrators of it apart from a few isolated individuals and groups [11]. This irony was particularly marked in Britain, where the very eminent anarchist Elisée Reclus openly advocated violence in respectable journals and promised, in The Contemporary Review of May 1884, that "we bring not peace but a sword and are in no wise astonished to be received as enemies" [12]. And yet, at the same time, there are only three well recorded incidents of specifically anarchist terrorist plots in the whole of this period: the Martial Bourdin case in 1894 (on which, of course, Conrad loosely based The Secret Agent); the case of six men accused, on quite suspect evidence, of possessing explosives in Walsall in 1892 (two of whom were foreign anarchists); and the somewhat bizarre case of John Evelyn Barlas, author of the anarchist love poem "Holy of Holies, Confessions of an Anarchist" (1887), who on 31 December 1891 fired several pistol shots at the residence of the speaker of the House of Commons until interrupted by a policeman. Barlas, it seems, was drunk and obligingly handed over his pistol to the policeman whilst confessing "I am an anarchist and intended shooting you, but then I thought it a pity to shoot an honest man. What I have done is to show my contempt for the

House of Commons" [13]. Such gestures and failures were about all that anarchist terrorism ever amounted to in late nineteenth century Britain; and it is clear that the anarchist myth, like the vast majority of the anarchists themselves, was largely imported from mainland Europe and America [14].

But that, of course, is only clear in retrospect and was no consolation to the general public of the time, the consumers of newspapers and novels, who felt personally threatened by the activities of dynamite terrorists and were actively encouraged by establishment and anarchists alike to focus their fear on anarchists. Indeed, the anarchists often seemed to consciously project this strangely confused image of themselves as violent desperados and to thereby conspire in the propaganda directed against them.

Take Albert Parsons, editor of <u>The Alarm</u> and one of the Chicago "Haymarket martyrs", as a case in point. Parsons and his six co-defendants received vast publicity in America and Europe during their trial, and eventual conviction, for complicity in explosions which led to the deaths of police and public during the Haymarket labour riots of 1886 [15]. It was revealed in later years that they were all innocent of any link with the explosions, but like so many of their anarchist bretheren, denied access to a mass audience for their ideas until prosecuted for their actions or supposed actions, they used their trial as a platform to publicize their views in a forthright manner. In a courtroom speech which was published in pamphlet form and freely distributed around the streets of London, Parsons spoke of anarchy and the "diffusion" of power from the state to the individual. Anarchy, he

made clear, is the future social condition of mankind, when coercion

and violence have been surpassed:

> Anarchy is the negation of force; the elimination of all
>
> authority in social affairs; it is the denial of the right
>
> of domination of one man over another. It is the diffusion of
>
> rights, of power, of duties, equally and freely among the
>
> people. [16].

Parsons thus elaborated his vision of an ideal society based on co-

operation and freedom, but he went on to make it equally clear that he

was no mere idealist. Indeed, like all those revolutionaries who had

learnt from the extreme and influential Italian republican Carlo

Pisacane [17], he understood that political ideas become valid only when

activated. And he was most explicit about the means of their activation:

> Dynamite is the diffusion of power. It is democratic; it makes
>
> everybody equal. ... Nothing can meet it. The Pinkertons, the
>
> police, the militia, are absolutely worthless in the presence of
>
> dynamite. ... It is the equilibrium. It is the annihilator. It is
>
> the disseminator of power. It is the downfall of oppression. It
>
> is the abolition of authority; it is the dawn of peace; it is the
>
> end of war, because war cannot exist unless there is somebody to
>
> make war upon, and dynamite makes that unsafe. [18].

Dynamite is "democratic" because it destroys rich and poor, powerful and

powerless, without distinction; and thereby creates an image of natural

equality outside of the confines of the artificial state. Behind the

obvious claim that Parsons is making here, that one can only overcome

the structural violence of capitalist society by responding with

violence, lies the contradiction that his rhetoric encompasses but tends

to spirit away. It is that central truth that if one impulse of human nature is towards freedom, another is towards security: that the very aspiration to the ideals of "equality" and "democracy" must serve, in its expression and method of realization, the equal and opposite aspiration towards the power needed to realize them. The political method of the anarchist, as expounded by Parsons, thus becomes the effort to efface this contradiction with a propaganda in which the idealism of "anarchy" is synonomous with the power of "dynamite": in which a unified form of total expression reconciles the distinctions between words and deeds, between rhetoric and action.

With proclamations like this receiving press coverage, it is small wonder that the general public of Victorian Britain were possessed of a positive horror of anarchism and the anarchist himself, an austere and implacable bomb-thrower, came to be a convenient bogeyman on which to blame the crimes of many. The equation, anarchy equals dynamite equals terrorism, was pushed onto the ordinary observer by the Victorian establishment so that the actual word anarchism came, in popular parlance, to mean precisely those things. Anarchism in late nineteenth century Britain was not the reasoned and philosophical social criticism of Kropotkin but precisely its opposite or reverse side: the violent and unmediated release of despair and anger at the world which found its most obvious expression in acts of terrorism. In "An Anarchist on Anarchy", Elisée Reclus attempted to reclaim the word anarchism for his own particular form of socialism, and complained of this confusion of fact and fiction in the minds of his readers:

> To most Englishmen the word Anarchy is so evil-sounding, that
> the ordinary readers of The Contemporary Review will probably turn

from these pages with aversion, wondering how anybody could have

the audacity to write them. With the crowd of commonplace

chatterers, we are already past praying for: no reproach is too

bitter for us, no epithet too insulting. Public speakers on social

and political subjects find that abuse of anarchists is an

unfailing passport to popular favour. Every conceivable crime is

laid to our charge, and opinion, too indolent to learn the truth,

is easily persuaded that anarchy is another name for ... chaos.

Overwelmed with opprobrium and held up to hatred, we are treated

in the principle that the surest way of hanging a dog is to give

it a bad name. [19].

But, of course, Reclus knew that the "ordinary readers" would not turn

from those pages but, on the contrary, would remain transfixed by the

horrors they unveiled: the "evil" of anarchism and the hidden "horrors"

[20] of the society it attacked, both equally laid bare. Indeed, it was

precisely that thrill of horror wherein anarchism's most powerful appeal

had come to reside. He continued:

... they never weary of repeating that anarchism is merely the

dream of a few visionaries ... do not even our enemies, by the

insults they heap upon us and the projects and motivations they

impute to us, make an incessant propaganda in our favour? It is

said that when the magicians of the middle ages wanted to raise

the devil, they began the incantation by painting his image on a

wall. For a long time past modern exorcists have adopted similar

methods for conjuring anarchists. [21].

The truth implicitly acknowledged by Reclus here is that the fascination

which anarchism and terrorism exerted over the imagination of "most

Englishmen", a fascination way out of proportion to its actual social and political impact on British society, was symptomatic of a deeper fascination with those forms of feeling and experience which were forbidden or socially outmoded in a highly evolved and complex society. Anarchism, at least in its more imaginative and poetic phase, gives voice to those simplistic but expansive moral visions and to that fantasy of personal power which are the very stuff of fiction. Thus the stock images of the revolutionary terrorist, and the accounts of his activities in newspapers and books, combined an imaginative vision of a primitively heroic and pure idealism with a voyeuristic fantasy of anarchistic violence and destruction. They satisfied an age old addiction to exciting melodramatic horror stories, but also gave a sense of reality to the "forces of dynamite and hate". For Reclus, this was propaganda in its favour, because it indirectly paid tribute to the power and appeal of such "forces" and thereby brought them into existence. But, as we shall see when I examine some of the novels in this tradition, these "conjuring" stories approach or "raise" those anarchistic modes of thought and feeling only within an ideological structure which renders their appeal unsafe and limits it to a purely fictional and imaginative dimension of expression.

Thus the "dynamite" novel constructs or plots a response to terrorism which reproduces that complex of feelings, that mixture of fear and desire, which is at the heart of all melodramatic narratives and, in a sense, at the centre of the appeal of "anarchism" itself. Often these novels are no more than love stories with a dash of anarchistic terrorism thrown in for colour and excitement, or for romantic complication. Often they are adventure stories in which the

respectable hero, obviously representative of the writer's values and perspective, is accidently plunged into a world of exciting revolutionary terror which he must overcome before he makes a positive assertion of "rational" and "civilized" values at the end. I have read literally dozens of these novels and, although they are very varied in type, what unites them is a consistent pattern of contradiction in which the more rationalistic rejection of terrorism, which is commonly to be found in press coverage of it, is mixed with an aesthetic engagement with its simplicity and power.

It is, then, with the press coverage of anarchism that I begin, since it is here that many of these writers found both their rational assessment of anarchism and, quite often, also the plots for their novels. What follows is by no means intended to be an exhaustive or even a comprehensive account of this area of journalism, but only a brief guide to its main themes; as well as an illustration of how the idea of the violent anarchist came to be one of the central themes around which the people of this violent period debated their feelings and views.

II.

Anarchism in the Press and Popular Journals

"... if you execute tomorrow every known anarchist in the
world", pronounced the Archdeacon of Westminster in The Pall Mall
Gazette of 14 September 1901, "you have not touched the evil. The same
causes will produce the same effects" [22]. He was writing on the day
after the President of the United States, William McKinley, had been
assassinated by the Polish anarchist Leon Czolgosz and he gave voice to
what was the worst fear in the minds of everyone in Britain at this
time: the idea that terrorism was not just a criminal plot which would
go away once its perpetrators had been arrested, as they would have
liked to believe, but a permanent and innate fact of life in a modern
political world. By 1901 Britain had seen, for over twenty years, a
serious and unprecedented escalation of terrorist attacks on both its
people and institutions. These included simultaneous dynamite attacks on
Parliament, the Tower of London and Westminster Hall; the bombing of
London Bridge and Trafalgar Square; three bombs in one day in Glasgow;
the bomb in Greenwich Park which killed Martial Bourdin; innumerable
bombs on trains and train stations; and a number of attempts on the life
of Queen Victoria. Today, perhaps, we cannot quite appreciate the impact
on the minds of the people of Britain of this new phenomenon, which
combined the horror of ferocious violence with all the wonders of modern
science which surrounded the new power of "dynamite". That impact,
though quite fleeting, was in many ways very profound and formed a
spectacular new subject for the press to investigate.

To some people in the press, like the Archdeacon, it seemed that terrorism and anarchism were the inevitable result of a deep malaise and despair at the heart of British and Western society generally; a despair which had to be confronted and overcome before terrorism would disappear. To others it seemed that they were the result of the insane evil of a few dangerous criminals, who hopefully had only to be rounded up by the police and executed in order to put an end to terrorism. Press coverage of the events of this period can be clearly seen to veer quite dramatically between these two extremes of analysis and gave birth to the stereotypical and confused images of the anarchist and terrorist which were then peddled to the public in popular fiction. However, the central recognition which underlies both of those schools of thought on terrorism, avoided by some and confronted by others, was that the invention of dynamite had subtly changed British society forever.

An 1885 edition of _All The Year Round_, for example, contained an article entitled "Detectives and their work" which, perhaps, struck the key note of the irreversible psychological and emotional effect of terrorism on the British people of the 1880's. In it the police receive great sympathy for their fortitude in facing the unimaginable "monstrosity" which had come to Britain:

> Since dynamite outrages, and threats and rumours of dynamite
>
> outrages, have become a sort of institution in our land, our
>
> detective force and its organization have been subjected to a
>
> good deal of adverse criticism. ... But it (dynamiting) is not
>
> an ordinary crime, and it is a new one. Assassinations of
>
> individual rulers, or ministers, we have had from of old, but

in the modern dynamiter, the wholesale indiscriminate assassin,
in comparison with whom the Thug was an embodiment of sweetness
and light --- this monstrosity, until it sprang into existence,
was a creature that the ordinary mind was incapable even of
imagining. [23]

"Dynamite" terrorism had changed the imagination of the age, and the
point implicitly registered here is that the use of dynamite by
terrorist groups in Britain had brought a new and unexpected dimension
to its public and political life. Terrorism was like war. It was not
simply that "wholesale" and instantaneous murder for political ends was
now a distinct possibility, but that the existence of that possibility
seemed to have a corroding effect beyond the mere physical danger and
horror involved: that it also attacked the most basic and traditional
categories of political and personal, public and private, into which the
"ordinary" English man divided his life. No longer could the private
citizen feel unconcerned with the machinations of politics or the
abstractions of government foreign policy: terrorism dragged the
"ordinary" man unwillingly into a violent political arena, seemed to
hold him responsible for the things which were happpening in the world
and placed him under direct and personal attack for "abstract" political
ends.

The purpose of terrorism is, of course, to do precisely that:
to disillusion the public and break down the distinctions between the
private and the public in political life, and so to terrorize the
"ordinary" man with the danger of being swept away into the dangerous
plots and conspiracies of politics. That was the idea or feeling which
the terrorists wished to communicate and, in a curious alliance, it was

also the theme which dominated many press reports and commentaries on their activities. Just like the terrorists, the newspapers pitched their stories at the fearful public imagination of their "ordinary" and "private" readers who had, of course, no other source of information. Consider this leader from The Times, three days after the bombing of Parliament and The Tower of London in January 1885:

> To compass the assassination of a Sovereign or a minister, or
> even the destruction *en masse* of a legislative body, must be,
> without doubt, condemned and pursued to punishment as crimes
> inconsistent with the elementary forms of civilization. But
> such designs are at least intelligible; they go straight to
> their work, and they are subject to limits of their own. The
> Irish-American "dynamite fiend" chooses, by preference, for
> the scene of his operations crowds of the labouring classes,
> of holiday-makers, of ordinary travellers and sweeps them at
> random into the meshes of his murderous plot with as little
> concern for their personal merits or demerits as the Thug
> feels for those of the victim of his deadly cult. ...
>
> To strike terror into the souls of Englishmen, whether by
> indiscriminate slaughter of holiday-makers and working
> people, or by the destruction of precious historical
> monuments, is the avowed object of the dynamite party in the
> U.S.. [24].

The "dynamite party" refered to here are the Irish Republican Fenian movement who were based in New York, but responsible for virtually all serious acts of terrorism in Britain in the 1880's. The Times, in a sense, truly recognises the impact of terror: it draws exactly the

conclusions and lurid visions that the terrorists wished them to draw and merely adds to the weight of terror. Thus, again the chord struck by the article is the dismay and indignation of private individuals at finding themselves to be public figures and the personal political target of the terrorist. Again the chief distinction being made is based on the "indiscriminate" and incomprehensible nature of the activities of the "dynamite fiend" who attacks "holiday-makers and working people"; as opposed to the more "intelligible" purposes of the "assassin" of "a sovereign or a minister". Politicians, it seems to be saying, and in the voice of the "ordinary" man, are on one level fair game; but the "ordinary" private man himself is not.

It was against this background of the individual's new found amd unwelcome political importance that most of the press debate about the meaning of terrorism took place. *"Dynamite" had given the "private"* man a political voice, but it had also made him a political victim. As the terrorist Emile Henry explained in his highly publicized trial in 1894 for bombing a crowded cafe, the "voice of dynamite" was "indiscriminate" and aimed at the randomly chosen individual:

> Perhaps we should attack only the deputies who make laws
> against us, the judges who apply those laws, the police who
> arrest us? I do not agree. These men are only instruments.
> They do not act in their own name. Their functions were
> instituted by the bourgeoisie for its own defence. They are
> no more guilty than the rest of you. Those good bourgeois
> who hold no office but who reap their dividends and live
> idly on the profits of the workers' toil, they also must
> take their share in the reprisals. And not only they, but

all those who are satisfied with the existing order, who

applaud the acts of government and so become its accomplices,

those clerks earning three or five hundred francs a month

who hate the people even more violently than the rich, that

stupid and pretentious mass of folk who always choose the

strongest side-- in other words, the daily clientele of

Terminus and the other great cafés.

That is why I struck at random and did not choose my

victims! [25].

Henry re-iterated the press construction of anarchism as an attack upon

the apparently non-political individual: the "daily clientele" of cafés

and "clerks earning three or five hundred francs a month".

But there is, of course, no terror in the minds of the people

without the representation of that terror; and, in raising these

feelings of panic and indignation in the reader, The Times and The Pall

Mall Gazette were to some extent co-operating with the likes of Henry in

the terror process. Whilst the terrorist was busy with what Bakunin

called the "poetry of destruction" [26], the press gained tremendous

power over the interpretation of that "poetry" and waged their own

"terror" campaign against the "ordinary" man with anarchism as the

threat. They did it so effectively, that it is from the press of this

time that the classic image of the anarchist as a mixture of bomb-

throwing fanatic and insane gangster derives; an image from which it has

never entirely recovered.

However, while the newspapers of this time did senationalize

events and thereby add to the terror of "dynamite", they did so only

within an ideological structure which ultimately denied that terror by

transforming it into something else. The journalistic writing of this
time is characterized by an attempt to domesticate this new political
power of "dynamite" and anarchism into an old and more traditional
worldview where the distinctions between personal and political, private
and public, still exist: where, in other words, explosions and acts of
violence can only be seen as "private" individual expressions. Thus the
writer of The Times article above, having dramatically evoked the
sensations and disturbing new effects of political terror on his reader,
then implicitly turns it into something more familiar. He ends with a
confession of faith in the British people:

> ... their traditional and inbred spirit will save them from
> submission to the insolent dictation of murderers, and their
> common sense will warn them that if they begin to pay the
> black-mail to one gang of terrorists they will have to go on
> paying it to others. [27].

In contradiction to what has come before, the writer now wishes to deny
the force of terror in the public world and construct an image of the
world in which those new political forces do not operate. Hence the
unimaginable and incomprehensible "indiscriminate slaughter" of
terrorism is implicitly domesticted within the more familiar and
traditional language of comprehensible crimes. The terrorist is a
"murderer" and his activities "black-mail"; terms which imply personal
blame and which suggest that he can be defeated by those "traditional"
values of "common sense" and "inbred spirit" the writer now invokes
against him.

This idea that the terrorist or anarchist was merely a form of
criminal was, as I have said, one of the predominant themes of the press

coverage of terrorism at this time. The contradiction within this
position was that the press tended to sensationalize the events in
question, and dwell upon the terror in a way that gave it an implicit
political meaning, at the same time that they wished to reduce or deny
that meaning as a political statement. The Times wished to run long
articles on the impact of the Fenian's attempts to blow up London Bridge
in December 1884, but also wished to state that the "outrage" was
"purely mischievous":

> There is nothing connected in the remotest fashion with
>
> politics in these repeated endeavours to destroy public
>
> property or to kill or maim harmless people. No sane person
>
> would imagine that political ends of any sort could be
>
> served by such methods. [28].

Having raised the spectre of terror so effectively, the writer then
rejects it. The charge of incomprehensibility and the denial of
recognition to acts of terror, which are so often a facet of these
reports, is really the the other side of the charge of insanity,
stupidity and criminality which became one of the central cultural
stereotypes of the terrorist. Typically the public were faced with a
choice of explanations of terrorism which rendered it either incredible
or unacceptable: as either incomprehensible and too stupid to have a
political effect or as mere insanity and criminality. The latter were,
of course, terms which embodied pre-conceived and easy explanations and
absolved the writer and the reader of newspapers from having to look
beyond the surface appearance of events to search for its causes. Thus
The Pall Mall Gazette on Leon Czolgosz:

> Nothing indeed can illustrate more vividly the low intellectual

level of the wretch Czolgosz, than the fact that he should have

believed that he would be furthering the cause of anarchism by

compassing the death of the President. He will have done nothing

of the kind; on the contrary it is absolutely certain that he

will have done his brethren of the ignoble fraternity the

most signal disservice imaginable. [29].

Here, while the writer is simply refusing to consider the meaning of
Czolgosz's action and abusing him on account of his supposed "low
intellectual level", it is also undeniable that there is a lot of truth
in his view. Many of the violent attacks of this period merely conspired
in the propaganda against the causes they were designed to maintain.
Czolgosz, for example, received censure not just from the conservative
press, but was berated by anarchists and socialists world-wide and
especially by the leaders of the Russian Revolutionary Movement who
hoped for support from American public opinion.

Against this tendency of the press to deflate the terrorist
expression and deny it meaning was, as I have said, the opposite
tendency to sensationalize events in order to grasp the mind of the
reader. Indeed it sometimes seemed as if the "dynamiter", and the
journalist who wrote sensationally about him, were equally responsible
for the larger effect of terrorism on the mind of the British public.
This temptation to indulge in terror themselves must have been very
powerful to those who wrote the newspapers; especially so when the
general horror that people felt for what was happening in their society
could be attached to the suggestion that the threat they faced, was not
just that of spontaneous outbursts of violence, but part of a
meticulously planned conspiracy. Thus The Pall Mall Gazette on the 1885

trial of Cunningham alias Byrnes alias Gilbert for complicity in causing

explosions at Charing Cross in London:

> Byrnes had it all planned, and I have a map of London at home
>
> that is all marked with red ink, where Byrne wrote in the
>
> locations of the buildings he wanted to destroy. The one hundred
>
> young men were to get into London, and to carry their material
>
> with them as best they could, or they might manufacture machines
>
> or explosive packages in London. A certain day and a certain hour
>
> were to be designated for the destruction. The signal was to be
>
> the mid-air explosion of a dynamite bomb dropped from a balloon
>
> over the English capital. The explosion was to be of sufficient
>
> force to startle all London, and while the city was in excitement
>
> machines, timed for three or four minutes, were to be placed
>
> under the walls of all the public buildings. Just imagine the
>
> ruin and terror that could be wrought in that way in a few
>
> minutes. [30].

This is journalism with a literary dimension. The details themselves are

too absurd; too like the plot line of a popular thriller (which, in many

essentials, they later became in the highly entertaining Hartmann the

Anarchist (1893)). In fact they were based upon the information of an

anonymous source in an American newspaper, the St.Louis Daily News, and

there was never any evidence for the existence of such a plot. But that,

of course, is not important since the article constructs the

consequences anyway. Thus the telling final phrase, the "Just imagine

the ruin and terror ...", goes beyond mere reportage and evokes that

mixture of wonder and fear with which the public regarded such "dynamite

outrages". The terrorist constructing his dastardly plot and the

journalist writing his report are momentarily united in presenting

visions of terror that transform violence into a form of political

theatre.

This report is also typical of an increasing trend in press

reportage which suggested that the attacks on London were part of a

highly organized and wider international assault on civilization itself,

rather than the specific actions of Irish terrorists expressing specific

greviances. It was here that the myth of the international anarchist

organization came into existence and linked the Fenian actions in

Britain, the labour violence in America, and the revolutionary movement

in Russia, into one huge imaginary conspiracy against all government. It

was clearly in the interest of the Victorian establishment to encourage

this confusion between the Fenians and other movements opposed to it, in

order to deflect the force of argument and to discredit Fenians,

socialists and anarchists with the same label of "dynamite fiend". Thus

from the scenario of a shadowy "one hundred young men" of the above

article, it is not a great imaginative distance to the "thousand madmen"

of the same newspaper five days previously when it quoted the Austrian

Allgemäine Zeitung:

> Modern civilization is not to be frightened into fits because
>
> at the outset a thousand madmen wage war against it. Nor will
>
> two entire continents place themselves under martial law and
>
> dictatorship because a few insane persons have succeeded in
>
> ruining some stonework and perhaps causing the death of one
>
> or two innocent persons. [31] .

The note of contemptuous defiance of "a few insane persons" is

compounded by the attempt to increase the values at stake in the battle

against terrorism to a defence of "modern civilization" itself. Against

that, of course, were posed the pan-national forces of "anarchy";

numerically few but, with the invention of dynamite, nonetheless capable

of great destructive power. Thus The Warsaw Official Gazette, quoted in

the same article:

> The recent anarchist orgies prove beyond all doubt that the
>
> separate efforts of the different Governments are not sufficient
>
> to repress Anarchy. ... Anarchy is an international organization.
>
> To that league of destruction a league of defence must be opposed.
>
> As soon as all the European Governments shall have joined hands for
>
> that purpose they will certainly prove stronger than the murderers'
>
> alliance. [32].

Implicit in this, of course, is a criticism of Britain's asylum laws

which sheltered many European revolutionaries from the wrath of their

governments. European governments, and the newspapers which represented

their views, were therefore concerned to spread this myth of the

"international anarchist conspiracy" which connected the events in

Britain to a world-ideological polarity between the forces of anarchy

and civilization, a "league of destruction" and a "league of defence".

This was an idea which found strong support amongst some

sections of the British press, especially those who were worried about

the presence in London of those foreign revolutionaries. Indeed it is

fear of the influence of foreigners which can be seen to underlie the

views of the Rev. Kaufmann who, as we have seen, believed the whole

world to be threatened by the "force of dynamite and hate". He was

writing just two years after Marx, the most famous foreign revolutionary

of them all, had died in London and he blamed the upsurge of violence on

ideas imported from the continent. He thought that terrorism was the expression of a profound social and intellectual despair, which he ascribed it to the effect of the "atheistic doctrine" of dialectical materialism which robbed men of hope and left them in a "despondency". Thus, in his article "Socialism and Atheism", he described the effects of such belief:

> The result of such a view of social development can produce nothing else, but either the despair of pessimistic fatalism, or the kindling rage and smothered resentment of anarchists and opportunists. And so we find the Utopian optimism of the earlier forms of socialism displaced by nihilistic pessimism in its most recent manifestations, as the unavoidable result of growing disbelief in transcendental ideas. The alarming increase of suicides on the continent has been ascribed, and probably not without some reason, to the corroding effects of this kind of sceptical despondency. [33]

It is interesting that the "recent manifestations" of terrorism take their place amongst "nihilistic pessimism" and "suicides", as defining characteristics or actions in the construction of this new type of "socialism": a connection which repeats the commonly fostered confusion between violent anarchism and the Russian nihilist movement, many of whose members sought asylum in London. Kaufmann, then, presents the danger which faced society within the terms of a polarity between "optimism" and "pessimism" which is, quite naturally, equivalent to that between his own traditional beliefs and those of this new, foreign and athiestic socialism:

> Nothing can ... save society from the present danger but the

restitution of genuine religious belief. The spiritual dynamic

of faith, hope and love, to counteract the "force of dynamite

and hate"... [34].

Kaufmann was one of a number of clergymen who were recruited by the

press to give an interpretation of events from their specifically

religious perspective. The figure of the clergyman also became a common

feature of many of the novels of this "dynamite" tradition and their

views, like Kaufmann's, were generally apocalyptically conservative and

spread this myth of the international threat.

One interesting exception to this rule was the Archdeacon of

Westminster, with whom I began this section. His analysis, though based

upon the same religious ideas as Kaufmann, was relatively sophisticated

and radical. The Archdeacon was a leading voice of that school of

thought which located anarchism's causes equally in social injustice as

in the religious despair which seemed to infect the society he lived in.

Those causes, he argued in The Pall Mall Gazette, were really twofold:

The first is the inadequacy of the conventional theological

conceptions of the Ruler of the Universe to arrest the attention

and command the respect of thinking men. Anarchism is the

fruitage of atheism-- not necessarily atheism in the sense

of non-believers, but rejectors of man's common conceptions. [35].

It is an explanation which reflects, in obvious ways, his own concerns

about the world. And yet, at the same time, the Archdeacon does not

simply attach the blame for anarchism to the anarchists themselves, but

also to the failings of the society which created them. The anarchist is

the denier, not just of God, but of "man's common conceptions": in the

other dimension of the dominant cultural stereotype of the anarchist, he

is the individual who has broken all ties with the rest of humanity, morally and intellectually driven away from it by the "inadequacy" of those "conceptions" which dominate social and political life. The idea that society was failing in its function was also the understanding behind the Archdeacon's citing of economic injustice as the second cause of anarchism and violence. In an obvious but rarely stated connection, he argued that nations must build a world of economic justice and "when that good time comes, and not till then, there will be an end of anarchists" [36].

The Archdeacon's analysis is radical because, of course, he makes that connection between injustice and violence which very few of the conservative commentators in the press were prepared to consider thoroughly. Usually the emphasis in the analysis of terrorism went on the fact of the violence, with the despair and criminality that it implied; and without looking beyond that fact for a cause or for any more general responsibility for it than that which belonged to the perpetrator. The archdeacon's implicit challenge to that type of analysis, his recognition of a relation between economics and anarchism, gives us an example of how the whole issue of terrorism and its interpretation became a site for ideological conflict at this time. The "anarchist", the "terrorist", the "dynamite fiend", or whatever the writer chose to call him, became a mythical figure whose interpretation expressed the writer's larger political attitudes.

It was also against that tendency to merely criminalize violence and anarchism, that Elisée Reclus wrote his influential "An Anarchist on Anarchy"; the article I have already mentioned in the previous section and which contributed much towards the formation of the

more positive aspects of the stock fictional image of the anarchist and terrorist. It was a rare occurence for an anarchist, even a well respected one like Reclus, to be given such a wide and respectable audience for his views as was afforded by The Contemporary Review; and Reclus took the opportunity to make a rationalistic defence of violence as a political tool, as well as a socialistic moral plea to his readers on behalf of the exploited and poor. It is worth savouring the emotional quality of that plea:

If it be true that we have duties, one towards the other,

are we not responsible for the servitude, the cold, the

hunger, the misery of every sort, which doom the unfortunate

to untimely deaths? Race of Cains, what have we done with our

brothers? [37].

Reclus constructs for his readers an imaginative vision of an ignored world of poverty and suffering in the midst of their own: a "London accursed" where people eat "dust stained fragments" and live in "fetid dens". It is a raw and powerful appeal to their moral sense, but also to their more rational capacities, as he is quite explicit about the violent consequences of continuing to ignore such injustice. In fact he goes on to give a highly rational justification of political violence which, in its clear logic, reflects his own training as a geographer and scientist. It is worth quoting at length for the imaginative effect it must have had on its largely middle class audience:

... vengeances are the inevitable incidents of a period of

violent changes. It is in the nature of things that they should

be. Albeit deeds of violence, prompted by a spirit of hatred,

bespeak a feeble moral development, these deeds become fatal and

necessary whenever the relations between man and man are not the

relations of perfect equity. The original form of justice as

understood by primitive peoples, was that of retaliation, and by

thousands of rude tribes this system is still observed ... Eye for

an eye! Tooth for a tooth! If the blood of one man has been shed,

another must die! This was the barbarous form of justice. In our

civilised societies, it is forbidden for individuals to take the

law into their own hands. Governments in the quality of social

delegates are charged on behalf of the community with the

enforcement of justice, a sort of retaliation somewhat more

enlightened than that of the savage. It is on this condition that

the individual renounces the right of personal vengeance; but if he

be deceived by the mandatories to whom he entrusts the vindication

of his rights, if he perceives that his agents betray his cause and

league themselves with his oppressors that official justice

aggravates his wrong; in a word, if whole classes and populations

are unfairly used, and have no hope of finding in the society to

which they belong a redresser of abuses, is it not certain that

they will resume their inherent right of vengeance and execute it

without pity? Is not this indeed an ordinance of nature, a

consequence of the physical law of shock and counter-shock? It were

unphilosophic to be surprised at its existence. Oppression has

always been answered by violence! [38].

Reclus speaks for the rights of the individual and they include, he

makes perfectly clear, the moral and political right to use violence if

his circumstances justify it. He throws the charge of criminality back

at the society and its newspapers which condemn the terrorist as a

"murderer", and ends by invoking an inverted vision of the "anarchist" as a kind of spiritual saint:

> For him, faith in his idea is enough. As says the proverb of the Danish peasants: "His will is his paradise". What matters it if he is treated as a visionary! Even though his undertaking were only a chimera, he knows nothing more more beautiful and sweet than the desire to act rightly and do good; in comparison with this, vulgar realities are for him but shadows, the apparitions of an instant. [39]

I find it impossible to decide whether Reclus is being ironic or literal here. Possibly the image of the anarchist as "beautiful and sweet", and ready to "act rightly and do good", is no more overstated than some of the negative depictions of him, but it is highly exaggerated and the stuff of absurdly sentimental fiction. Also the ending is potentially sinister: the final reference to "shadows" and the "apparitions of an instant" could well be read as an indirect reference to the more instant acting means of his chimerical "undertaking". Nevertheless, Reclus' attitude is clear and, in an attempt to counteract the effect of press denial and confusion, he makes a forceful assertion of the political status of violence.

In this article, then, Reclus was trying to reclaim the term "anarchism" from the vilification it had received at the hands of the press. For Reclus anarchism was that brand of militant and individualistic socialism that he outlines, and not simply terrorism or "dynamite" outrages. Ironically, however, while Reclus was trying to rescue this term, there were other foreign revolutionaries writing in the pages of The Contemporary Review who were desperately trying to

escape from it and adding to the condemnation of "anarchism" in the process.

Amongst the largest and most prominant groups of political exiles in Britain at this time were those from the Russian nihilist movement. London had long been a place of asylum for Russian revolutionaries and socialists, being home for a long time to Herzen and Kropotkin and even for a while to the notorious Nechaev. Nevertheless the presence in London of a number of known terrorists was a sensitive issue, especially so when Britain was on officially friendly terms with the Tsarist government of Russia and was now begining to experience terrorism herself. The concern felt at this was reflected, as we have seen, in press reports and quotes of foreign press reports which suggested that the events in Britain were part of a wider international conspiracy aganist all governments. Indeed <u>The Pall Mall Gazette</u> quoted <u>The Moscow Gazette</u> as saying, "At last she (Britain) is herself experiencing the evil which she has always maintained for others with her sacred right of asylum" [40]. It also ran an article entitled "The Russianization of England", in which the wife of a Tsarist general asks: "When will England cease to be a paradise for assassins?" [41].

It was in answer to articles like these, and to counteract the force of that more general identification of nihilism with anarchy and terror, that many writers in the newspapers and journals of this time made a defence of nihilism and revolutionary violence in Russia as a special case; one which was not to be confused with events elsewhere in Europe or in America. That defence forms one of the most interesting strands of the whole press debate about terrorism at this time, and gave rise to a huge number of novels on the same subject (a special type of

terrorist novel, often with a partially educational purpose for the
reader who knew nothing of the conditions in Russia).

Interestingly, some of the writers of these articles on
nihilism were nihilist refugees themselves and men who had commited acts
of terrorism. Stepniak was perhaps the best known of these [42]. Known
in Russia under the name Kravchinsky, in 1878 Stepniak had stabbed to
death General Mezentzev of the Russian police in broad daylight and had
escaped to exile in Western Europe. Once there he quickly became
involved in the Italian nationalist and anarchist movement, before
eventually settling in London and becoming a journalist and novelist in
English. In his new life, Stepniak had a mission to become an advocate
for nihilism and to recruit Western public sympathy for the revolution
in Russia. His ambition was, he said in the November 1891 edition of <u>The</u>
<u>North American Review</u>:

> To conquer the world for the Russian Revolution, to throw upon
>
> the scales the huge wieght of the public opinion of civilized
>
> nations, to bring to those whose struggle is so hard that
>
> unexpected help; to find without a lever to move the minds of the
>
> Russians themselves within-- this was the dream which glistened
>
> before me. [43].

In the light of this task it was obviously crucial for Stepniak and
other nihilist sympathizers to forcefully oppose that tendency in the
press to identify them with the "anarchists" and "dynamite fiends" of
Europe and America. To that end, Stepniak wrote two quite well received
books, <u>Underground Russia</u> (1879) and the novel <u>The Career of a Nihilist</u>
(1889), both of which were concerned with depicting the extreme horrors
of the political situation in Russia and thereby justifying

revolutionary terrorism. I will deal with these works in a later

section, but here I just wish to give an account of the general outline

of Stepniak's views on political violence as they appeared in "Terrorism

in Russia and Terrorism in Europe", an article in the March 1884 number

of The Contemporary Review.

The stated purpose of Stepniak's article is to "compare and

judge European terrorism" [44] by comparing it to the Russian example.

It is typical of the way in which nihilism was defended to the British

people of that time, that Stepniak clearly seeks to play to the sympathy

and prejudices of his largely middle class readership and thereby to

distinguish nihilism as far as possible from those groups which seemed

to threaten them. "... dynamite has become", he argues, "the accredited

symbol of anarchy, the banner of the extreme revolutionary party" [45];

and it is against the stereotype of such anarchistic excesses that he

outlines his portrait of the "gentle" and "refined" individuals who were

to be found in the midst of nihilist violence:

> That which surprises and perplexes all those who interest
>
> themselves in the so-called nihilists, is the incomprehensible
>
> contrast between their terrible and sanguinary methods and
>
> their humane and enlightened ideals of social progress: a
>
> contrast that is suggested most forcibly by their personal
>
> qualities. For, whenever these men actually come before the
>
> eyes of the public, every unprejudiced and independent
>
> observer is forced to recognize that, instead of the ferocious
>
> monsters their acts would suggest, they are in fact men of the
>
> gentlest disposition, evidently inspired by unselfish love for
>
> their country, and, more often than not, well-educated, refined,

and belonging to the best society. How is it then, that men of
this sort, not only commit so many deeds of blood but defend
them, and proclaim them openly as a fair means of warfare? [46].

Apart from the fact that they are terrorists, Stepniak's nihilists sound
remarkably like average readers of The Contemporary Review and he
dscribes their "deeds of blood" as "warfare"; a concept his Western
readers could understand. The major distinction he makes, therefore, is
between acts of terrorism occuring within the context of "political and
social conditions" which justify them, as part of large scale political
and social movements, and those which occur without that context, mere
acts of personal vengeance. These latter can have no political meaning:

... a man who is not an outlaw, but a citizen living under

ordinary conditions, when he commits an act of terrorism does

nothing less than sacrifice completely and irrevocably his

future, his life, his all! For in Europe there remains no

possible position in society, no occupation of any sort, for

the man who has a deed of blood at his heels. He is dead, if

not physically, at least morally and politically. [47].

For Stepniak, terrorism is justified in Russia by "numerical conditions"
but in Europe, where the revolution is "economical", it cannot be:

Terrorism has no *raison d'etre* on European soil, and will

therefore not succeed in forming for itself the indispensible   ·

surrounding of a mass of sympathizers and supporters. [48].

Interestingly, Stepniak's argument is another version of that
conservative analysis to be found in the mainstream British press. He
too denies the political status of individual action and the political
meaning of acts of terror which occur outside of an official party

context. He, too, renders them *purely as unjustifiable* and personal "deeds of blood".

His argument is, of course, on another level also a version of that made by Reclus: that violence is the inevitable outcome of injustice and suffering and is justified by its context. But unlike Reclus, Stepniak positively refuses to accept the existence of any such justifying context in the Western world. He re-inforces this point by quoting an 1881 editorial of the Russian Revolutionary newspaper Narodnaya Volya on the recent assassination of James Garfield, President of the United States, by a disgruntled individual:

> "While expressing profound symapathy with the American people in the death of President James Garfield, the Executive Commitee feels itself obliged to protest, in the name of the Russian Revolutionary Party, against all acts of violence like that which has been perpetrated. In a country where the liberty of the subject allows peaceful discussion of ideas, where the will of the people not only makes the law but chooses the person by whom it is administered; in such a country as this, political assassination is a manifestation of the identical despotic tendency, to the destruction of which we are devoting ourselves in Russia. Despotism, whether wielded by the individual or by parties, is equally condemnable, and violence can only be justified when it is opposed to violence". [49].

These remarks seem equally well designed to irritate the then quite considerable anarchist movement in America, as they do to appease and enlist the "public opinion of civilized nations". Indeed, Stepniak completed his article with an outright attack on "the anarchists (we

should rather say a few knots of anarchists) who ... have betaken

themselves to terrorism". They were, he argued, doomed to failure:

> ... they find themselves reduced to a kind of agitation of
>
> which the political insignificance (not to speak of its other
>
> aspects) is too evident; and they will probably abandon their
>
> ill-advised practices, rather than risk their lives for such
>
> false stakes. The sooner they do so, the better it will be for
>
> the interests of the social revolution. [50].

The English newspaper reader finds a familiar voice here. He can be left

in no doubt as to the distinctions between the "dynamite" symbolism of

anarchism and the sane values that nihilism represented. However, if he

was in doubt, there were plenty more writers given space in the press to

make the same point.

Typical of these was "The Radical and Revolutionary Parties of

Europe" by Karl Blind; a two part explanation of nihilism which appeared

in the September and November 1882 numbers of The Contemporary Review. I

do not know who Blind was, whether he was actually a nihilist or not,

but his opinions bear a strong simlarity to Stepniak's, whom he also

frequently quotes. He too makes a great point of the difference between

"the crack-brained" and "impractical anarchist whose brain has been

turned and set fire to by incessently brooding over wrongs beyond the

possibility of redress", and the nihilists who "recently declared ...

that if the Tsar were to consent to the convocation of a National

Constituent Assembly, they would at once cease using violent means"

[51]. He also makes use of that tactic, perfected by Stepniak, of

portraying the revolutionary in high romantic terms: as a kind of gentle

and idealistic tragic hero, caught in a violent world. Here he describes two recent nihilists martyrs:

> Dmitri Lissogub, who was hanged, on the denunciation of his own steward, for having devoted his whole property to propagandism and revolutionary action. ... Pale, haggard, of apostolic aspect and demeanour, this enthusiast always appeared in shabby garb, thinly clad, in the bitterest cold. The author of Underground Russia calls him "the Saint of Nihilism". His couterpart was Valerian Ossinsky. ... of great manly beauty, tall, slim, of elegant attitude, with blue eyes of enthusiastic expression, fair-haired and well bearded, of charming manners-- a favourite of women. He was the best collector of pecuniary funds for the party. When he asked for contributions, even old misers did not resist his persuasive voice. He is called the "Apollo of Nihilism". He, too, ended at the gallows. [52].

This is almost as overstated as Reclus' "beautiful and sweet" anarchist, but it is also very effective propaganda. The figures Blind describes could be characters from any one of the great number of novels about the nihilist struggle that were published at this time. Indeed this conception of the terrorist as a morally righteous and romantic hero was taken up by literally dozens of popular melodramatic novelists who turned their imaginations to the world of Russian nihilism revealed to them by Stepniak and his imitators: a world of dramatic turmoil, clear political and moral alternatives, and with endless capacity for heroism and villainy.

The huge success found by this formula of "Russian" terrorist
novel is attributable to the co-incidence of two major factors. Firstly
they were, for the most part, excellent propaganda for the Russian
revolutionary cause and so they were constantly encouraged and re-fueled
with plots and stories by the press and revolutionaries in London.
Secondly, they provided an opportunity for the English writer to engage
in visions and scenarios of revolutionary violence, in its more
positively dynamic and aesthetic aspects, whilst remaining safely within
a conventional ideological understanding of the world. These "Russian"
novels have a simple melodramtic directness which is sometimes missing
in those "dynamite novel" which were set in England and which,
therefore, had to mediate their appreciation of the appealing aspects of
terrorism through narrative devices and irony.

We can see, then, that the image of the terrorist or anarchist
became a kind of focusing point for many of the major conflicts of this
period. The interpretation of his activities reflects some of the major
ideological polarities of the age: between the status of the individual
and the state, between economic and moral values, and, on an
international level, between Eastern and Western powers. This press
interpretation also provided the material for those popular novels which
I have so often mentioned, but now shall actually discuss. Partly for
the sake of convenience and partly because they are the vehicles of
different images of the anarchist or terrorist, I do so in a number of
different sections, each dealing with a dominant fictional theme or
aspect of anarchism's reception in Britain.

*

III.

Revolutionary Martyrdom:

Stepniak and the "Russian" Novel of Terror.

In December 1890 a reporter from the New York Times was sent

to meet the ship bringing Stepniak to America on his self-imposed

mission to "conquer the world for the Russian revolution". In an article

of the following day, he reflected on the impression that he had

gathered [53]:

> Anybody taking a good look at him, would say: "There's a man
>
> overflowing with good nature; a warm-hearted, sympathetic fellow.
>
> He cannot be a Nihilist!" But that is the very sort of man to make
>
> a good Nihilist, according to the definition which Stepniak himself
>
> gives, for, as he puts it, the Nihilist is a man who, touched by
>
> the suffering of his people, feels impelled to espouse their cause
>
> and to make a martyr of himself, if needs be, to right their
>
> wrongs. He may do very bad things, but he does them because he is
>
> a very good man. [54].

Stepniak himself could not have written a better or more sympathetic

introduction for a known advocate of revolution and violence to the

American people. The reporter makes him sound exactly like one of the

heroic and darkly romantic figures who inhabit the pages of his

propagandistic fiction and journalism. Not surprisingly, given this type

of press coverage, Stepniak was well received during his stay in

America; mostly spent writing articles and conducting public meetings on

the subject of revolution in Russia.

Stepniak's welcome, however, was mainly testimony to the
success with which he had already conquered the sympathy of a large
number of people in Britain and, in particular, to the impact that his
Underground Russia: Revolutionary Portraits and Sketches from Life
(1883) had had upon the thought of the time. Along with the highly
influential works of Kropotkin and the translations of the great Russian
authors then appearing in Britain [55], this book was instrumental in
inspiring that fashionable interest in Russia which possessed the
reading public of the 1880's and 1890's and helped give rise to the
spate of popular romantic fiction about revolution and violence which is
my subject here. Many of the writers of this fiction found, in
Stepniak's vivid revelations of an "underground" world of revolution and
terrorism, a perfect ready-made background and plot for their own
melodramatic fantasies and adventure stories. Indeed both the nightmare
vision of Russia and the almost spiritual enthusiasm for violent
revolution, that arises from the popular fiction of this time, are
factors that closely reflect Stepniak's ideas and illustrate the power
of his literary propaganda.

But then, as we have briefly seen in a previous section,
Stepniak was a shrewd and clever propagandist. His primary tactic was to
play directly to the imagination of his audience, by reproducing in his
books and articles the type of dramatic and slightly paradoxical
impression that he had personally made upon the American reporter. His
fictional and idealized nihilists were exactly that attractive but
contradictory mixture of "overflowing good nature" and the secret
capacity to do "very bad things", which made them interesting as
subjects of romantic speculation and the perfect protagonists of

melodramatic imaginative fiction. In Stepniak's enthusiastic

presentation, even the extreme "terrorist" was a deliberately intriguing

and romantic figure; given credibility by Stepniak's own incontestable

claim to special knowledge of his subject and repectability by his

influential propaganda against the Russian government as a kind of

pariah amongst civilized authorities: a notion which itself fed directly

into his British audience's fears and prejudices about international

issues. In his 1886 book The Russian Storm-Cloud, for instance, Stepniak

addressed himself to the question of war in Europe in terms which were

to be echoed by many other writers in the following thirty years:

> Why is Russia a conquering country? ... The fundamental cause of
>
> this is perfectly understood in Europe: it is the existence of the
>
> Autocracy in Russia, ... Russia alone among European countries
>
> is a conquering state in these days. [56].

For Stepniak, autocracy, violence and war were structurally and

irrevocably linked in Russia and in this piece he seeks to use his own

authority as a Russian to exploit a western fear of Russian expansionism

and to align his reader's sympathy with the revolutionary movement.

Indeed, against the necessarily violent excess of autocracy he posed the

essentially peaceful and reasonable nature of the means of the

revolutionary struggle, whose violence was only a temporary response to

extraordinary conditions. "The terrorists will be the first to throw

down their deadly weapons," he wrote in Underground Russia, "and to take

up the most humane and the most powerful of all, those of free speech

addressed to free men, as they have several times explicitly declared"

[57].

It was, then, partly out of his own special knowledge and partly out of a literary technique that Stepniak's considerable power as a propagandist for the revolution emerged and ensured for him a receptive audience in Britain. In Underground Russia, his best received book, Stepniak takes his reader into the hidden and exciting "underground" world of revolution and, in a series of emotionally charged vignettes which were to be much imitated by British writers on the same or similar subjects, unfolds what was one of the British public's first and most direct acquaintances with the philosophy of terror. Indeed Stepniak sets out a vision of the Russian autocracy as itself a terroristic and dangerous force which necessitated, even ennobled as "warfare", the most extreme expressions of opposition and negation.

However, in keeping with his "conquering" mission, Stepniak initially describes the characters and motives of the revolutionary movement in terms which are clearly designed to appeal to the prejudices and ideas of the "free" citizen of the West [58]. He explicitly makes the point, for example, that the origin of nihilism and political violence does not lie solely or simply in a political or ideological belief, but much deeper in one of the most fundamental of moral rights and human instincts:

> Nihilism was a struggle for the emancipation of the intelligence
> from every kind of dependence, and it advanced side by side with
> that for the emancipation of the labouring classes from serfdom.
>
> The fundamental principle of nihilism, properly so-called, was
> absolute individualism. It was the negation, in the name of
> individual liberty, of all the obligations imposed upon the

individual by society, by family life, and by religion. Nihilism

was a passionate and powerful reaction, not against political

despotism, but against the moral despotism which weighs upon the

private and inner life of the individual. (p.4).

Stepniak locates the springs of nihilism in "absolute individualism" and

independence: concepts and aspirations with a "moral" value beyond mere

geographical politics and which, of course, could be understood and

supported by the Western reader. They are also, in the special

conditions of the Russia that Stepniak describes, qualities of life

which are clearly denied to the individual by a despotism which invades

every aspect of his existence and inevitably drives him to extremes of

violent reaction against his oppression. Significantly, then, it is that

instinctive "reaction", not political ideas or theories, which lies at

the heart of Stepniak's "nihilism": a movement whose violent and

disturbing actions are a moral reflex and the only possible response to

the tyranny of a government which makes a free and independent life

impossible.

As we have seen in the last section, it was important for

Stepniak to make the distinctions between Russia and the West as

explicit as possible in his propaganda and to deny the validity of

terrorism on American and European soil, where "the liberty of the

subject allows peaceful discussion of ideas". Thus the rather subtle

distinction made in the above formulation, between opposition to

"political" and "moral" despotisms, can be best understood in terms of

Stepniak's attempt to propitiate his reader's fear that he might support

the merely "political" and "morally" unjustified terrorism in their own

lands, and to dissociate the nihilists from the actions of the

anarchists and other groups who practised violent opposition in the

West. In Russia, of course, the justification for terrorism is that no

liberty to discuss exists: that the freedom which for the Westerner is

defined and expressed by that power to use words and to engage in

"discussion", for the Russian becomes a more immediate and simple

physical imperative which can be asserted or articulated only in terms

of more primary and direct acts. The "Russian mind", Stepniak takes

pains to emphasize, proceeds to extremes because it exists under extreme

and primitive conditions and tends to "become excited even to

fanaticism, about certain things which would simply meet with approval

or disapproval from a man of Western Europe" (p.7).

It is, then, strictly with reference to this difference in

"moral" conditions between Russia and the West, that Stepniak undertakes

to recruit sympathy for nihilism and to explain the process by which the

terrorist is created. In a series of set descriptions and portraits

covering the various phases of the nihilist movement, he charts an

evolution of terror in which the violent nihilist of the present day is

the direct descendent of his essentially "religious" and idealistic

forbears. Indeed the terrorist is that old and almost christ-like

idealist, but twisted and soured by the experience of failure. Thus

here, in characteristically theatrical and overtly religious terms,

Stepniak recounts the fate of the early propagandists who "went to the

people" to preach revolution:

> ... these beings were too ideal for the terrible struggle which was
>
> about to commence. The type of propagandist of the ... last decade
>
> was religious. His faith was socialism. His god was the people. ...
>
> Inexorable reality struck a terrible blow at his enthusiasm and

faith, disclosing to him his god as it really is, and not as he

had pictured it. He was as ready for sacrifice as ever. But he had

neither the impetuosity nor the ardour of the struggle. After the

first disenchantment he no longer saw any hope in victory and

longed for the crown of thorns rather than that of the laurel. He

went forth to martyrdom with the serenity of a christian of the

early ages, and he suffered it with a calmness of mind-- nay, with

a certain rapture, for he knew he was suffering for his faith. He

was full of love; and had no hatred for anyone, not even his

executioners.

Such was the propagandist of 1872-75. This type was too ideal

to withstand the fierce and imminent conflict. It must change or

disappear.

Already another was arising in its place. Upon the horizon there

appeared a gloomy form, illuminated by a light as of hell, who,

with lofty bearing, and a look breathing forth hatred and defiance,

made his way through the terrified crowd to enter with a firm step

upon the scene of history.

It was the terrorist.   (p.30-1).

The "terrorist" is the reactionary dark side of that evangelical and

failed "idealist" and Stepniak overtly casts him in a religious and

sacrificial mode: as a kind of destructive anti-christ come to punish

humanity for its failure to realize ideals. It is interesting that

Stepniak traces that same trajectory of disillusionment which, as we

shall see, is described in A Girl Among The Anarchists (1901) and other

English novels about anarchism and socialism. The belief in idealistic

political ideas is clearly a phase in the development of a country or an

individual which, in time, is undermined or destroyed by contact with "inexorable reality" and gives way to hatred. However, whereas the English Rossetti sisters could retreat from that reality and translate their deflated idealism and hatred into a literary language and expression, Stepniak's "Russian" disillusioned idealist must forego verbal expression and has recourse only to deeds of violence and acts of terrorism (as, apparently, did Stepniak himself until he came to England and flourished as a writer).

Stepniak's terrorist, of course, also owes something to the mythical "lost man" of Nechaev's prophetic terroristic fantasies: to that fanatical individual "lost" to all rationality and all the ordinary ties of human existence, to "society", "family life" and conventional "religion", and dedicated purely and simply to negation. It is a phase of political extremism again imagined as a primitively simple physical imperative and a reaction to the failure of "words":

> The propagandist movement was a sublime test of the power of words. By a natural reaction the opposite course was now to be tried, that of acts.

> "We did not succeed because we were mere talkers, incapable of real work."

> Such was the bitter reproach of the survivors of the great movement, confronted with the new revolutionary generation which had arisen to occupy the place of of the preceding; and the cry of "Let us Act" became as general as "among the people" had been a few years before. (p.33).

The consequence of this opposition of "talkers" and "actors", which runs throughout Underground Russia, is that for the Russian under a "moral

despotism" terrorism had itself become the only language which had a meaning: that what Emile Henry later described as "the voice of dynamite" was now the only medium in which the idealist could articulate his ideals and assert his freedom.

At the heart of Underground Russia, then, is this central theme of an inevitable evolution towards a language of violence: a negative articulation of ideals conceived of as the product of a failure or absence of any other channel of expression in Russia. Stepniak defends violence as a "moral" necessity and, as the consistently christian imagery of Underground Russia suggests, he wishes his reader to imagine the terrorist as a "martyr" in something close to the original religious sense: as a witness to the reality of a greater moral and spiritual truth, whose deeds on Earth are designed to literalize and give meaning to the language of ideals. It is, of course, an extremely irrational and patently romanticized conception of the terrorist but one which also proved highly influential in shaping the thoughts and imagined visions of even those writers whose subject was not Russia: of imaginative young ladies like the Rossetti sisters or Maria Betham-Edwards whose interest in violence and terror was purely romantic, or of the equally frivolous type of engagement with violence that we can see in Hartmann the Anarchist (1894).

This theme of the terrorist as martyr is one which Stepniak treated even more directly, but perhaps less successfully, in his next major work, The Career of a Nihilist: a novel whose central subject is the torment and pressure which drives essentially decent individuals, like the hero Andrey Kojukhov, to acts of despairing and self-destructive terrorism. Despite some quite serious flaws, it is an

entertaining work and an interesting historical document which gives an informative insight into the life, methods and dilemmas of the contemporary revolutionary struggle. What specifically interests me here, however, is that Stepniak exploits the conventions of the novel to conduct a defence of revolutionary terrorism on two distinct levels, both of which proved highly influential in the popular fiction of the time. Thus he presents, as the background to his story, a lucid explanation of the nihilist movement from a reasoned and sober perspective and justifies terroristic violence as the only possible rational response to despotism in Russia. Yet, at the same time, he uses the artistic license and imaginative appeal of the novel form to construct a deeper irrational understanding of violence as an orgiastic and almost spiritual form of expression: as, in fact, an ecstatic language of its own which can express, in what Stepniak calls "manly rebellion" [59], that which is beyond the mere "power of words" to convey.

The story itself is set amid the émigré revolutionary circles of the late 1870's and recounts one man's gradual but inevitable transformation from a propagandist "among the people" to a desperate assassin prepared to "act" at any cost. Within the framework of this evolution, Stepniak again uses his special authority as a Russian to establish many of the stock elements of the popular "Russian" popular novel so fashionable at this time. Thus there is the melodramatic and pervasive vision of "the dominions of the Tzar" (p.10) as a region of darkness, evil and turmoil: a "bottomless abyss that swallowed up so many victims" (p.85). There are all the fascinating "authentic" details and insights into the life and work of the revolutionary "league" to

which the hero belongs; and which provides a model or collaboration for the secret societies and revolutionary groups that appear in so many popular novels by British writers. There is also, most centrally, the presentation of the revolutionists as consistently high-minded and law abiding individuals, whose use of violence is purely functional and clearly distinguished from the arbitrary and chaotic violence of autocracy. Thus, in deference to its high code of ethics and discipline, Andrey's group abandons a number of its potentially most satisfying missions; including a "death sentence" pronounced on a tyrannical official responsible for the order to brutally strip and beat a female political prisoner in Dubravnik:

> ... the attorney who ordered the infamous act, upon receiving
>
> news of his death sentence, was seized with such a panic that he
>
> at once left the town upon furlough, obtained under pretext of
>
> sudden illness. After a month it transpired that he had left the
>
> service of the Ministry of Justice altogether.
>
> The Dubravnik people, furious as they were against him, had no
>
> had no choice but to let him alone. It is an absolute and
>
> inviolable law with the terrorists, that from the moment an
>
> official gets out of the way of his own accord, and ceases to be
>
> harmful, he is in no case to be struck down for the sake of mere
>
> revenge. Several cowards have thus escaped the fate meted out to
>
> them. (p.79).

In a series of episodes and details like this, Stepniak builds up a picture of the revolutionary "underground" of Russia as an effective and disciplined movement with its own laws and codes of honour; and in

direct opposition to the commonly received notion of revolution as a chaotic expression of anger.

Within what one might call the ideological or imaginative geography of the novel, it is interesting that Stepniak employs the same central symbolic opposition of Russia and the West that was used by many writers of this time, and which found its most famous expression in Conrad's Under Western Eyes (1911). Stepniak's idea of the West is of a complex and formalized culture which diffuses and defuses political ideals and aspirations into essentially verbal phenomena, into discussion and debate, and thereby effectively disables the political "actor". Russia, on the contrary, is conceived of as a primitive and savage culture which somehow has a concentrating but simplifying effect on the mind of the political idealist: which disables the talker and causes the activist to translate his aspirations directly into deeds of violence. It is, then, within the terms of the hero's movement from western exile back into Russia that his progress towards a revolutionary "martyrdom" is described.

Just as in Underground Russia, Stepniak underpins his narrative with the mythology and imagery of the early christians' struggle against persecution and foregrounds the mystical dimension of terrorism throughout the novel as his main ideological and aesthetic point. Thus many long passages are devoted to the hero's inner spiritual conflicts as he comes to realize his political "mission" on earth. Unfortunately, however, it is precisely at those points where Stepniak's propagandistic purpose becomes most clear that the novel most fails as convincing fiction. The rather excessive mysticism of the majority of these passages can best be gauged by an example from early in the novel

when Andrey, seeking an occupation in his political exile, is first

beginning to thrill with the urge to martyrdom and experiences a moment

of epiphany whilst out walking in the dark forest:

> His widely opened eyes looked wistfully into the darkness, but he
>
> scarcely saw anything. If the sharp thorns of some bush had
>
> lacerated his body, he would not have noticed it. He was almost
>
> beside himself with the violent emotions boiling from the depths of
>
> his soul and permeating his whole being.
>
> He could not say this feeling was quite new to him. Now and then
>
> he had experienced something similar, though never had he been so
>
> completely under its power. It was rapture, yet it was unutterably
>
> sad, as if his soul was filled with wailing, and his heart brimful
>
> of tears; but the wailings were melodious, the tears were sweet.
>
> Out of this tumult of emotion-- like the cry of an eagle soaring
>
> in the eternal calm of the skies, far above the regions of cloud
>
> and tempest-- there rose in his breast the triumphant, the
>
> intoxicating consciousness of the titanic strength of the man,
>
> who no danger, no suffering, nothing on Earth, can compel to
>
> deviate one hair's-breath from his path. He knew that he would
>
> make a good and faithful soldier of the legion which fought for
>
> the cause of their country. Because this is what gives one man
>
> power over another's heart; this is what imparts the spell of
>
> contagion to his zeal; this is what infuses into a word-- a
>
> mere vibration of the air-- the force to overturn and remould the
>
> human soul. (p.22).

As one reads this and many similar passages, one cannot help thinking of

Conrad's protest against the Russian style of thought and language in

Under Western Eyes: that "spirit of Russia" with "its strange

pretentions of sanctity, and ... secret readiness to abase itself in

suffering", and it is tempting to think that Conrad had Andrey's vision

most in mind in Razumov's fantasy of subjecting himself to "a man--

strong and one" [60]. But, of course, it is the very excess and

"cynical" religiosity of Stepniak's treatment that makes this such

effective propaganda and sets the tone for his imitators, even if it

destroys it as convincing fiction: Stepniak's ideal notion of the

"terrorist martyr", that condition of "intoxicating consciousness"

towards which his hero moves, perfectly combines the dark romanticism of

Nachaev's "lost man" with a christian mythology which grows more

explicit as the novel develops. It is an earlier and obviously

influential version of the stock melodramatic notion of the "fanatical"

perfect anarchist, as imported and developed by the Rossetti's and other

British writers: an ascetic and remote being whose purpose is to

translate the metaphorical and figurative language of idealism into

literal and factual statements about reality. In Stepniak's version as

articulated here, he is a figure whose fate is ultimately testimony to

the inadequacy of the "power of words", perhaps even of life itself, to

the "real work" of a revolution conceived of as a quasi-religious quest

to "infuse" "force" into "words".

It is in this sense, of course, that the role of the

revolutionary becomes most comparable to the other role that Stepniak

himself assumed: that of the artist or propagandist attempting to

"infuse" words and to "remould the human soul" with the "work" of art

[61]. At several points Stepniak makes explicit the direct connection

between these two activities and it is clear that he conceived of this

novel as a way of bonding to his activist past and of somehow continuing

the "work" of that time in the "western" language of literary

propaganda. Thus he specifically links his hero's growth towards

political violence to the lack of an alternative means of expression or

of action upon his ideals. In this section he recounts his hero's

attempts to occupy himself in his exile from the struggle in Russia:

> Three long, long years had elapsed since Andrey Kojukhov,
>
> compromised in the first attempts at propaganda among the peasants,
>
> as well as in later struggles, had been urged by his friends to
>
> take an "airing". Since that time he had rambled over various
>
> countries, trying to find some occupation for his restless spirit.
>
> ... When there was any need of his return they would let him know.
>
> In the meantime he must keep quiet, and try to find work, either in
>
> revolutionary literature, or in the social movement abroad.
>
> Andrey tried both, but with more zeal than success. He wrote for
>
> several Russian papers published abroad. But nature had denied him
>
> any literary talent. He felt within him an ardent enthusiastic
>
> soul; he was far from being insensible to what was beautiful and
>
> poetical. But the channels between his sentiments and their
>
> utterance were blocked in him, and things which profoundly stirred
>
> his heart, when set down on paper, looked savourless and
>
> commonplace. His occasional contributions to the papers were no
>
> more than tolerably good padding. (p.13-14).

Stepniak has obviously dug deep into his own experience for this

material and it is often as if he is articulating, through the figure of

Andrey, his sense of the inadequacy of his own "occupations" as he

"rambled over various countries" and wrote revolutionary literature in

the late 1870's and 1880's. Indeed it is precisely Andrey's "blocked"

power of expression in words which makes him, in distinction to

Stepniak, quintessentially a terrorist and a candidate for martyrdom

[62]. Thus unlike his fellow exiled revolutionaries in the novel,

characterized as having a tremendous love and capacity for talk, Andrey

is a man of "few words" and "had nothing or very little of that ardent

passion for debate so common among the Russians, in the absence of some

more substantial outlet for energy" (p.65). He is the other side of the

eloquent idealists by whom he is surrounded: unable to translate his

"sentiments" adequately into the figurative language of literature and

verbal propaganda, Andrey is forced to translate them into the literal

language of physical acts; into, he comes to realize, the language of

terrorism.

Terrorism, therefore, is imagined by Stepniak to be a kind of

alternative form of expression to literature. His ideal "terrorist" is

ultimtely a very Sorelian conception of the revolutionary as a kind of

artist in reality: a figure whose violent deeds are the dramatic

enactment of ideals and the translation of a myth into what Sorel called

the "language of movement" [63]. This is figured in the novel through

Andrey's gradual Dostoyevskian surrender of himself to an external

narrative or biography of martyrdom and to a set of archetypal forms and

sequences of behaviour. This surrender comes to a crisis as Andrey

witnesses the execution of his friend and fellow revolutionist Zina: an

event which sets the pattern for his own future thought and action. It

is a scene in which Stepniak pours on the sentiment and piety and

positively cries out for imitation himself:

   ... upon a platform of any kind it is the woman that reigns over

the crowd. The eyes of the multitude were fixed upon that face ...

Beautiful as woman ever was, her head encircled by her hair as by a

halo, her face bashfully blushing under the gaze of so many eyes,

she cast a kind pitying look over the people below ... She expected

that Andrey would come, and was seeking him in the crowd. She

discovered him at once. There he stood, directly under her feet,

with head raised towards her. Their eyes met.

Neither then nor afterwards could Andrey understand how it came

to pass, but in that moment everything was changed in him, as if in

that kind pitying look there was some spell. Anxieties and fears,

nay, even indignation, regrets, revenge-- all were forgotten,

submerged by something thrilling, vehement, undescribable. It was

more than enthusiasm, more than a readiness to bear everything. It

was a positive thirst for martyrdom-- a feeling he always

deprecated in others, but never suspected himself to possess--

which burst forth within him now. To be there, amomg them, upon

that black car of infamy, his shoulders fastened to the wood like

those of that woman, bending her radiant brow above the crowd--

this was not punishment, this was not horror, it was the fulfilment

of an ardent desire, of a dream of supreme happiness! (p.252-3).

This scene, or close variants of it, appeared regularly in novels of

this time and fashion: the beautiful and saintly heroine, the "eyes of

the multitude" upon her, routinely faced death and humiliation in order

to enlist the sympathy of the readers of popular fiction. Stepniak's

symbolic and orgiastic rendering of this convention, his transformation

of Zina into an essentially mythical figure of desire, is meant to mark

Andrey's final attainment of the "intoxicating consciousness" of the

fanatic. Indeed it is at this point that his resolution to undertake a suicide mission against the life of the Tzar is instantly formulated; to the exclusion of all other claims, even those of his love and responsibility to his wife. Here he ponders his decision for the last time:

> Then came the personal question, -- Why should it devolve on him, out of all his fellow conspirators, to do that deed of retribution and self-sacrifice?
>
> This question he was no longer able to discuss dispassionately, as if it were a geometrical problem.
>
> That something which thundered and seethed in the depths of his soul now rushed upwards, not waiting for his decision. It flooded his whole being with fire. It made short work of hesitations, attachments, pity, as the irrupting lava burns to ashes fences, houses, smiling groves-- everything in its path. He stopped short in the middle of the room. His face and eyes glowed,-- gloomy, menacing, yet excited,-- as he threw both hands upwards with the same gesture he had made when he saw Zina on the day of her execution.
>
> His decision was made, and was irrevocable. Now it could be talked about. (p.274).

Typically Stepniak describes the moment of "conversion" in the most ecstatic terms and as an experience beyond or below the level of conscious rational thought. The "rush" of the "something which thundered and seethed in the depths of his soul", elsewhwere enthusiastically depicted as "a moment of moments ... of one vivifying touch" (p.94), represents the fanatic's possession by, and sacrifice to, an external

archetype of revolutionary action [64]. Within the terms of Stepniak's

terrorism and literature opposition, Andrey is now the artist in

reality: representing and re-enacting the "same gestures" that he has

seen made by heroic figures, his life is a process of giving form and

meaning to their example.

The novel ends with the promised death of Andrey in his

suicidal assassination attempt and the consequent fulfilment of the

heroic biography of the revolutionary as "martyr". Stepniak sustains the

note of religious exaltation and sacrifice right up to the closing

words:

> He had perished. But the work for which he died did not perish.
>
> It goes forward from defeat to defeat towards the final victory,
>
> which in this sad world of ours cannot be obtained save by the
>
> suffering and the sacrifice of the chosen few. (p.320).

This final imaginative vision of the terrorist is, of course, intended

as a sop to the prevailing notions and prejudices of the "public opinion

of civilized nations": that power which Stepniak wished to evangelize

for the Russian revolution. Stepniak's tactic to overcome those

prejudices, as demonstrated in both Underground Russsia and The Career

of A Nihilist, was to cast his representation of the revolutionary

struggle in the kind of mythical and romantic terms which submerged the

fact of violence in the overall framework of a greater religious or

idealist narrative of history. Ultimately his terrorist martyr, backed

up by Stepniak's own revolutionary credentials, was a poetic and

political image which imaginatively and morally sanctioned acts of

violence and terror as a genuine means of political expression, but

which is remembered by the reader mainly as a heroic and spiritual being.

Stepniak then, in a sense, uses his authority as an experienced revolutionary and as a Russian to set a kind of ideological trap for the reader of his books, who is forced to identify with his mystical notion of terrorism or made to feel as if he is applying inappropriate "Western" standards in a situation he does not understand. Stepniak was relying on the conventions of the novel, on the reader's suspension of disbelief and imaginative commitment to the novel as an art form, backed up by a clever insertion of "authentic" detail on his behalf, to ensure that the reader did identify with his ecstatic and mythical vision of revolution. The only alternative, of course, is that disconnection and alienation from the spectacle Stepniak constructs which leaves the reader unable to judge or to understand a world of which, as the author implicitly emphasizes, he knows nothing [65].

Stepniak, then, can be seen to use Western ignorance as a positive tool of propaganda in The Career of A Nihilist: the unknowing reader has, effectively, a choice between his ecstatic version of revolution or nothing. Stepniak, however, was not alone in this quite blatant use of his reader's supposed blindness and ignorance to make a case for nihilism. Many of the novelists inspired by Stepniak also take trouble to remind their reader's of their inability to judge the issues involved in the nihilist struggle without the help of the author. Consider, for example, Charles H. Eden's George Donnington; or, In The Bear's Grip (1885), a full-blooded melodrama of love and revolution which plunges its English protagonists and readers into a chaotic and alien Russian world: a society depicted as so perverse and vicious that

the standard conditions and criteria of life and thought in the West do
not apply. Eden thus constantly insists upon the strangeness of life in
Russia to the English vision and makes his novel's ideological purpose
very clear. The Englishman, he reminds his readers, lives in a land
which "affords opportunity and self-expression" for those who seek them:

> Russia, however, provides but one opening for an ardent nature
>
> shut out from the sunshine of healthy growth and condemned to grow
>
> awry, and bring forth poisonous fruit under a system of incredible
>
> perversity-- and that one opening is Nihilism-- warfare against the
>
> authorities who have so wilfully misused the power they possess.
>
> Let us remember this before we blame too hastily; let us never
>
> forget that we deal with a land where freedom, in its true sense,
>
> is wholly unknown. [66].

Eden's most obvious purpose here is to remind the reader of the
different and special conditions under which the Russian lives and is
driven to "warfare". Yet it is also clearly the case that he is
inventing his own authority within the world of the novel and seeking to
lend to his melodrama that "sense of reality" and political purpose that
attached to Stepniak's visions.

In The Bear's Grip is, in fact, a novel which follows very
closely Stepniak's depiction of Russia as chaotic and savage land and
Eden exploits the full dramatic potentials of that idea. It recounts the
experiences of young George Donnington, "a penniless baronet" (p.10)
fallen on hard times, who is sent into Russia as a business agent only
to be quickly and innocently caught up in the violent political turmoils
that infect even the aristocratic circles in which he mixes. Even before
he enters Russia he is warned, by an *émigré* Russian in London, of the

gap in comprehension between the experience of the Englishman and that of the Russian:

> Such a government as that of Russia is never without a pretext for
> restricting the liberty of its subjects. An atmosphere of
> corruption taints the whole social system, and espionage is rife
> amongst all classes. No man in that unhappy land knows who he can
> trust. You, as an Englishman, cannot realize what it is to weigh
> every word before uttering it-- to place a constant guard over
> your mouth even when in the presence of those nearest and dearest
> to you. (p.25).

As is implicit here and becomes clear in the course of the novel, the vital principle of the difference between Russia and the West is the fact that in Russia there is no separation between the private and the political life. The "corruption" and violence which infects the political world, invades the most intimate aspects of the individual's life and makes anything but a violent engagement with and heroic bonding to political struggle impossible.

This is a truth which young George soon learns the hard way when, shortly after his arrival, he becomes involved in a romantic rivalry with a corrupt and villainous Russian count for the hand of a young lady. The upshot of this is that the count, no respecter of formalities and one who happily abuses his public power in pursuit of private ends, invents nihilist conspiracy charges against him and George finds himself arrested and sent to Siberia. Of course George, who embodies a traditional British perspective on the world and believes in the notions of fair play and justice, is outraged by this and soon learns to sympathize and involve himself with the revolutionary movement

in reality. It is from his point of view, and via the revolutionary characters he meets and scenes he witnesses, that Eden presents a picture of Russia as a vicious and anarchic society and constructs an apology for terrorism addressed directly to the imagination and sympathy of his English audience.

George, by virtue of his misfortune, is therefore a typical hero of this type of fiction in that he is given privileged access into and vision of the "underground" world of the nihilist movement. In one section, for instance, he is allowed to witness a meeting of a secret conspiracy group of nihilists addressed by "Ivan Ivanovitch", who lists a catalogue of abuses and injuries to the people and promises retribution. Eden obviously knew something of Russian political history or had read his Stepniak and Kropotkin closely:

> All who are here present are pledged to assist in bringing about
> a revolution. Ignorant people accredit us with seeking to destroy
> all existing institutions. They say that our aim is solely
> destructive; that we would pull down the monarchy, root up
> religion, sweep away at one swoop administration, armies, priests,
> judges, and the monopolists of privileges. Those who say this
> traduce us. Herzen promulgated the theory that a constitution was
> only a miserable contract between masters and slaves; but in this
> our great teacher was wrong. No sane man if called upon to improve
> an edifice would begin his work by pulling down the entire
> fabric and raising another on the ruins. He would rather content
> himself with removing the weak or objectionable portion, and
> substituting that which was more suitable and commodious in its
> place. So with us: we would not lay the axe to the root of the

social tree, we would prune it only-- by judicious lopping, thin

out all the decaying branches, and mercilessly excise the parasites

that cumber its frame and batten on the destruction they bring.

(p.82).

These, of course, are acceptable and even attractive ideas to the

staunch Englishman embodied by George; and the novel's central

ideological image, therefore, is that of the respectable British

capitalist in league with the liberal tendencies of radical Russian

resistence against the force of tyranny.

A novel which sets up a very similar ideological image is

Olive Garnett's _In Russia's Night_ (1918): a record of the experiences of a

young Englishwoman who marries into a noble Russian family only to be

caught up in the tempestuous events of the 1905 revolution. Although it

is a very late example of the Stepniak inspired fascination for Russia

and revolution, appearing some years after the main trend, it is given

added interest by the fact that in the 1890's Garnett had been involved

in a very close personal relationship with Stepniak and his influence

over the work is very direct and powerful. After his death in 1895, she

travelled to Russia to see it for herself and spent several years there

as a language teacher; an experience which provided the material for her

first published work of fiction, _Petersburg Tales_ (1900). This was a

collection of short stories concerned specifically with the difficulty

of understanding Russia and Russians from an English point of view and

closely follows Stepniak's characterization of the fanatical nature of

the Russian mind under the pressure of tyranny.

In "Roukoff", the best of the four stories which make up the

volume and one which Conrad is known to have highly admired [67],

Garnett's narrator is herself a young Englishwoman who gives English

lessons in St.Petersburg and initially struggles to understand the

almost spectral "Russian atmosphere" [68] of oppression and suffering

which seems to hang over every aspect of life. "All we intelligent

Russians suffer horribly," one of her "advanced" pupils informs her, "in

some mysterious way you are tuned up to this note: it touches you and

you evoke it" (p.100).

The narrator's penetration of the mystery of this suffering

becomes, then, the background to the story of Roukoff: a brilliant blind

con man whom Garnett uses as a figure around which to depict a wide

range of typical Russian sentimental and moral attitudes. Of specific

interest to me here, however, is simply the development of the

narrator's spectral understanding of Russian life and the growth of her

appreciation of the special "tension" which drives the Russian to

extremes of behaviour:

> "That's what comes of the unnatural tension these advanced people
>
> work under," I said to myself; "the anxiety must be killing. They
>
> see a spectre at every window-- a policeman behind every lamp post.
>
> Only frivolous people enjoy themselves in Petersburg." (p.103).

This spectral subjection of Russian vision, what Stepniak had depicted

as the perception of "momentous crisis" in everything, is what makes the

Russian so incomprehensible to the western mind and generates the

ironies of another of Garnett's stories, "The Secret of the Universe".

This is the story of Alexander Barry, an exiled radical Russian

philosopher and "mystic of science" (p.233), who enlists the sympathy

and support of a number of English intellectuals who feel morally

obliged to help him translate and publish his great work, but unable to

understand what he means by it. "He seemed to me to talk of everything
in heaven and earth in his shrill voice ...," remarks the narrator,
"especially of principles and aims and sufferings. But somehow it was
not inspiring" (p.216). Indeed her incapacity to be inspired, literally
to see what he sees, becomes a source of torment to her as she gets to
grips with the work of translation:

> Childlike vanity was writ large over the pages, but his essential
> character shone through the gloom like a vein of gold in a dark
> place. Such apostrophes, coming as climax to a burst of
> indignation, as "Nicholas I., I abominate you! Alexander I., I defy
> you! Alexander III., I despise you!" would reduce us to that
> feebleness in which the pen falls from nerveless fingers, ...
> between laughter and tears. (p.246).

Again the "childlike vanity" and hard literalness of the Russian mind,
which proceeds to extremes apparently on the basis of nothing, are the
fundamental point of the story.

In Russia's Night is essentially an extended and more overtly
political treatment of this theme. Garnett is again centrally concerned
with establishing the unavoidable political pressure under which the
individual lives in Russia: that "tension" and "anxiety" noted in
"Roukoff", which destroys the very English distinction between the
public and private dimensions of life and inevitably creates violence
and frustration. Very much like Eden before her, Garnett articulates her
sympathy for the nihilist struggle in the narrative of a respectable
young Enlishwoman who is lead into a series of experiences which
convince her of the inevitability and righteousness of terroristic
violence in a Russian political context.

The novel presents a vision of Russia as suffocated by a despotic and barbaric bureaucracy which denies liberty and justice to even its more privileged subjects and corrupts and politicizes the most private aspects of existence. Indeed the shadow of that tyranny invades even the love of the heroine, Katerina, and her Russian husband, as she struggles to understand his Russian mentality and overcome her prejudices against the wildness and savageness of Russian life. "I imagine that the proverb about scratching a Russian still holds good", she remarks early in her experiences of Russian life, "Except in the educated and travelled families the veneer of civilization is but thin, the rough nature is very near the surface" [69].

The leading interest, then, is how Katerina's very English conceptions of life and politics are broken down by her witness of a "rough" Russian reality from the inside. Initially she cannot adapt herself to, what seems to her, the violent political ideas of the liberal classes in which she finds herself. "Yes, my wife's English," laughs her husband, Dmitri, "She is ignorant of our domestic troubles, and thinks that the remedy for every evil is to write to the London Times" (p.151). Her political education begins during long discussions with her husband on the morality of political violence and, like Under Western Eyes which is an obvious influence on Garnett, occur against the background of the assassination of the Russian minister, de Plehve. Again the narrator's essentially western understanding is challenged by the environment in which she finds herself:

> ... I overheard some people saying that Plehve, the all powerful
> minister of the Interior, who had so long held the reins of
> reactionary power in his hands, had been killed by a bomb the day

before. I knew already that he had the worst possible record as an

oppressor and suppressor; and all the joy around me ... was

extreme; but in my English way I wanted to know a good deal more

before I could wholeheartedly share the exuberant satisfaction;

I wanted more particulars as to the assassin, his motives, etc.,

than were available. Dmitri's light-hearted raising of his glass

to his lips at dinner to "the happy removal of our tyrants, Plehve

in particular", seemed to me very shocking and we had a long and

heated argument about bombing. I declaring that I found in it the

barbaric Russian element ... and Dmitri declaring that it was

merely a method of warfare; and seeing that the tyrants were always

shadowed by the police, my aristocratic ideal of personal combat

was out of date, and anyhow impractical. (p.261-2).

Katerina, however, soon loses this concern for ethical niceities under

the weight of her Russian experience and becomes attracted to

revolutionary circles; where she meets a number of inspiring terrorist

types and begins to perceive the inevitability of political violence. In

Russia, it becomes clear, no separation betweem the personal and the

political is enforcible in one's life and if corruption occurs in one

sphere it inevitably moves to the other. Thus Luba, an experienced

political activist, explains to her how people become revolutionists

even without intending to:

The quickest method to be genuinely of our way of thinking,"

said Luba, laughing, "is to want to improve something somewhere,

and set about doing it; in education or in hygiene for example,

and you will find some opposition. You will begin asking why? The

answers will be unsatisfactory, and then, if you are sufficiently

in earnest, you will find that you *are* a political. ... Do you want

to get something done and quickly and do you dislike bribery? Then

you are already an enemy of the bureaucracy. Is there some unsavory

scandal you want ventilated in the press? Then you are already up

against censorship. What are the last resources when all else has

been tried? Cunning or force. Then you have already become an

active revolutionist. But if you smile, shrug your shoulders and

say, "Oh, these Russians-- Kissel, it is quite a hopeless

struggle," then you are already our enemy. For he that is not with

us is against us. (p.274-5).

This, of course, is Garnett's major point: the constant imminence of

politics and despotism in Russian life which makes western forms and

standards unsustainable and irrelevant.

Katerina's conversion is completed on Bloody Sunday in

St.Petersurg, when she witnesses the Cossacks firing on a crowd of

protestors. The effect is to open her vision to the horror always just

beneath the surface of Russian life:

My eyes being now opened to underground Russia, I was to find a new

significance even under unpromising exteriors, and indications of

repression and the consequent upheaval, almost everywhere. (p.301).

The novel ends, then, with this experience of conversion and extremely

self-conscious re-statement of Stepniak's vision. Indeed it enacts the

standard ideological image and purpose of the fashionable "Russian"

novel of terror: that political spectacle of the English bourgeois

individual united in imagination with the violent nihilist

revolutionary.

Like _In The Bear's Grip_, Philip May's _Love, The Reward_ (1885)

is one of the earliest examples of the novel used to persuade the

English public of the justice of the nihilist struggle. May is very

serious in his intentions and presents an intelligent and informative

account of the situation in Russia, even reproducing long sections of

Chernyshevsky's propagandistic novel _What is to be Done_ in support of

revolution. Like Stepniak, he depicts the revolutionary movement on the

turning point between idealism and terror and includes long sections

devoted to vivid evocations of government oppression and cruelty. For

May, violence is the inevitable and justifiable response to those

conditions and to the failure of all other methods:

> There were then, and still are, but few who approve of violence
>
> and assassination; but when men become desperate, through being
>
> treated like savage beasts by those who have no legal or moral
>
> right to rule over them, they may sometimes be forced like beasts
>
> to turn in self defence. [70].

In distinction to this reduction of men to violent "beasts", May posits

the myth of the gentle and refined terrorist:

> The nihilists do not aim at the destruction of all things; some of
>
> their actions, indeed, would not be unbecoming in a devout believer
>
> in any accepted religion. Charity is the chief virtue, and even
>
> women are encouraged to devote their energies to the advantage of
>
> humanity, especially of suffering humanity; and the female nihilist
>
> can go with safety into the midst of the poor, for she is known as
>
> the friend of those stricken by misfortune or distress. (vol.2,
>
> p.97).

May thus expounds, throughout the novel, the paradox of the nihilist

revolutionary as driven equally by impulses to violence and "charity";

inspiring fear and fascination.

There were, as I have said, literally dozens of novels which

fall into the same category as Love, The Reward and In Russia's Night

and which address or exploit the same vision of Russia as a strangely

contradictory country which inspires both a fascinated interest and

horror in the western observer. Ultimately, of course, these were really

the expression of a broader historical suspicion of Russia which existed

within British political culture, which was given added impetus and

interest by the upsurge in revolutionary struggle in the 1870's. The

larger political purpose of these novels was to direct that existing

suspicion as much as possible against the power of Russian autocracy

specifically and to construct an imaginative or mythical connection

between traditional British political values and the revolutionary

struggle. The western "convert" was, therefore, the perfect expression

of the propagandist's dream and accordingly appeared in a great number

of novels. However, in the interests of brevity, I restrict my

discussion to a brief mention of just a few others.

John Ironside in The Red Symbol (1911) provides a good example

of a purely frivolous engagement with this fashion for the theme of

Russia and revolution. Ironside sets a highly conventional narrative of

romance and chivalry against the revolutionary movement of the early

1900's and exploits its more lurid potentials to construct a voyeuristic

fantasy of violence. Thus his American hero, wishing to shield the woman

he loves from a desperate group of terrorists, is plunged into a series

of violent escapades in the graphically realized turmoil of a Russia in

the throes of revolution. The vision of Russia which emerges can be best
appreciated by an excerpt from one of the numerous sections in which the
hero-narrator expands upon his new found knowledge of the region:

> Heavens, how I hated-- how I still hate it; the greatest and
> grandest country in the world, viewed under one aspect, a fair
> land, a territory to which even our own United States of America
> counts second, for extent, for fertility, for natural wealth, wood,
> oil and minerals. A country that God made a paradise-- or at least
> a vast storehouse for the supply of human necessities and luxuries,
> but a country that man has made such a hell, that, in comparison
> with it, Dante's "Inferno" reads like a story of childish
> imaginings.

> Yes, Russia was a hell upon earth; and Petersburg was the centre
> and epitome of it, ... A fair city outwardly, a whited sepulchre
> raised over a charnel house. A city of terror, wherein every man
> is an Ishmael, knowing, or suspecting, that every other man's
> hand is against him. [71].

Ironside exploits the stock image of Russia as a region of "terror", the
dark melodramatic space of the "other", in which he immerses his hero as
a test of his fortitude and honour: "with every verst we covered,"
comments the hero in his first expedition into Russia, "it seemed to me
we were getting still further back still-- to the Dark Ages themselves"
(p.215-6).

Initially Ironside's ideological sympathy is neither with the
government of Russia nor with the revolutionary movement, which he
depicts as equally torn by the dissensions and chaos which touch
everything in Russia. Thus here Ironside's hero discovers the extent and

reality of the revolutionary movement, with an obvious swipe at other

examples of the tradition of fiction he himself was exploiting:

> Hitherto I had imagined, as most foreigners do whose knowledge
>
> of Russia is purely superficial and does not extend beyond the
>
> principal cities, that what is termed the revolutionary movement
>
> was a conflict between the governing class-- the bureaucracy
>
> which dominates every one from the Tsar, an autocrat in name only,
>
> downwards-- and the democracy, once actively represented only by
>
> the various Nihilist organizations, but now including the majority
>
> of the urban population, together with many of the nobles who ...
>
> have suffered and still suffer so sorely under the iron rule of
>
> cruelty, rapacity and oppression that has made Russia a by-word
>
> among civilized nations since the days of Ivan the Terrible.
>
> But now I realized that the movement is rendered infinitely
>
> complex by the existence of two other conflicting forces, the
>
> *moujiks* and the Jews. The bureaucracy indiscriminately oppresses
>
> and seeks to crush all three sections; the democracy despairs of
>
> the *moujiks* and hates the Jews, though it accepts their financial
>
> help; while the *moujiks* distrust every one, and also hate the Jews
>
> -- and murder them whenever they get the chance. (p.214-5).

For Ironside, Russia is a murderous society in a state of war: a

condition of which the various "forces" of revolutionary resistence are

merely one phase. To re-inforce this point he litters the book with

loathsome "jews" and idle peasants as a negation of democratic idealism

and proof of the impossibility of progress. Indeed that internal

struggle and anarchy even infects the most disciplined and professional

core of the revolutionary secret society which, as in all novels of this

fashion, Ironside's hero is allowed to penetrate in order to fulfill his mission and rescue the heroine.

However, despite this predominantly negative view of the revolutionary movement, _The Red Symbol_ nevertheless fulfills the typical pattern of these novels and ultimately asserts the imaginative power of the fictional stereotype of the nihilist heroic martyr. This is because, whilst Ironside's overt ideological position is opposed to revolution as politically futile, the book is driven and given its impact by an imaginative commitment to violence in its more aesthetic and dynamic aspects and, given the tradition against which he wrote, it was far easier for him to glamourize revolutionary violence. The hero is teamed up, therefore, with a number of heroic revolutionists taken direct from the pages of Stepniak and his imitators: "Dreamers dreaming greatly" (p.296) who redeem the ideal of "democracy" in a series of street battles with Cossacks and the more unruly proletarian elements of the revolution. Thus we meet Count Loris, a "born leader of men" and member of the Russian royal family turned nihilist, whose "splendid personality never failed in its almost magnetic effect on every one who came in contact with it" (p.292): a pure embodiment of revolutionary idealism as a distant aristocratic ideal. Then there is the heroine, apparently part-time English society beauty "Anne Pendennis" and part-time revolutionary "La Mort", who believes in "constructive as well as destructive" (p.246) principles, who inspires an uprising, and then meets her fate of martyrdom when violently torn apart in a clash between the Cossacks and an undeserving people:

The mob was horrible ... reeking with vodka, drunk with liquor and

excitement. Pah!-- they were not fit for the freedom they clamoured

for, and yet it was for them, and others like them, that she toiled

and plotted in peril of her life! (p.296).

Ironside exploits the pathos and romantic tragedy of revolutionary

martyrdom before revealing to the reader that it is not actually the

heroine, but her long lost identical twin sister who is the "La Mort"

thus melodramatically rent by the mob. This, of course, leaves the real

heroine free to return to England and marry the intrepid hero.

It is a hugely insignificant ending to the novel, which

discloses Ironside's purely voyeuristic interest in Russia for the sake

of violence. And yet it is that very lack of an ideological sympathy

with the revolutionary cause which makes The Red Symbol a clear example

of the subtle power of those Stepniak inspired images of the heroic

nihilist, since Ironside automatically plays upon them in response to a

well established formula of political fiction. By contrast Joseph

Hatton, in his By Order of the Czar (1892), makes a more explicit

connection between the forms and purposes of art and the feeling of

sympathy for revolution. In this narrative, the story of a young English

painter's growing fascination for the almost mythical revolutionary

heroine Anna Klosstock "Queen of the Ghetto", the author's purposes and

intentions are closely mirrored in his hero's artistic designs:

With the eye of imagination he saw his picture grow into what

it might be, what he hoped it would be, not only a great work of

art, but an everlasting rebuke to Russian tyranny; not simply the

study to which the Academy had awarded the Gold Medal, but the

study which had perhaps brought the awful political disabilities

of the Russians home to the sufferers, helping the champions of

the people to break the chains that kept Liberty in prison, galled its

flesh, and wore its brain to madness. [72].

This, then, is equally the political purpose of Hatton's novel, of his hero's art, and of his heroine's heroic deeds: to erect an image of revolution and sacrifice to move the world. Again this is a purpose which informs Oscar Wilde's juvenile attempt at a revolutionary subject in his play, Vera; and, or, The Nihilists (probably written 1876, but published for the first time in 1902): a Romeo and Juliet love story which Wilde loosely bases action on the life of Vera Zasulich, real life revolutionary heroine and martyr. It is a purpose which informs this whole fashion of formulaic writing and which, perhaps far more powerfully than political or philosophical argument could do, realizes Stepniak's propagandistic ideal.

*

IV.

"Revolutionary Gestures":

The Bourgeois Anarchist in Fiction.

In 1881 Peter Kropotkin, famously prefering a French prison to
an English grave, left the safety of asylum in England to return to his
more dangerous activities in mainland Europe [73]. His decision was
specifically inspired by a speaking tour he had made of the radical
London working men's clubs with his fellow revolutionist Nikolai
Chaikovsky, hoping to collect funds for the Russian socialist movement.
So poor had been the attendance at their meetings, that Kropotkin
decided to leave England immediately in disgust at the apathy of English
political life. Ironically however, after a two year spell in the prison
at Clairvaux, he returned and was destined to spend the next three
decades of his life in England and to publish all of his major works
there. Yet his assessment of the fertility of English soil for his
anarchistic ideas never really changed and in 1904 he dismissed British
anarchism as a bourgeois phenomenon: as "*le anarchie de salon*--
epicurean, a little Nietzschean, very *snobbish*" (italics in original)
[74].

Kropotkin was objecting to the peculiarly elitist nature of
the anarchist movement in Britain, by which it was fated throughout the
period of anarchism's greatest international popularity to find no
widespread support amongst the British working class and to recruit its
adherents predominantly from the disaffected members of the very classes
it ostensibly set out to destroy. Indeed, as several researchers into

the anarchist scene have discovered, the typical British anarchists of this time tended to be the frustrated or disturbed sons and daughters of middle and upper class households: predominantly young people and women in rebellion against their own backgrounds and domestic conditions and inspired by the large numbers of foreign revolutionaries then present in London and elsewhere in Britain [75]. This was a fact also noted, of course, by many of the novelists of the time who turned their attention to anarchism and composed the large number of "anarchist" novels and stories which became such a popular literary formula at the end of the nineteenth century. Conrad for instance, as his portrayal of the Hostess in *The Secret Agent* (1907) makes clear, had nothing but contempt for those members of the aristocracy who took to entertaining and supporting foreign revolutionaries and, in his short story "The Informer" (1908), dismissed such radical chic as "the silly vanity of being abreast with the ideas of the day after to-morrow" [76]. Similarly R.L. and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* (1885) includes the story of Clara Desborough, the beautiful and gifted daughter of a noble family embroiled in revolutionary circles by an excess of juvenile idealism. And Henry James, in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), depicts several aristocratic characters intent on conspiracy in their own ruin. Amongst these are the "saintly" Lady Aurora Langrish, who deserts the privileged circles of her birth and endures the taunts of eccentricity to help the poor of London, despite the assurance that she will not be "let off" in the coming social retribution. As James reflects from the viewpoint of Hyacinth Robinson, his pathetic social-climbing hero:

> She appeared to have been driven to her present excesses by
> the squire and the parson and the conservative influences of

the upper-class British home which our young man had always

held the highest fruit of civilization. [77].

There is also a strong hint of sexual frustration in the portrayal of

Lady Aurora, re-inforcing the suggestion that her altruistic activities

are the discharge of her own very personal feelings of emotional

repression. The Princess Casamassima, the novel's other female

adventurer into the revolutionary world, is the product of a broken

marriage and becomes obsessed by the myth of a great international

terrorist conspiracy into which she pours all her displaced energy and

sense of social futility [78].

What unites Kropotkin's feelings of frustration with these

novelistic representations is ultimately the recognition that anarchism

had become strangely domesticated in Britain and assimulated into its

class and social systems without really changing or challenging them. In

the popular understanding, anarchism was not the politics of the adult

British male, whether working man or aristocrat, but typically that of

the socially superfluous female or of the freedom loving bourgeois youth

seeking out ideals and purposes: of individuals on the margins of

political life, who represented a connection which, of course, vitiated

its larger influence. "Anarchism has suffered in England," wrote George

Woodcock, "because it has been regarded by the general public as an

exotic growth, a creed originating from Russians, Latins, and other

suspect races and therefore something to be avoided by all good

Englishmen". "English anarchism," he added elsewhere, "has never been

anything else than a chorus of voices crying in the wilderness ..."

[79]; and the "wilderness" in question, for a good number of its

adherents, seems to have been that of the spiritual and imaginative
restrictions imposed by a respectable and limited existence.

Anarchism, by contrast, was exciting. It offered a vision of
individual freedom, a sense of emotional tension, and the possibility of
a positive and dynamic social role, all of which were lacking in the
lives of many people in the higher reaches of British society.
Anarchism, as a particularly imaginative form of political thought, fed
the same sympathetic and emotional needs as art and literature and,
whereas socialism made great inroads into working class British culture,
it became a kind of middle and upper class fantasy of revolutionary
politics; and one which was largely based upon and given form by
imported tales of romantic and heroic deeds in other lands. Isabel
Meredith for instance, a privileged bourgeois dabbler in revolutionary
politics and the narrator of A Girl Among The Anarchists (1903),
acknowledges as much as she recalls what initially attracted her to
anarchism:

> A famous Russian writer had described a strange phase through which
> the Russian youth passed not many years since, the "V. Narod" ("To
> the People!") movement, when young men and girls by the thousands,
> some belonging to the highest classes in society, fled from their
> families, tore themselves free from all domestic and conventional
> yokes, persuaded that it was their duty to serve the cause of the
> masses, and that in no way could they better accomplish this object
> than by settling in the people's midst, living their life, taking
> part in their work. I was passing through a similar phase of
> mental evolution.
>
> I felt a strong desire to free myself from all the ideas, customs

and prejudices which usually influence my class, to throw myself

into the life and work of the masses. [80].

"Isabel Meredith" was in fact the pen name of Helen and Olivia Rossetti,

the precocious anarchist daughters of William Rossetti, who along with

their brother Arthur began to publish the journal The Torch in 1891

[81]. A Girl Among The Anarchists is a semi-fictionalized account of

their experiences which I shall examine in a moment, but here I wish

merely to note the essential self regard of young Isabel's engagement

with anarchism: with what is very much a Stepniak-inspired imaginative

scenario in which she herself plays a dramatic and heroic role which

expresses her desire for liberation.

In calling anarchism a "fantasy", then, I do not refer to the

ideas of anarchist social criticism, but to the result of the process by

which anarchism tends to become transformed into whatever it is that its

proponent or opponent wants it to be. As we have seen in the previous

sections, traditionally anarchism has given rise to a number of inter-

related cultural and fictional stereotypes of the anarchist which most

closely reflect the political position of those who employ them. Thus,

to the political conservative, the anarchist is the sinister bomb-

throwing maniac; whereas, to the liberal, he is the impractical dreamer

possessed of noble ideals but condemned to political futility.

Similarly, the "epicurean" and "snobbish" anarchism Kropotkin bemoaned,

was the inevitable outcome of his own "appeal" [82] to the young and

educated bourgeoisie who shaped anarchism in a way which, however good

and altruistic their intentions, reflected their own social prejudices,

experiences and desires. It was a form of anarchism inspired by the type

of rhetoric in which infamous propagandists like Elisée Reclus indulged, in his influential "An anarchist on Anarchy":

A sincere man owes it to himself to expose the frightful barbarity which still prevails in the hidden depths of a society so outwardly well-ordered. ... Below the London of fashion is a London accursed, a London whose only food is dust stained fragments, whose only garments are filthy rags, and whose only dwellings are fetid dens. ... Others may turn their eyes away from these horrors, we socialists look them full in the face and seek out their cause. [83].

As Conrad cynically put it, "a demagogue carries the amateurs of emotion with him" [84]; and here Reclus undertakes in his imagination that journey into the hidden "horrors" of life in the city which inspired many young, privileged and educated anarchists like the Rossetti's to undertake it for themselves. Thus Reclus deliberately appeals first and foremost to the imagination and fear of his readers and renders the sinister underworld of "a London accursed" as a kind of theatre of melodramatic secrets ready to be explored and conquered by the daring.

It was, then, this direct appeal of anarchism to the more imaginative and leisured individual that secured for it a certain type of following in Britain and, as Kropotkin recognized, thereby restricted it to the status of a fashion or a theatrical gesture rather than a serious political commitment. Anarchism became a fiction of political action for the book reading public, for the idealistic bourgeois youth or for the "superfluous" woman like the Princess Casamassima, and its final effect in the political world was merely to marginalize and vitiate the influence of anarchism more generally. Again this is a fact

noted by Conrad in "The Informer", in which he presents a number of such

fashionable anarchists temporarily playing at revolution. His hostility

to their "gesture" politics and vanity is made patently clear in the

description of the daughter of a "distinguished government offical" who

provides a safe house for a group of anarchists to run a printing press

and bomb factory:

"The girl, a fine figure, was by no means vulgarly pretty. To

more personal charms than mere youth could account for, she

added the seductive appearance of enthusiasm, of independence,

of courageous thought. I suppose she put on these appearances

as she put on her picturesque dresses and for the same reason:

to assert her individuality at any cost. You know, women would

go to any length almost for such a purpose. She went to a great

length. She had acquired all the appropriate gestures of

revolutionary conviction;-- the gestures of pity, of anger, of

indignation against the anti-humanitarian vices of the social

class to which she belonged herself. All this sat on her striking

personality as becomingly as her slightly original costumes. Very

slightly original; just enough to mark a protest against the

philistinism of the overfed taskmasters of the poor. Just enough

and no more. It would not have done to go too far in that

direction-- you understand. But she was of age, and nothing stood

in the way of her offering her house to the revolutionary workers.

... The group she came in contact with while exploring the poor

quarters of the town (you know the gesture of charity and personal

service which was so fashionable some years ago) accepted with

gratitude ..." [85].

Given that William Rossetti worked as an excise official and that Conrad had met Helen Rossetti in the early nineteen-hundreds, it is almost certain that he had the writers of A Girl Among The Anarchists in mind here [86]. His plain contempt for such self regarding forms of political delusion was given its fullest satirical expression in The Secret Agent where the idea of a "domestic" origin for anarchism is given an ironic twist in the fate of Winnie Verloc. Here, however, it is curious that his assessment of the Rossettis' commitment seems to be at one with Kropotkin; who initially encouraged their activities, but grew to distrust their ability to propound anarchism clearly or sensibly [87].

The "girl" in Conrad's story finally ends up in retreat at a convent, after a romantic disappointment and a consequent disillusionment with anarchism. It is a fate which again closely reflects that of Isabel Meredith, who is frustrated in her love affair with a fellow anarchist and retreats from politics to devote herself, like both of her authors, to the pursuit of literary fiction. A Girl Among The Anarchists is the product of that literary retreat and a record of the "epicurean" anarchism that so frustrated Kropotkin and disgusted Conrad. It is an interesting work both because it gives us a very clear example of the type of social and literary engagement with anarchism against which Conrad was reacting in his work; and because the Rossetti's propound all the mythical interpretations of terrorism as a spiritual or otherworldly dimension of expression that were generated by the works of Stepniak and other "enthusiasts" of violence at this time.

It is closely based, as I have said, on the Rossettis' own experiences and recounts the fictional adventures of an idealistic young woman during a period of flirtation with anarchist politics. In both

conception and form the novel is heavily influenced by Stepniak's

Underground Russia (1883) and it is clear that they imagine A Girl Among

The Anarchists to be an equivalent guide to the London underworld. In

the overall scheme of the novel, the anarchist career of Isabel Meredith

is clearly meant to be seen as a kind of paradigm of the fate of

anarchism in British society; describing that fleeting and essentially

literary fascination that it held for the public imagination of the

time, and ending with a sobering vision of a "real life" which undercuts

the anarchist vision and assigns political idealism firmly to the status

of illusions. Thus the narrative form the Rossettis employ, in which an

older and wiser women records the thoughts and feelings of her youth,

from the outset implicitly articulates this interpretation of anarchism

as a phase of youthful imaginative excess untempered by experience. Yet,

at the same time, the Rossettis also wish to exploit the more dynamic

and exciting aspects of anarchism and the explicit purpose of the work

is therefore to provide an "objective" account of the anarchist scene of

the 1890's from the perspective of someone with direct experience of it.

As "Morley Roberts" (another Rossetti psuedonym) explains in the

introduction, the book is conceived as an antidote to popular press

misrepresentation of the anarchists:

> ... it is certain that Anarchists are curiously interesting,
>
> and not the less in need of observation from the fact that
>
> apparently none of the social quacks who prescribe seriously
>
> in leading articles has the faintest insight into them as a
>
> phenomenon, a portent, or a disease. This book, if it is read
>
> with understanding, will, I feel assured, do not a little to
>
> show how it comes about that Anarchism is as truly endemic in

Western Civilizations as cholera is in India. (p. lxx).

As it becomes clear in the course of the novel, the Rossettis are having the reader on here; since they know or reveal next to nothing new about anarchism and restrict their depiction of it to only the most conventional of stock images and "types" which they, in their unconscious naivety, seem to genuinely imagine to be representative of anarchism generally. The real purpose of this declaration is, therefore, not so much to clarify the purpose of the work, as to allow the Rossettis to remind their readers of their special knowledge of their subject as one time anarchists themselves: to invent their own authority within a fictional world of anarchism and to give their own fantasy of that revolutionary world the status of a documentary account. Like Stepniak before them, the Rossettis/Isabel Meredith are possessed of a privileged vision and can claim to exist in two worlds at once: in the safe bourgeois domain of the mature and ironic detachment from which they write and speak for the presumed conventional values of their reader, but simultaneously in the "curiously interesting" and dynamic domain of revolution where the narrator has the opportunity to engage in authentic "observation" of anarchists.

I insist upon this dual perspective of the narration because it is one of the most typical tactics of this fashion for "anarchist" novels. The narrator who is an interloper between two worlds, one of which the reader is unfamiliar with, allows the writer a particular freedom to invent reality and to construct entertaining images of terror with which to thrill and pacify the "curiosity" of the reader. It also confers the advantage of being able to apparently subvert the conventional bourgeois order from within, with an aesthetic and exciting

rendering of revolutionary impulses, but at the same time to expose what

is absurd or wrong or purely self-deluding in that revolutionary

alternative. For the Rossettis it is the contradictions and ironies that

this dual perspective generates that enable them to engage with

anarchism as a purely literary phenomenon and in the thematic terms of

the relationship between thought, language and vision, which they found

in ready made in Stepniak's vision of the terrorist as "martyr".

The Rossettis, then, recount their heroine's experiences with

a consistently ironic over statement which implicitly articulates the

wiser judgements and literary concerns of the writing time; as in this

sequence where Isabel visits an anarchist newspaper office and plunges

into a lumpenproletariat underworld at the "Myrtle Grove Tavern". I

quote at some length to give a flavour of the tone:

> ... the atmosphere was dense with the foul breath and still
>
> fouler language of the drunken and besotted man and women.
>
> Every phase of the lower orders of the British drinker and
>
> drunkard was represented here. The coarse oaths of the men,
>
> mingled with the shriller voices of their female companions, and
>
> the eternal "'e saids" and "she saids" of the latter's complaints
>
> and disputes were interrupted by the plaintive wailings of the
>
> puny, gin-nourished infants at their breasts. ... The unbridled
>
> enthusiasm of eighteen years can do much to harden or deaden the
>
> nervous system, but certainly it required all of my fortitude to
>
> withstand the sickening combination of beer and damp horse hay
>
> which greeted my nostrils. Neither could the cabmen and stablemen,
>
> hanging around the public-house doors and the mews generally, be
>
> calculated to increase one's democratic aspirations, but I walked

resolutely on, and turning to my left, dexterously avoiding an
unsavoury heap of horse manure, straw and other offal, I
clambered up a break-neck ladder, at the top of which loomed the
office of the *Bomb*. *(italics in original)* *(p.42-3)*.

Although this is presented as young Isabel's personal experience of such
places, it is clearly not the result of the authentic "observation" the
Rossettis promise in their introduction. The squalid pub scene was both
a well established set piece of the melodramatic novel and a
conventional space in which anarchists were to be found (indeed it is
said that when James was working on The Princess Casamassima, he haunted
proletarian pubs on order to get a "sense" of their revolutionary
world); and it is a convention which closely controls Isabel's
perception here. Thus the self-dramatization and the stylized
exaggerations of the scene, the "foul breath" and the "puny, gin-
nourished infants", are clearly the elements of a demotic and bookish
fantasy of a proletarian hovel which disclose the true literary status
of Isabel's imaginative commitment to the "cause of the masses": to a
Reclus-like melodramatic journey into the fascinating "horrors" of a
"London accursed", a world imaginatively realized as a challenge to the
powers and values of her own bourgeois taste and idealism.

A Girl Among The Anarchists therefore, as the above extract
makes clear, tells us nothing of anarchism itself, but instead forms a
record of Isabel's strangely naive and unconscious engagement with a
fantasy form of anarchism: a form which reflects the writers' own
personal attitudes and reading far more than the realities of political
struggle in Britain. Thus it is this tension between Isabel's
"democratic aspirations" and her aestheticism, between her positive and

bookish vision of "the cause" and her negative vision of "the masses",
which becomes both the dramatic and ironic life of the novel and the
ideological pattern for its series of portraits of the anarchist
underworld. The growth of Isabel's hatred for an unaesthetic and
unregenerate humanity, and the simultaneous development of the ironic
perspective and language of her older incarnation in the narrator, is
imagined as a kind of alternative to anarchism: as if she is involved in
an internal spiritul battle and confronted with a choice between a
religious bonding to a set of abstract ideas of perfection, which insist
that she loves humanity, or a free and alive understanding of life and
ideas which inevitably leads to hatred.

True anarchism then, in the Stepniak-inspired Rossetti
understanding, is the surrender of life itself to an abstract set of
ideals and the anarchist is the being who can sustain that positive
vision against all other evidence or feelings and block out the rest of
reality: who can, in the Rossettis' "snobbish" version of reality, blind
themselves to the "horrors" of that "London accursed". "To anarchists of
this order," Isabel informs us, "abstract ideas and opinions replaced
all the ordinary forces of life. Their every action was prompted by some
theory, and they fashioned their lives to fit their peculiar views of
what it ought to be" (p.190).

Isabel's struggle to "fashion" her life in this way, and her
eventual surrender to the facts of "reality", forms the pattern of the
growth and disillusionment which lies at the centre of the work. In the
early stages of her anarchist career, the youthful energy of Isabel's
faith in her "democratic" beliefs is sufficient to blind her to the
conditions of a social milieu which is unresponsive to her idealism and

which she obviously detests. Indeed she is initially resolute, even in
the face of the jeering proletariat of the "Myrtle Grove Tavern":

> ... as I never missed an opportunity to spread the light, I
> distributed among them some hand-bills entited "What is Anarchy?"
> regardless of their decidedly hostile attitude. The London
> loafer has little wit or imagination, and their comments did
> not rise above the stale enquiry as to where we kept our bombs,
> and the equally original advice bestowed on Kosinski to get
> 'is 'air cut. (p.93).

Here Isabel's generous struggle to have faith in the masses does not
involve a consideration of whether they have faith in her. In an ironic
subversion of her own declared disbelief in "revolution from above", her
"enthusiasm" to "spread the light" is clearly premised on the assumption
of darkness in the other: it goes hand in hand with her contemptuous
disregard for the "London loafer" and forms part of a highly
patronizing, almost imperialistic [88], attitude to the world she wishes
to save. It is also, as is constantly registered by the wiser narrator,
based upon an egotistic, perverse and child-like restriction of her own
vision which is the leading characteristic of nearly all the idealistic
anarchists we encounter in the course of the novel.

It is in order to escape the realities of her world, that
Isabel embroils herself in the theoretical technicalities of anarchism
and slips slowly but necessarily into a world of solipsistic isolation
amid her extremely literal-minded fellow revolutionists:

> Armitage and I engaged in endless discussions with Norbery on
> the question of violence, maintaining on our side that violence
> could only be overcome by violence, and that, however peaceful

our ultimate aims might be, force must inevitably used towards
their attainment. We argued and adduced reasons in support of
our views, and Norbery argued and adduced counter-reasons in
support of his views, but neither one nor the other of us was
ever in the least affected by his opponents eloquence, and at the
end of the discussion we were all, if anything, more staunchly
persuaded of the sense and justice of our own case than at the
start. So much for the profitableness of debate between confirmed
partisans. (p.193).

Again we are given the benefit of the wiser and more detached judgements
of the writing time, in which the older Isabel can recognize and
ironically deflate the vanities of her youth. It is this mature and
essentially literary vision of the world which forms the ideological and
linguistic alternative to anarchism in the novel and Isabel's maturation
therefore occurs as a growth towards irony: towards a more detached and
sophisticated form of understanding of herself and of the language of
politics, by which she learns to resolve that tension between her chosen
beliefs and innate feelings and to reject anarchism as the product of
too literal and simplistic an interpretation of ideals. "I fancy people
with a keen sense of humour are rarely enthusiasts;" she reflects at one
point, "certainly when I began to see the ludicrous side of much of what
I had taken to be the hard earnest of life, my revolutionary ardour
cooled" (p.92).

Most of the novel, in keeping with the stated purpose of
revelation, is taken up with a series of well-executed but highly
derivative portraits and set descriptions of the characters and
situations the heroine encounters on her journey into the anarchist

"underground" of London. Indeed the Rossettis almost directly reproduce, in a British context, many of the heroic and psuedo-religious images of the violent revolutionary which they found ready made in Stepniak's writings and erect an idealized and impossible image of the perfect anarchist, to which Conrad's scornful and reductive characterizations of anarchism in The Secret Agent and elsewhere are clearly in part a response. The Rossettis also provide, however, an interesting insight into the less perfect sides of radical London society of the time and further reveal their own thoroughly un-anarchistic attitudes in the process. They depict a chaotic movement made up of a diverse and eccentric collection of individuals, each attracted to the ideas and personalities of revolution from very different personal motives. They introduce the reader to all the representative "types" of the hangers on of the anarchist scene: to highly idealistic and passionate young men, to the "type of the East End sartorial Jew" (p.45), and to the very prominant "loafer type" of whom the following provides a representative example:

> ... a square-built, sturdy-looking man of some forty years. His
> appearance was the reverse of engaging, but by no means lacking
> in intelligence. He was ill-satisfied and annoyed with the
> universe, and habitually defied it from the stronghold of a
> double bed. Thither he had retired after the death of his father,
> an old market porter, who had been crushed by the fall of a basket
> of potatoes. The son saw in this tragic circumstance the outcome
> and the reward of labour, swore a solemn oath never to do a stroke
> of work again, threw up his job, and from that day become a
> confirmed loafer in the anarchist party. (p.46).

Some of the Rossettis' parodies are quite amusing and this particular

detail brings to mind Conrad's description of Verloc as having "an air

of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day, on an unmade bed" (p.46).

However it is indicative of the Rossettis' larger attitude throughout,

that this "loafer type" is a category imposed only upon anarchists of a

proletarian origin and does not seem to apply to the bourgeois

anarchists of Isabel's acquaintance; they, for the most part, are

characterized as revolutionists from an admirable energy and principle.

Indeed the whole anarchist milieu the Rossettis describe is a strangely

class conscious society which reproduces and, in the case of Isabel

herself, ironically re-inforces social prejudice and limitation by

bringing her into contact with the lower classes.

The young heroine's introduction to these anarchist circles

is, like that of the Rossettis themselves, via the eclectic salon world

of the émigré Russian nihilists presided over by the likes of Kropotkin

and Stepniak. "Nekrovitch", the "great Russian nihilist" refered to here

for instance, is almost certainly based on Stepniak:

The company was always of a very mixed cosmopolitan character--

Russian Nihilists and exiles, English Liberals who sympathized

with the Russian constitutional movement, Socialists and Fabians,

Anarchist of all nationalities, journalists and literary men whose

political views were immaterial, the psuedo-Bohemian who professes

interest in the "queer side of life", all manner of faddists,

rising and impecunious musicians and artists-- all were made

welcome and all were irresistibly attracted towards the great

Russian Nihilist. (p.22).

The heroine's attitude to this salon world, however, is that of the
healthy scepticism of a woman of action: someone who is clearly seeking
a dynamic social role for herself and anarchistically dismissive of the
limitations of the conventional forms of political activity for her
class and status. "But I should like to know what I can do", she tells
the first real anarchist she meets at Nekrovitch's salon:

> "I have been interested now in these problems for a year or two,
> and must confess that the electioneering and drawing room politics
> of fabians and Social Democrats are not much to my taste; in fact
> I may say I am sick of them. A few men like our friend Nekrovitch,
> who ennoble any opinion they may hold, are of course exceptions,
> but I cannot blind myself to the fact that ambition, wire-pulling,
> and faddism play a prominant part in the general proceedings. On
> the other hand you seem to me to sin in the opposite direction. No
> organization, no definite programme, no specific object!-- what
> practical good could anyone like myself do in such a party?"
> (p.31).

This, from a privileged young woman just turned eighteen, strikes the
note of a strident and remarkably unself-conscious egotism which
characterizes all of Isabel's pronunciations on political matters.
Indeed it is this unbounded self-confidence in her own vision, and
desire to act directly upon it, which drives her away from the "drawing
room politics" of socialism towards anarchism as a form of political
activity sufficiently free of "a specific object" as to allow her to
give free expression to her own "taste" and energy.

It is against this background of Isabel's struggle to sustain
a positive vision of the "cause of the masses" in line with her

"tastes", that the Rossetti's present a series of portraits of perfect
anarchists of their acquaintance and develop that theme of revolutionary
commitment as the outcome of a particular relation of vision and
language: of a superior mental and spiritual bonding to ideals which
they found in Stepniak. Typical of these is Giacomo Giannoli, a solid
bourgeois "converted" by the simple words of a woman in a moment of
epiphany which changes the very basis of his vision of life and society.
Thus he relates the story of his conversion to anarchism as a result of
his romantic involvement with a sexually liberated peasant girl, who at
a moment of crisis points out to him the evil of possessiveness and
sexual jealousy:

> I think that was the most momentous day in my life, for it
> wrought the greatest change in me. My eyes were opened by the
> peasant girl's words, and from that evening forward I regarded
> life quite differently. For the first time I realized the
> necessity to the individual to enjoy absolute personal freedom
> in love as in all else in life. All my previous ideas and
> prejudices appeared to me monstrous and iniquitous. I saw the
> falseness of all our ideas of morality, the absurdity of placing
> conventions before nature and the detestable character of our
> dealings with women and of our attitude in such matters. And
> with this suddenly awakened vision I looked anew on life, and
> it seemed to me that I had never lived. All that which I had
> before taken for granted I now began to question. I found that
> instead of thinking out life's problems for myself I had
> allowed mysef to grow into other peoples ideas, that I had
> tacitly taken for right what they had pronounced right, and

wrong what they had stigmatized as wrong. My spiritual world

now turned, as it were, a complete somersault, and I was reborn

a new man-- an Anarchist. (p.200-1).

In what is another cliché from the popular terrorist novel, the sudden

moment of religious conversion to the anarchist vision, the Rossetti's

clearly locate the appeal of anarchism in a spiritual dimension of

experience; with no necessary reference to ordinary logic or causation.

Indeed, as Stepniak had earlier described it in _The Career of a_

Nihilist, conversion comes in many forms: an "event or a book, a living

word or a stirring example, a sorrowful tale of the present or a radiant

glimpse of the future-- anything may be the instrument to bring about

this momentous crisis" (p.94). It is in just such a thoroughly perverse

system of logic, a kind of schizophrenic madness in reason in which

"anything" can bring about "crisis", that Giannoli moves directly from

the few simple words of a peasant girl to this vision of liberation and

thence to the conviction of the absolute necessity of destructive and

cataclysmic violence:

> To destroy utterly the fabric of society by all possible means,
>
> by acts of violence and terrorism, by expropriation, by
>
> undermining the prevailing ideas of morality, by breaking up the
>
> organization of the Anarchists and Socialists who believed in
>
> association, ... by preaching revolution wherever and whenever an
>
> opportunity occured or could be improvised, to these objects he
>
> had blindly devoted the best years of his life. His was a gospel
>
> of destruction and negation, and he was occupied rather in the
>
> undoing of what he had come to regard as bad than with any
>
> constructive doctrines. (p.209).

Curiously Conrad includes a similar experience of conversion to
Bakuninist principles by a few simple words in his short story, "An
Anarchist" (1908). However the fate of Paul the engineer, one moment
happily celebrating his birthday with friends and the next a ferocious
revolutionary anarchist, occurs in a Conradian world where such
intoxication is a short lived ecstasy and doomed to imminent disaster:

> He had never drunk so much in his life. His elation was
> extreme, and so pleasurable that whenever it flagged he hastened
> to order more drinks.
>
> "It seemed to me," he said in his quiet tone ... "that I was on
> the point of just attaining a great and wonderful felicity.
> Another drink, I felt, would do it. The others were holding out
> well with me, glass for glass."
>
> But an extraordinary thing happened. At something the strangers
> said his elation fell. Gloomy ideas-- *des idées noires*-- rushed
> into his head. All the world outside the café appeared to him as
> a dismal place where a multitude of poor wretches had to work and
> slave to the sole end that a few individuals should ride in
> carriages and live riotously in palaces. He became ashamed of his
> happiness. The pity of mankind's cruel lot wrung his heart. In a
> voice choked with sorrow he tried to express these sentiments. He
> thinks he wept and swore in turns. ... There was only one way of
> dealing with the rotten state of society. Demolish the whole
> *sacrée boutique.* Blow up the whole iniquitous show. ... He was
> extremely drunk-- mad drunk. With a howl of rage he leaped
> suddenly upon the table. Kicking over the bottles and glasses,
> he yelled: "*Vive l'anarchie*! Death to the capitalists!"

[89].

In Conrad's parodic version of the "intoxicating consciousness" of

conversion the apparent simplifier of the mind is alcohol, but the real

simplifier is a literal understanding of language: a lack of irony, of

the ability to distinguish between language and the world, which renders

the word literal and immediately powerful. Thus, by a series of grimly

comic turns of fate, the outcome of this moment of illumination is to

transform Paul into the "anarchist slave" (p.144) of the agent of a

multi-national capitalist concern. Like Stepniak's "martyr", he is

possessed and subdued by a fictional identity: by the "name" of an

"anarchist" by which, as his immediate captor puts it, "I hold him ...

better than if I had him chained up by the leg ..." (p.128) [90].

Conrad's paradoxical and somewhat pathetic "anarchist slave"

can be seen, then, as a sardonic response to Stepniak's and the

Rossettis' elevation of a mythical and psuedo-religious image of the

anarchist and terrorist. His formulation of the characteristics which

convert the ordinary citizen to anarchism, the combination of "Warm

heart and weak head" that makes the anarchist a "riddle" (p.143), are an

ironically deflated version of the Rossettti's portraits of some of the

most famous revolutionaries of their time as being beyond the reach of

ordinary understanding and judgement:

> The primary difference between the ordinary normal man and the
>
> fanatic-- as between the normal man and the madman or genius--
>
> is the totally different viewpoint whence each views life. This
>
> it is which renders it impossible for the normal man to really
>
> understand or judge fanatics. He cannot grasp their motive, their
>
> point of view, and is therefore morally incapable of judging them.

... Among the anarchists, who may be said to represent the
intellectual rather than the material side of the socialist
movement-- there were many fanatics. This fanaticism showed itself
in different ways-- sometimes in the most admirable self-
abnegation,, in the sacrifice of wealth, position and happiness;
frequently in abnormal actions of other kinds, and most noticeably
in deeds of violence. (p.187-8).

"The fanatic", "the genius", and "the madman", are beyond the
comprehension of the "normal man" because they take words seriously and
convert their verbal ideals directly into acts. Emile Henry's deeds were
thus the perfect expression of anarchist faith, conceived of as an
impossible ideal and the product of a particularly narrow and pedantic
understanding of the nature of language. Again I quote at length to give
a sense of the development of this idea:

Emile Henry, the dynamitard of the Café Terminus, belonged to the
number of what I call the theoretical dynamitard. His terrible acts
were the outcome of long and earnest thought; they were born of his
mental analysis of the social canker. He committed them not in
moments of passion, but with all the *sang froid* of a man governed
by reason. ... To the average man it is no doubt very difficult to
conceive that when he threw his bomb among the crowd at the Café
Terminus, maiming and killing indiscriminately, Emile Henry was
performing his duty according to his own lights just as much as a
soldier when he obeys orders and fires on the enemy, a city man
when he embarks on the day's business, or a parson when he preaches
a sermon against prevailing vices. It was his sermon-- however
vigourously preached-- against the prevailing vices and injustices

of Society, and against the indifference which all classes

displayed towards these. ... Being a man of intellect and some

culture, he could not, like his more ignorant *confréres*, imagine

that one man or group of men was responsible for these. ... Society

at large was guilty: all the thoughtless, all the indifferent

members of society were responsible for its abuses. Now, this may

be true enough theoretically, but no one but a fanatic or a madman

would carry the reasoning further to the point of saying: "Society

at large is guilty; society at large must suffer. Society is fairly

well represented by the mixed crowd in a café. I will attack this

crowd indiscriminately, and kill as many of their number as I can.

I will unreluctantly end my days on the scaffold in order to

accomplish this very obvious duty;" and proceed from words to

deeds. (my ellipses) (italics in original) (p.188-90).

What Emile Henry clearly lacked was a "sense of humour", an appreciation

of irony, by which he would have been able to distinguish between the

reasoning of theory and the demands of life. In the Rossettis'

categorization he is, therefore, the type of the "theoretical

dynamitard" and commits "deeds of violence" from a very Stepniak-like

heroic bonding to language.

In complete distinction, however, the Rossettis' other major

"type" of the extreme anarchist is conceived of as a being suffering

from a contrasting, but equally perverse and unreasonable a relationship

to words. A---, the anarchist by "passion", commits acts of violence as

an expression of a total alienation from the language of society and its

imaginary "theoretical" representations of the world:

He had turned anarchist in revolt against the society which had

cramped his life, starved him in childhood, overworked his body,
underfed his mind, where he had found neither place nor welcome.
Born into the lowest depths of society, dragged up amid criminals
and drunkards, he had spent his early years between the streets and
the jailhouse, ...

"It is all very well," he said to me one day, "for those on the
top rungs of the ladder to talk of the unrelenting laws of nature
and the survival of the fittest. For my part I have felt very
forcibly one great law of nature, the law of self-preservation ...
when my stomach is empty and my boots let in water, the mere sight
of a replete and well clothed man makes me feel like murder. It
may be true that it is natural for the strongest and the best men
to rise above their fellows, but even this is not the case in our
society of today. The weakest and the worst have somehow got to
the top, and giants are bolstering up the impotence of dwarfs.
These dwarfs are crushing the life blood out of us. We must pull
them down, exterminate them; we must turn the whole world upside
down before we can create a new and better order of things."

His action was not a theoretical protest translated into deeds;
it was an act of vengeance, of personal and class revenge.
(my ellipsis) (p.193-4).

In terms reminiscent of Conrad's Professor, A-- articulates the
instinctive, vengeful hatred of the wronged and downtrodden of the
world. As such he is an alien voice within the essentially bourgeois
"anarchist" world the Rossettis describe and receives only passing
mention; with none of that romantic expansion reserved for the
"otherworldly" figures like Emile Henry.

It is, then, in relation to these two extremes that the Rossettis depict a revolutionary world of their imagination: one which obviously derives from a taste for those "Russian" and "exotic" sources to which George Woodcock has refered the failure of anarchism in Britain. As we have seen, A Girl Among The Anarchists explores the contemporary anarchist scene in a way which so heavily reflects the ideas and heroic literature of the Russian nihilist struggle, that the more complex realities of revolutionary struggle in Britain pale in comparison. Thus the Rossettis presentation of two basic categories of anarchist is itself a distinction which unconsciously reproduces the ideological assumptions of its age in regard to country, class and revolution. The A-- "type" of anarchist, cursorily treated, is not so amenable to heroic expansion and sympathetic identification as his more intellectual and "exotic" counterpart. In the main he is represented by British and working class figures who activate the Rossettis' social prejudice: by what they call the "rank and file of the English party":

> They used long words they barely understood, considered that
> equality justified presumption, and contempt or envy of everything
> they considerd to be superior to themselves. Communism, as they
> conceived it, amounted pretty nearly to living at other people's
> expense, and they believed in revenging the wrongs of their
> classes by exploiting and expropriating the bourgeois whenever
> such action was possible without incurring personal risk. (p.272).

The narrator's growing contempt for these "ordinary" anarchists is the inevitable outcome of her imaginative identification with the other intellectual and more amenable "type" of anarchist: the Emile Henry type

of leaders and prophets of revolution, taken direct from the pages of
Stepniak:

> Then, of course, there were the noble dreamers, incorrigible
> idealists, ... men whom experience could not teach nor
> disappointment sour. Men gifted with eternal youth, victimized
> and sacrificed by others, yet sifting and purifying the vilest
> waste in the crucible of their imaginations, so that no meanness,
> nor the sorrow born of the knowledge of meanness in others, ever
> darkens their path. Men who live in a pure atmosphere of their own
> creation, whom the worldly wise pity as deluded fools, but who are
> perhaps the only really enviable people in the world. Notable, too,
> were the fanatics of the Kosinski type, stern heroic figures who
> seem strangely out of place in our humdrum world, ... (p.273).

It is these aristocrats of anarchism, largely heroic romantic foreigners
and the occasional saintly eccentric of British origin, that represent
the impossible and aesthetic ideal of romantic revolution the Rossettis
can approve, but against which the realities of British anarchism are
measured and found wanting. Indeed these aristocrats of the revolution
so activate Isabel's romantic "aspirations" that she becomes sexually
liberated by the "stern heroic" Kosinski mentioned here; and the history
of her engagement with anarchism is thus transformed into a more
conventional affair of the heart. Until, that is, the lover has to
return to his more serious revolutionary work abroad and a disappointed
Isabel drifts away from the revolution and into her overtly literary
world.

The final outcome of all this is, of course, the somewhat
solipsistic judgement which forms the central ideological point of the

novel: that revolution is a process that happens elsewhere than in Britain, whether in different countries or in different dimensions, and that idealism is the stuff of "noble dreams" dreamt by "purifying ... imaginations" but not of the "humdrum" reality recognized by Isabel's disenchanted and more ironic self. Thus it is also irony, conceived of as the consciousness born of the experience and knowledge of failure, that "saves" Isabel from anarchism and helps her reformulate her idealistic visions into the pursuit of literature. It is as she sits alone, reading a book, that she has her first fully conscious vision of the "reality" of her life and thoughts of surrender:

It was a long while since I had thus enjoyed a quiet read. For several months past my life had been a ceaseless round of feverish activity. Looking back, it seemed to me that I had allowed myself to be strangely preoccupied and flustered by trifles. What were these important duties which had so absorbed me as to leave me no time for thought, for study, no time to live my own life? How had I come to give such undue importance to the publication of a paper which, after all, was read by very few, and those few for the most part already blind believers in the ideas it advocated? Yet I told myself that the *Tocsin* had done good work, and could yet do much. Besides I had undertaken it, and must go on with it; life without an object would be intolerable. (p.287-8).

Isabel's rejection of anarchism is thus presented vaguely in terms of a choice in favour of "life" and the following of a literary career by which she hopes, presumably, to reach more readers than did her anarchist "publication".

I have devoted so much space to A Girl Among The Anarchists

because, as I have said, it provides a very clear account of the

dimensions of that "epicurean" and bourgeois anarchism which effectively

prevented anarchism from becoming a serious political force in Britain.

It is a novel which demonstrates, in a direct way, the influence and

power of the romanticized mythology of the revolution which was coming

out of Russia via the popular novels and journalism of the time. And it

is this "exotic" mythology, rather than any social-anarchistic

understanding of the world, which informs Isabel Merdith's

"representative" vision of the anarchist movement and which she learns

to understand as mere fiction at the end. In so doing, of course, she

also provides an example of that "amateurism" and confused self-regard

in political thought that Conrad so despised and resisted in his work

(interestingly, "amateurism" is a word also frequently used by the

Rossettis themselves).

In a final irony, perhaps nowhere is the Rossettis'/Isabel

Meredith's confusion in regard to anarchism greater than in the closing

section of the novel, when the illusions and realities have supposedly

been sorted out. Once again I quote at length, this time to give a sense

of how the Rossettis, or Isabel's, liberation from the anarchist vision

rapidly gives way to a vicious expression of hatred for the common man;

a feeling that has been implicit throughout as the true source of an

imperialistic anarchism. A disenchanted Isabel thus describes her final

departure from the scene of her political endeavours shortly after a

police raid, and is significantly met by the almost gothic proletarian

landlady of the premises:

As I made my way down the yard leading to the street, I encountered

Mrs.Wattles at the back door of her shop. She had now reached the
maudlin stage of intoxication. Her eyes were bleary, her mouth
tremulous, her complexion bloated and inflamed. There was something
indefinite in her appearance, suggesting the idea that her face had
been boiled, and that the features had run, losing all sharpness of
outline and expression. She fixed me with her fishy eye, and
dabbing her face with the corner of her apron began to blubber.

"S'elp me Gawd, miss," she began, "I never thought as I should
come to this! To have them narks under my very roof, abrazenin' it
out! I always knew as there was something wrong abart pore
Mr.Janly, and many's the time I've said to 'im, "Mr.Janly, sir,"
I've said, "do take a little something, yer look so pale." But 'e
always answered, "No, Mrs.Wattles, no; you've been a mother to me,
Mrs.Wattles, and I know you're right, but I can't do it. 'Ere's for
'alf a pint to drink my health, but I can't do it." And I dare say
as it were them temp'rance scrupils as brought 'im to 'is end."

At these tender recollections of Giannoli the good lady quite
broke down. ...

She seemed by now quite oblivious of my presence: a quivering
shapeless mass of gin-drenched humanity she collapsed on to the
doorstep. And with this for my last sight and recollection of the
place which had witnessed so much enthusiasm, so many generous
hopes and aspirations, and where so any illusions lay buried, I
walked forth into the London street a sadder if a wiser woman.
(my ellipsis) (p.301-2).

Here, in the last words of the novel, the ironic perspective of the
narration breaks down as Isabel reaches the same level of consciousness

as the older "wiser" narrator: a wisdom which ultimately consists only in a contempt for a "gin-drenched humanity" and an understanding of politics in terms of "intoxication" and "temp'rance". Thus Mrs.Wattles is symbolic and Isabel is trying to cheer herself up by what she has secretly been doing all along: measuring her own egotistic aestheticism and idealism against an equally imagined vision of a vile and unworthy proletariat [91]. The result is an unreserved and vulgar expression of what Conrad called "scorn" at humanity without that balancing moral principle of "pity" or even the excuse that it is true.

This strange and bitter ending to A Girl Among The Anarchists must ultimately stand as evidence that the Rossettis' grasp of "life" is just as remote and, within the limits of mere words, possibly just as destructive and anarchistic as that of Emile Henry or of any other of the violent revolutionists they describe. However, their bourgeois anarchism is also the perfect expression of the fashionable engagement with revolutionary politics that was a common feature of so many novels at this time. Thus A Girl Among The Anarchists strikes and exploits all the major themes of the "anarchist" novel of the period: the romantic complications and possibilities occasioned by revolutionary commitment, the exploration of violence as the outcome of a particularly child-like understanding of language and vision of humanity, and the presentation of violent extremists as a combination of violent criminals and "stern heroic" martyrs.

By contrast, Matilda Betham-Edwards' The Flower of Doom; or, The Conspirator (1885) is a novel which exploits the romantic elements of terrorism and revolution far more simply and innocently than the Rossettis. Betham-Edwards, it is clear, knows no more about political

extremism and revolution than she has read in popular books and

newspapers. Unlike the Rossettis, however, she does not pretend to know

any more than she does, and the result is a very straightforward

melodramatic engagement with revolution as a form of almost religious

possession and a challenge to the powers of sexual love. The

proletariat, or scenes involving assessment of deserving or undeserving

causes, are entirely absent from the revolutionary world Betham-Edwards

presents; as the action of the novel takes place in a very rareified

atmosphere of romantic suffering and pain (curiously, Betham-Edwards

makes a play of concealing the Irish nationality of her characters and

sets them in an imaginary country, presumably in order not to offend the

sensibilities of her readers with too close a romantic treatment of

current issues; but then, for some unclear reason, she divulges the

Irish connection by a series of broad hints).

The plot is a very typical and simple one. Edgeworth, the

fenian "Conspirator" of the title, is torn between his commitment to a

secret terrorist organization and his love for the young and beautiful

heroine. The internal conflict into which this plunges him, makes the

novel a vehicle for Stepniak-like visions of the terrorist as a

sacrificial lamb and witness. As Edgeworth himself explains to his

lover, in terms which give a good idea of the tone of the novel:

"... were I called upon in this sacred cause, this awful cause,

to connive at the destruction of an entire city-- aye, were it

London itself, I should say, not the vindictiveness of man but

the indignation of heaven has spoken. ... We revolutionists,

called upon to redress the wrongs that outrage humanity, have no

recourse but so to unman ourselves. We must shut our hearts to

pity, strip off the last vestiges of weakness ere we are fit for

our work. But there is self-abnegation here, and self-abnegation

is even a kind of nobleness." [92].

The underlying christian mythology of this passage effectively

identifies the trope of revolution Betham-Edwards wishes to exploit:

that vision of revolutionary commitment as the domain of spiritual

excess and ascetism, which allows her hero to inspire feelings of both

romantic admiration with talk of "heaven" and fear with talk of

"destruction". It is this, and only this, which gives complication and

interest to what would otherwise be an utterly conventional romance.

It is, then, for this saintly exaltation and Nechaevist

isolation that the hero suffers and aspires. However, in moments of

weakness and sexual desire, his resolution falters and he reluctantly

admits that "I, the arch conspirator, cannot live alone. We dynamiters,

as they call us, need sympathy as well as ordinary men" (p.29). The

substance of the novel thus becomes the heroine's endeavours to reform

him: to assert the claim of "life" and the power of love against a

"noble" but de-humanizing and impossible idealism. Thus she remonstrates

with Edgeworth to abandon his violent activities:

Is there not misery enough in the world that you must heap up

the sum? And in all these black plots and fiendish intrigues,

it is ever the innocent who suffer for the guilty. (p.26).

In terms of the novel's world and interests, the "innocent who suffer"

here are not the physical victims of Edgeworth's "plots", who we do not

see directly, so much as Edgeworth himself and the girl who loves him.

The Flower of Doom, therefore, provides a much simpler example

of the Rossettis' melodramatic exploitation and vitiation of the appeal

of anarchism. Betham-Edwards, in the person of her "innocent" and clearly bourgeois heroine, makes that same journey into a dark domain of political terror which forms the core of the melodramatic treatment of revolution; and her eventual transformation of the hero, though it comes very late, signifies the triumph and assertion of conventional non-political values. This vitiates the appeal of anarchism and political violence, of course, not only because it presents the spectacle of its failure and abandonment by admirable characters, but much more centrally because it reflects and re-inforces the romantic, bourgeois and essentially adolescent terms in which the popular fiction reader was encouraged to imagine political extremism. It provides, in a sense, an example of the working of that cultural hegemony which kept anarchism always on the margins of political discourse in Britain by "domesticating" it: by bringing it into the conventional bourgeois worldview and identifying it with aspects or phases of itself.

For one more brief example of this "domestication" of anarchism, consider the following confession from another disenchanted young terrorist in R.L. and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's 1885 comic melodrama, The Dynamiter:

> "... you behold in me the victim equally of my own faults and
> virtues. I was born a hater of injustice; from my most tender
> years my blood boiled against Heaven when I beheld the sick,
> and against men when I beheld the sorrows of the poor; the
> pauper's crust stuck in my throat when I sat down to eat my
> dainties, and the crippled child has set me weeping. What was
> there in that, but what was noble? ... I had observed the
> course of history; I knew the burgess, our ruler of today, to

be base, cowardly and dull; I saw him, in every age, combine to

pull down that which was immediately above him and to prey upon

those who were below; his dullness, I knew, would ultimately

bring about his ruin; I knew his days were numbered, and yet

how was I to wait? how was I to let the poor child shiver in

the rain? The better days, indeed, were coming but the child

would die before that. ... in no ungenerous impatience I

enrolled myself among the enemies of this unjust and doomed

society; in surely no unnatural desire to keep the fires of

my philanthropy alight, I bound myself by an irrevocable

oath" [93].

The Stevensons' formulation is another sentimental exploration into

anarchism as a phase of youthful "impatience" and excess, and the

evaluation of the young man's extremism binds it into a conventional

political understanding of the world. The sympathy for the "pauper's

crust" is "noble" and admirable, his contempt for the "dullness" of his

"rulers" is evidence of his "generous" impulses toward the deserving,

but neither is investigated beyond their effect upon him. Both are

expressed and ultimately defused by his individual actions rather than

by the questioning of the forces which created them. The point, then, is

an obvious one: the fashionable "anarchist" novel of this time, and the

fashionable anarchist movement it inspired, was as an arm of an almost

imperialistic cultural power which effectively transformed the

theoretically powerful anarchist communism of Kropotkin into that merely

"epicurean" and "snobbish" anarchism that drove him to despair and into

the hands of foreign police.

"Streets slippery with blood":

Fantasies of Anarchist violence.

"... in this age, when even the assassin is a sentimentalist,
there is no virtue greater in my eyes than intellectual clarity"
(p.189). Thus observes Prince Florizel of Bohemia, retired political
adventurer and now the proprietor of a cigar shop in Piccadilly, at the
close of R.L. and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's The Dynamiter (1885).
The remarks are intended to be the moral to be drawn from the novel's
loosely interwoven series of farcical tales which are devoted, for the
most part, to making the terrorist the subject of comic derision.
Published at the height of the Fenian attacks on London, the tales
originally date from a period of illness in the Spring of 1883, when
R.L. Stevenson was confined in isolation to the darkness of a Swiss
chalet and amused by his wife with topical stories of dynamite and
terror.

Perhaps it is that rather grim and obscure origin that
accounts for the extremely light-hearted tone of the published stories
and the swagger with which they deflate the terrorist threat. Maybe the
Stevensons, detached from the world in the Swiss mountains, could not or
did not wish to take the prospect of revolution and terror very
seriously and imagined that no one else would. In any case, their
satirical fantasies at times come dangerously close to accounts of
events that really did happen and expose that temptation at the heart of
the fictional engagement with violence and terror: that special interest

in sensational images of destruction, which links the imaginative
writer, trying to make an impact on his society, with the terrorist
attempting to grasp the minds of men.

For example, in one section of the novel, Zero, a
"sentimental" terrorist of artistic disposition and the most violent
opinions, relates the farcical story of an abortive attempt at a
terrorist "event" by his comrade, the "patriot" M'Guire:

Our objective was the effigy of Shakespeare in Leicester Square:
a spot, I think, admirably chosen; not only for the sake of the
dramatist, still foolishly claimed as a glory by the English race,
in spite of his disgusting political opinions; but from the fact
that the seats in the immediate neighbourhood are often thronged
by children, errand-boys, unfortunate young ladies of the poorer
class, and infirm old men-- all classes making a direct appeal to
public pity, and therefore suitable with our designs. As M'Guire
drew near his heart was inflamed by the most noble sentiment of
triumph. Never had he seen the garden so crowded; children, still
stumbling in the impotence of youth, ran to and fro, shouting and
playing around the pedestal; an old sick pensioner sat upon the
nearest bench, a medal on his breast, a stick with which he walked
(for he was disabled by wounds) reclining on his knee. Guilty
England would thus be stabbed in the most delicate quarters; the
moment had, indeed, been well selected; and M'Guire, with a
radiant prevision of the event, drew merrily nearer. (p.110).

There is no recorded historical precedent for an attack on Leicester
Square, but the Stevensons could have taken the idea from the
innumerable newspaper reports of Fenian plots in the west end of London

(presumably their only source of information in the Swiss mountains).
The comic and ideological point of the passage is obvious enough: terror
is a state of mind and the Stevensons' irony decodes the terrorist's
inner thoughts so that the "dynamiter" is rendered as the psychopathic
"sentimentalist", so caught up in his political causes that he comically
confounds fantasy with reality and sees an abstract "Guilty England"
personified in the form of a "sick old pensioner". This joke, funny
enough first time around, is re-iterated in different forms throughout
the novel and forms its central political point that terrorism is the
domain of solipsistic adolescent excess, as we are given insight into the
minds of one terrorist after another.

Curiously, however, this essentially comic intention goes hand
in hand with the authors' need and readiness to exploit the more serious
aspects of the terrorist violence which forms their subject. Thus the
tale of the unfortunate M'Guire continues with his failure to "deposit
the machine" due to a police presence, and being left in possession of a
bomb due to imminently explode. In a grimly comic scene, he tries to
make a present of his bomb to a six year old girl, before again being
foiled and collapsing in despair:

He thought of his old mother, of his happy youth; of the hideous
rending pang of the explosion; of the possibility that he might
not be killed, that he might be cruelly mangled, crippled for life,
condemned to life long pains, blinded perhaps, and almost surely
deafened. Ah you spoke lightly of the dynamiter's peril; but even
waiving death, have you realized what it is for a fine, brave young
man of forty, to be smitten suddenly with deafness, cut off from
all the music of life, and from the voice of friendship and love?

How little do we realize the suffering of others! Even your brutal government, in the heyday of its lust for cruelty, though it scruples not to hound the patriot with spies, to pack the corrupt jury, to bribe the hangman and to erect the infamous gallows, would hesitate to inflict so horrible a doom; not, I am well aware, from virtue, not from philanthropy, but with the fear before it of the withering scorn of the good. (p.114).

Again the joke is obvious as the terror is reversed and the solipsistic terrorist is "blinded" and "deafened" by his own imagination of terror: paralysed by the very image of what he wants to inflict upon the "Guilty England" he attacks. The Stevensons' moral and intellectual position on this kind of excess is clear and yet the description of the effects of the explosion, the ironically distanced vision of being "cruelly mangled, crippled for life", is also excessive and graphic enough to have placed the Stevensons in a rather difficult situation.

The publication of <u>The Dynamiter</u> co-incided with an outpouring of public sympathy for two police officers injured in an attempt to dispose of a bomb in Westminster Hall, and the Stevensons could easily have appeared facetious and callous in their deflation of the terrorist threat at this moment. They overcame this problem by attaching to the work a dedication to the injured men, "Messrs. Cole and Cox", in which it is explained that, although the stories deal with the "ugly devil of crime, with which it is your glory to have contended", it "were a waste of ink to do so in a serious spirit" (p.v). Against their own lightheartedness, they poise the high seriousness of their subject:

... seriousness comes most in place when we are to speak of our defenders. Whoever be right in this great and confused war of

politics; whatever elements of greed, whatever traits of the

bully, dishonour both parties in this inhuman contest;-- your

side, your part, is at least pure of doubt. Yours is the side of

the child, of the breeding woman, of individual pity and public

trust. If our society were the mere kingdom of the devil (as

indeed it wears some of its colours) it yet embraces many

precious elements and innocent persons whom it is a glory to

defend. Courage and devotion, so common in the ranks of the

police, so little recognized, so meagrely rewarded, have at

length found their commemoration in an historical act. History,

... will not forget Mr.Cole carrying the dynamite in his

defenceless hands, nor Mr.Cole coming coolly to his aid. (p.v-vi.).

It is a clever way of surmounting their immediate problem and inventing

a moral purpose for their somewhat cynical work. But behind their claim

that "it were a waste of ink" to treat their subject with a serious

intention is a recognition of the purpose of the "anarchist" novel more

generally: to bring "the ugly devil of crime", of culturally forbidden

impulses and desires, under control by familiarizing and bringing them

into contempt in narratives which control them. Indeed, as a body of

narrative, these novels represent a defence of conservative thinking,

not just in the sense that they generally vilify their revolutionary

subjects, but perhaps more importantly in that they provided their

readership with a form of catharsis: a vicarious thrill at discovering,

feeling engaged with, and hence controlling, the things which most

terrified them.

This purpose, then, gives rise to clear strategies for

representing political violence in novels in a way that makes it

ideologically safe, whilst at the same time allowing the writer and reader to engage in a voyeuristic fantasy of terror. Irony and the use of a bourgeois narrator to set up a moral diatribe with violence and anarchism provides the narrative and political framework in which terror is, in the words of Elisée Reclus [94], "conjured" to entertain the reader and "exorcise" his fascination for it. We have already seen one example of this tactic, in Edward Jenkins' A Week of Passion (1886), consider the following novel as another example.

"I hated revolution and I equally hated the pettiness of a sordid socialism. We must not, I contended, see the graces of high-life, art and culture, fouled by the mob, but the mob elevated into a possession and appreciation of the graces ..." [95]. Such are the liberal reflections which occur to Mr. Stanley, the narrator of E.Douglas Fawcett's Hartmann the Anarchist or, The Doom of the Great City (1893), shortly before he becomes the privileged witness to an anarchist terror which brings the end of capitalist civilization and violently challenges his initial aesthetic rejection of "the mob" and revolution. Written from a post-revolutionary perspective early in the twentieth century and looking back at events set in 1900, the novel is a lurid fantasy of violence which deals with the series of atrocities commited by "the saintly dynamiter Hartmann" (p.12) and his crew of desperate anarchists aboard the "death-dealing Attila": a flying boat from which they bombard London with dynamite and burning oil in order to give the signal for a Europe-wide revolution.

Perhaps more forcefully and simply than any other single work, Hartmann the Anarchist exposes that contradiction at the heart of the "anarchist" novel and the contemporary response to anarchism generally:

that mixture of voyeuristic fascination and extreme horror with which

the writer and the public beheld the prospect of "dynamite outrages",

and the sinister anarchists who commited them. Taking his initial

assessment of anarchism and even the bones of his plot from the press

(see page 182), Fawcett's aim in this novel was to combine an explicit

moral and political condemnation of anarchism from a constitutional

socialist perspective with an implicitly articulated appreciation of its

violent attractions: of its explosive power and emotional immediacy. He

therefore exploits the various stereotypes of the anarchist in their

most extreme and dynamic phase as a form of thrilling entertainment. His

anarchists are "enthusiasts" and "fiends of destruction" (p.80): "hated

by and hating society" (p.3), they are an odd assortment of crackpot

intellectuals and violent criminals upon whom Hartmann, their leader,

discourses poetically:

> Every man is an outlaw from society, and most have shed blood. They
>
> burn to revenge a society the evils which they have received, or,
>
> given appropriate occasion, would receive from it. In this way I
>
> secure resolute, fiery and unflinching soldiers. ... They are like
>
> the creatures generated in decaying bodies. They are the maggots of
>
> civilization, the harvest of the dragon's teeth sown in past
>
> centuries, the Frankenstein's monsters of civilization which are
>
> born to hate their father. You have read Milton, of course. Do you
>
> recall the passage about Sin and the birth of Death who gnaws his
>
> wretched parents vitals? It is the sin of this industrial age which
>
> has bred the crew of this death dealing Attila. (p.80-81).

Fawcett's anarchists exist in the same negative phase of idealism from

which Stepniak's dark "terrorist martyr" emerged, but realized with a

decadent neurasthenic pleasure in the details of their violence which

the narrator's formal political opposition permits the author.

Thus, through the typical narrative device of these novels,

Mr. Stanley is allowed to accompany the anarchists on their mission to

"wreck civilization" (p.84) whilst remaining morally and ideologically

opposed to it:

> I myself, though a socialist, was averse to barricades: "Not
>
> revolution but evolution" was the watchword of my section ...
>
> How were the details of this vast change to be grappled with
>
> amid the throes of revolution? How deliberate with streets
>
> slippery with blood, the vilest passions unchained, stores,
>
> factories, and workshops wrecked ... What man or convention
>
> could beat out a workable constitution in the turmoil? (p.5-6)

Such are the "reforming" sentiments which establish Mr. Stanley's

credibility as the voice of bourgeois consciousness in the novel and

propel him into a series of debates with the anarchists which form the

interludes between spectacular acts of destruction. His rather weak

rejection of anarchism as "unsafe", and the anarchists' impatient

dismissal of his "played out socialism" (p.10), are the poles of the

diatribe he holds with a series of representative anarchist types who

clearly articulate the author's own less responsible emotional impulses

and violent fantasies.

The novel, then, ultimately becomes the story of Mr.Stanley's

efforts to maintain this moderate position in the face of both the

horrors unleashed by the anarchists and the strong instinctive

attraction that he feels for their dark and secret power: a power which

also evokes all the wonder and fear with which the nineteenth century

regarded developing technology. "... about our numbers, my friend,"

boasts the anarchist Burnett shortly before he introduces the awestruck

narrator to the dynamite ship, "you think that we must be politically

impotent because we are relatively few ... But suppose, suppose, I say,

our people had some inculculable force ..." (p.10). At a later point,

shortly before the anarchists break out into savage fighting amongst

themselves over who is to cruelly destroy an innocent ship they spot at

sea, the anarchist Brandt vividly expounds the larger ethical purposes

of their mission:

> Violent diseases often demand violent remedies ... The surgeon
>
> may be gentle at heart, but he spares not the gangrenous limb ...
>
> Regard us anarchists as excising the foul ulcers of humanity and
>
> as forced to perform that duty with no anaesthetic to aid.
>
> Unhappily we have to confront struggling patients vividly
>
> sensitive to the knife. Nevertheless, for their own sake, or
>
> rather for the sake of humanity, we must act. (p.109).

This tendency to abstract medical metaphor, instantly negated by

extremes of brutal violence, is a characteristic shared by many of the

anarchists aboard the "Attila"; including Hartmann himself:

> His aim was to pierce the ventricle of the heart of civilization,
>
> that heart which pumps the blood of capital everywhere, through the
>
> arteries of Russia, of Australia, of India ... "Paralyse this
>
> heart," he has said, "and you paralyse credit and the mechanism of
>
> finance everywhere." (p.148).

Such colourful rendering of the language of violence is typical of the

work throughout, which constantly opposes the imaginative and emotional

dynamism of anarchist excess against the stale rationalism of the

narrator's more timid constitutional position. "The bluster of the vulgar dynamiter is revolting" (p.102) is his dismissive but somewhat lame response.

Hartmann himself, "a prodigy of intellectual vigour" (p.26) and "an ethical madman" (p.12), is the classic type of the heroic and romantic anarchist who has sacrificed all to the revolution and it is his violent rhetoric that so disturbs and secretly excites Mr.Stanley. He and his men are said to "live for the roar of dynamite" (p.63), in a permanent frenzy of destruction. By an unlikely chain of connections, the narrator is not only allowed to accompany Hartmann on his terrorist voyage and speak with him at length, but also accidentally gets to know his mother and thereby gains an insight into the development of the fanatic from rebellious youth to confirmed and desperate revolutionary. Thus, as the narrator gathers from early photographs, Hartmann as a young man seemed possesed of "an arbitrary and domineering soul, utterly impatient of control and loftily contemptuous of its kind" (p.39); whilst at present:

> There was the same independent look, the same cruel hardness that
> had stamped the mien of the youth, but the old impetuous air had
> given way to a cold inflexible sedateness, far more appropriate to
> the dread master of the Attila. (p.65).

Hartmann's maturation into a confirmed anarchist and hater of humanity has, the narrator explains, been at the charge of another representative anarchist type of the German revolutionary chemist:

> ... one Schwartz, a miscreant of notorious opinions and character.
> This man gradually inspired him with a hatred of the whole fabric
> of society and the end of it was that he became an anarchist. He

sacrificed his aims, position, comfort, reputation, his studies—
in short, everything. He regarded civilization as rotten from top
to foundation and the present human race as "only fit for fuel"
(p.26).

Ironically it is this evaluation of humanity as "only fit for fuel", and
the dynamic freedom of violent action it confers upon the judge, which
proves most seductive to the liberal Mr.Stanley with his reforming
ideals and contempt for "the mob". Thus, although he intellectually
asserts the need for political restraint right up to the close of the
novel, Mr.Stanley's aestheticism forces him to acknowledge the
attraction of the Attila and its anarchistic mission. He does so in
terms which reflect the imaginative and emotional power of both
revolution and science over the mind of the time:

> ... when to these purely artistic pleasures are added those of
> power, when the roar of maddening cities rises upwards, and you
> lean over the bulwarks supremely conscious of superiority, you
> must be described as realizing here on earth one of the paradises
> of dreamland. (p.138).

It is then to anarchism in this phase, as a temptation to a sinister
"dream" of unrestrained individual power, that Fawcett pays an ambiguous
tribute in this novel and thereby exposes that paradox of the
"anarchist" novel: that secret and irresponsible engagement with
fantasies of anarchic freedom and revolutionary violence which only the
artist and the terrorist can make.

*

Section 1:

1. Part of Spies' courtroom speech on being sentenced to death in 1886.

   Cited by Paul Berman, Quotations from the Anarchists (London:

   Praeger, 1972), p.116. (hereafter, Berman).

2. This is taken from Frank Harris' semi-fictional account of the

   framing of Louis Lingg and the other "Haymarket Martyrs",

   The Bomb (London: Hutchinson, 1908), p.268.

3. George Bernard Shaw, An Unsocial Socialist. First published in the

   the magazine Today in 1884. This page reference is from the 1980

   edition (London: Virago), p.139.

4. This phrase is taken from a letter to Grace Norton, of 16-8-1886.

   The Letters of Henry James, ed. Percy Lubbock (London: Macmillan,

   1920), Vol.1, p.123.

5. The term "Era of Propaganda by the Deed" has come to designate that

   period in European and American history roughly between 1880 and

   1910; but particularly the 1880's and 1890's when a number of

   revolutionary activists throughout the world took it upon themselves

   to realize their ideals in acts of destructive violence. There was,

   of course, nothing new in that, but this period was marked by a

   great escalation of indiscriminate attacks by individuals on targets

   that were often not specifically or overtly political. The

activities of Ravachol and Emile Henry provide especially

spectacular examples of this practise. August Vaillant, who threw a

bomb into the Palais Bourbon in 1893, was another notorious

"propagandist by the deed". At his trial in 1894, a defence lawyer

described Vaillant's deed as "a social crime, and the warning of his

bomb was the menace in the cry of human suffering" (Pall Mall

Gazette (11-1-1894) The first widescale use of dynamite in such

attacks is also a defining characteristic of this era.

6. By this longer tradition of novels, I mean the English "Social-
   Problem" novels of the 1840's and after: works shot through with the
   fear of social unrest, conceived of as a necessarily negative
   phenomenon, and which consistently confound chartism, communism,
   socialism, trade-unions, assassinations and other forms of violence.
   Most of the "dynamite" novels, which form my subject here, inherit
   their ideological structures and confusions from this tradition.

7. R.L. and F.Van de Grift Stevenson, The Dynamiter (Stroud: Alan
   Sutton, 1984), p.106. (All further page references in the text are
   to this edition).

8. This formulation originates from Hyndman's book, The Historical
   Basis of Socialism in England (1883) (p.443), but Kaufmann quotes it
   his article, "Socialism and Atheism", in The Contemporary Review of
   June 1885 (p.838). (all further references to this periodical are
   indicated by CR)

9. CR, June 1885, p.838, p.840.

10. The Alarm (Chicago), 21-2-1885.

11. This is not to suggest that anarchists were not responsible for some quite serious acts of terrorism. Apart from the actions of Ravachol and his imitators in France and Spain, anarchists were responsible for the assassinations of President Carnot of France in 1894, Empress Elizabeth of Austria in 1898, King Umberto of Italy in 1900, and President McKinley of the United States in 1901. The important point, however, is that these actions were never a part of a co-ordinated strategy or pattern of terror, but the spontaneous actions of isolated individuals and were, accordingly, very limited in their lasting political impact and importance.

12. CR, May 1884, p.627.

13. Reported in The Times, 1-1-1893.

14. It is a remarkable fact that, whilst anarchism had relatively little real political impact on the native British population at this time, just about every major anarchist figure either lived or spent considerable in London: from Nechaev to Johann Most to Kropotkin and Malatesta. It was also the case that many of the most important international anarchist newspapers of the period were written and published in London. These included the Russian revolutionary periodical Vpered, the German language Die Freiheit, the Yiddish

<u>Arbeter Fraint</u>, Kropotkin's highly influential journal <u>Le Révolté</u>,

as well as many English language journals such as <u>Freedom</u> and

<u>The Torch</u>.

15. It was, perhaps, what has become known as the "Haymarket massacre",

of Chicago 1886, that did more than any other single event to bring

anarchism into the public mythology, as a serious conspiratorial

terrorist movement. In that year Chicago was disturbed by great

industrial unrest in response to a national call for an eight-hour

working day, which found strong support among the city's prominent

anarchist movement, largely composed of German and Czech immigrants.

Events came to a head on 3 May, when police fired on a crowd of

workers locked out of a factory and killed several people. On the

next day a protest rally was held in Haymarket Square and a bomb was

thrown into the massed ranks of the police, killing seven officers.

The police responded with gunfire which killed many more

demonstrators and injured at least sixty. After a public outcry,

seven anarchists were put on trial including Parsons and August

Spies, both editors of anarchist newspapers. The trial was a

transparent sham and both were convicted on extremely dubious

evidence, with the trial judge openly admitting that "Not because

you have caused the Haymarket bomb, but because you are anarchists,

you are on trial" [cited by Emma Goldmann, <u>Anarchism and other</u>

<u>Essays</u> ed. Richard Drinnon (New York: Dover, 1969), p.87]. Parsons

got fifteen years; Spies got death commuted to life imprisonment;

four others including Louis Lingg were executed. Several years later

the trial was declared a case of judicial murder by the State

Governor of Illinois, and Parsons and Spies were released.

16. Berman, p.30 1.

17. Carlo Pisacane formulated the idea of "propaganda by the deed" in
    the f llowing terms:"The propaganda of the idea is a chimera. Ideas
    result from de ds, not the latter from the former, and the people
    will no be free when they are educated, but educated when they are
    free." [cited by George Woodcock, The Anarchist Reader (Glasgow:
    Fontana, 1977), p.43]. His thought was highly influential in the
    insurectionary tactics of Italian anarchists and, through them, he
    influenced wider anarchist thought and methods.

18. Berman, p.114.

19. CR, May 1884, p.627.

20. CR, ibid., p.635.

21. CR, ibid., p.637.

Section 2:

22. From an article entitled "Anarchism: Its cause and Cure". The Pall
    Mall Gazette, 14-9-1901 (Hereafter, PMG).

23. All The Year Round, 25 4-1885.

24. _The Times_, 27-1-1885.

25. From "A Terrorists Defence", _An Anarchist Reader_ ed. George Woodcock
(Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p.195.

26. Cited by James Joll in _The Anarchists_ (London: Methuen, 1979), p.67.
Bakunin made many explicit comparisons between destruction and the
process of art. Violence itself was a creative act:
There can be no revolution without a sweeping and passionate
destruction, since by means of such destruction new worlds are
born and come into existence.
[_Statism and Anarchy_ ed. Marshall S. Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1990), p.108].

27. _The Times_, 27-1-1885.

28. _The Times_, 15-12-1884.

29. _PMG_, 14-9-1901.

30. _PMG_, 31-1-1885.

31. _PMG_, 26-1-1885.

32. ~~Ibid~~. _ibid_.

33. _CR_, "Socialism and Atheism", June 1885, p.838.

34. *Ibid*., p.448.

35. _PMG_, 14-9-1901.

36. *Ibid*. *ibid*.

37. _CR_, May 1884, p.632.

38. *ibid*., p.638-9.

39. *ibid*., p.640.

40. _PMG_, 26-1-1885.

41. From "The Russianization of England" by Madame Olga De Novikoff. _PMG_, 15-1-1885.

42. Stepniak, before his "deed of blood", lived in various parts of Europe and was not always as opposed to European terrorism as it would seem. It was said of him that "he could always be found when there was talk of insurrection" [G.Woodcock and I.Avakumovic _The Anarchist Prince_ (London: Boardman, 1950), p.148] and in 1877 he was involved, with the anarchists Carlo Cafiero and Errico Malatesta, in an attempt to spark a peasant revolt in Benevento, Italy. They occupied two villages with an armed band, burnt tax registers and pronounced the downfall of King Victor Emmanuel. The peasants supported them at first, but feared the impending battle

with Italian troops and finally the revolt failed to spark off the "social liquidation" the rebels had hoped for. The insurrectionists fled and only Malatesta and a few others were arrested. In London Stepniak was acquainted extensively in the cultural and literary circles of the time. He was on close terms with the Garnett family, especially with Olive Garnett who went on to write In Russia's Night (1918), one of the better examples of the nihilists novel; he also knew H.G.Wells, G.B.Shaw, and Ford Madox Ford. He must, given the many acquaintances they had in common, have known the Rossettis.

43. The North American Review, November 1891, Vol. 153, No. 3, p.600.

44. CR, March 1884, p.325.

45. *ibid*., p.325.

46. *ibid*., p.326.

47. *ibid*., p.327.

48. *ibid*., p.340.

49. *ibid*., p.340.

50. *ibid*., p.341.

51. CR, September 1882, p.624.

52. *ibid* ~~Ibid~~., p.625.

Section 3:

53. Stepniak's powerful personal magnetism and ability to hold a public stage are attested to in nearly all references to him in the literature of the time. The Rossettis, for example, express great respect for him in their depiction of "Nekrovitch" in A Girl Among The Anarchists (1903), written with all their class's enthusiasm and fascination for foreign revolutionaries which Stepniak played to:

> Nekrovitch was essentially a great man; one of those who to know was to admire and to love; a man of strong intellect, and of the strong personal magnetism which is so frequently an adjunct of genius. Physically he was a huge powerful man, so massive and striking in appearance that he suggested comparison rather with some fact of nature-- a rock, a vigourous forest tree-- than with another man. He was one of those rare men who, like mountains in a landscape, suffice in themselves to relieve their environments, whatever these may be, from all taint of meanness. He stood out from among his guests the centre of conversation, of feeling, and of interest. (p.22-23). (London: Univ. of Nebraska, 1992).

54. New York Times, 31-12-1890.

55. Co-incidentally Stepniak acted as an advisor to Constance Garnett on her translations of Russian literature. After his death, his wife Fanny Kravchinskaya took over this work.

56. Cited by James Hulse in <u>Revolutionists in London: A Study of five</u>
<u>Unorthodox Socialists</u> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970) p.47. The
work refered to is <u>The Russian Storm Cloud: or, Russia in relation</u>
<u>to her neighbouring countries</u> (London: Sonnenschein, 1886), in
which Stepniak gives a very aggressive picture of the autocracy.
Another work of interest is <u>The Russian Peasantry, their agrarian</u>
<u>conditions, social life, and religion</u> (London: Sonnenschein, 1888)
in which Stepniak presents the other side of his propagandistic
message: the extreme hardships and sufferings of the Russian people.

57. <u>Underground Russia</u>, translated from the Italian (London: Smith,
Elder and Co., 1883), p.280-1. (All further references in the text
are to this edition).

58. What Stepniak really thought of the relative freedoms and virtues of
Russia and the West can only be guessed at, since he obviously
wished to flatter his Western audience to some extent. However, it
is tempting to attribute to him the more critical opinions expressed
by some of the characters in <u>In Russia's Night</u> (1918), by Stepniak's
very close friend and confidant Olive Garnett. Her cosmopolitan art
collector, Arabagine, strikes a note of reservation about the moral
purity of western society as opposed to that of Russia:

We live under a regime with laws, but without justice or rights,

as men live on with one lung, one kidney, one leg, and get quite

accustomed to it. The minds of men, however, are freer than with

you: men in Russia may think and even say what they like so long

as they do nothing to upset the powers that be. Freedom, on which

the anglo-saxon prides himself, is a noble illusion. I would not

mind having the freedom of an English country gentleman of leisure

and culture-- my ideal existence, but it is built upon slavery

nevertheless. [(London: W.Collins and Co., 1918), p.157].

59. <u>The Career of a Nihilist</u> (London: Walter Scott, 1890), p.22.

60. <u>Under Western Eyes</u> (London: Methuen, 1911), p.60, p.32. There are a

number of verbal parallels between Conrad's novel and <u>The Career of</u>

<u>A Nihilist</u> which suggest that he partly had Stepniak in mind in his

drawing of the Russian character and its conditions. Stepniak

included in his characters a Jewish activist who exists on the

fringe of the movement, working for it but also providing for the

reader a rationalistic criticism of the Russian mind in terms which

bring Conrad's English teacher to mind. "But you Russians hate to

deal with positive things that you can touch with your fingers;" he

tells the hero, "you must always have some fantastical nonsense to

muddle your heads with" (p.46). As Keith Carabine has pointed out in

his ""*The Figure behind the veil"*: *Conrad and Razumov"*, Stepniak and

his novel were part of the Russian fashion against which Conrad was

reacting: "... Conrad's sardonic depiction of the drunken peasant,

Ziemianitch, hailed by Haldin as a "bright spirit" (p.18) "with an

extraordinary ...sense of the necessity of freedom" (p.56), can be

read both as a satire of such enthusiastic depictions of the

revolutionary terrorist as, Stepniak's <u>The Career of A Nihilist</u>

(1889), and of the Garnett's inspired liberal Edwardian admiration

for the Russian revolutionary "soul"..."[K.Carabine in <u>Joseph</u>

Conrad's Under Western Eyes ed. David Smith (Connecticut: Archon
Books, 1991), p.30].

61. For Stepniak, the perception of art and politics as providing
    alternative means of expressing the same needs and desires, was made
    particularly clear cut by the radical political traditions of
    literature in his native Russia. As Kropotkin argued in 1905:

    In no other country does literature occupy so influential a

    position as it does in Russia. No where else does it exercise so

    profound and so direct an influence upon the intellectual

    development of the younger generation. ... The reason ... is self

    evident. There is no political life. ... The consequence has been

    that the best minds of the country have chosen the poem, the

    novel, the satire, or literary criticism as the medium for

    expressing their aspirations, their conceptions of national life,

    or their ideals.

    [Cited by Woodcock and Avakumovik, The Anarchist Prince: Peter

    Kropotkin (London: Boardman, 1950), p.347].

62. T.C.Moser speculates as to the possible suicide motive behind
    Stepniak's death. Like Razumov, he was hit by a train when
    apparently in a fit of mental abstraction. Moser argues that
    "Stepniak may well have unconsciously wished for such an accident.
    At the end of The Career of a Nihilist, Stepniak's hero is clearly
    self-destructive ..." [Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline
    (Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 1957), p.24]. Whilst
    this identification of Stepniak with Andrey is obviously fruitless,

the wish for death does tend to dominate the atmosphere of
Stepniak's work.

63. Georges Sorel, Reflections on Violence (Illinois: The Free Press,
1950), p.57.

64. Again it is interesting that Conrad reproduced this kind of language
in his novel. "Some brains cannot resist the suggestion of
irresistible force and of headlong motion" [Under Western Eyes
(London: Methuen, 1911), p.167], the narrator comments during
Razumov's sufferings.

65. In Conrad, of course, this tactic is inverted so that his narrator,
the English teacher, constantly denies knowledge of Russia to a
Western readership.

66. George Donnington: or, In The Bear's Grip 2 Vol. (London: Chapman
and Hall, 1885), Vol.1, p.176. (All further references are to this
edition).

67. See T.C.Moser, as above, p.29. See also Conrad to Edward Garnett,
12-11-1900, The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad ed. F.R.Karl and
L.Davies (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1986) vol.2, p.128.

68. Petersburg Tales (London: Heinemann, 1900), p.92. (All further
references are to this edition).

69. In Russia's Night (London: W.Collins and Co., 1918), p.70. (All further references are to this edition).

70. Love, The Reward 2 Vol. (London: Remington and Co., 1885), vol.1, p.236.(All further references are to this edition).

71. The Red Symbol (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1911), p.113. (All further references are to this edition)

72. By Order of The Czar (London: Hutchinson, 1892), p.142-3.

Section 4:

73. Kropotkin had good reason to fear his reception by the authorities in Europe and made a number of lucky escapes to England during his early revolutionary career. In 1876 he had escaped in spectacular fashion from the St.Petersburg Military Hospital,where he had been imprisoned for sedition against the Tsarist government, and eventually reached Sweden overland from Russia. In Memoirs of a Revolutionist (1899), he described his elation on finding a ship to take him from there to Newcastle:

... as I went to the steamer I asked myself with anxiety, "Under what flag does she sail-- Norwegian, German, English?" Then I saw floating above the stern the Union Jack-- the flag which so many refugess, Russian, Italian, French, Hungarian, and of all nations, have found an asylum-- I greeted that flag from the depths of my heart.

[Memoirs of a Revolutionist (New York: Dover, 1971), p.377].

Despite his joy, Kropotkin did not stay long in England and soon

went to Switzerland. In 1877, however, he fled to England once

again, this time pursued by the Belgian police. In 1882, shortly

after leaving England, he was arrested by the French police and

found guilty of being a member of the International, even though it

was recognised by the court that the organization no longer existed.

He was sentenced to several years in prison but was released in 1885

after an international outcry and again sought refuge in England.

74. Cited by Malcolm A. Millar in Kropotkin (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 1976), p.169.

75. Hermia Oliver, for instance, points out that nearly all the leading

anarchists of the time were of bourgeois origin and would seem to

have been motivated by factors in their personal lives which tended

to isolate them. Charlotte Wilson, for example, is suggested to have

sided with the poor and oppressed partly because of a difficult

relationship with her mother; Henry Seymour, because of his sexual

proclivities; many others, because they were orphans or the products

of broken homes. This, of course, does not in any way invalidate

their ideas, but it does throw an interesting light on the reason

why anarchism has been presented in novels as specially attractive

to socially isolated individuals, like James' Hyacinth Robinson or

Turgenev's Nejdanov in Virgin Soil (1877). [See Oliver's The

International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London

(London: Croom-Helm, 1983) (hereafter, Oliver)].

76. _A Set of Six_ (London: Methuen, 1908), p.76. (All further refences in the text are to this edition).

77. _The Princess Casamassima_ (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.186. (All further references in the text are to this edition).

78. As I go on to imply, it is no co-incidence that all of these characters are women. Probably the greatest impact that anarchism had on British society was in its influence on the feminist movement.

79. George Woodcock "Introduction" to _Selections from Political Justice_ (London: Freedom Press, 1943), p.iv. George Woodcock _The Anarchists_ (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p.370.

80. Isabel Meredith _A Girl Among The Anarchists_ (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992; first published in London, 1903), p.56. (All further page references are to this edition).

81. _The Torch_ ran as a publication from June 1894 to September 1895. Its later incarnation, as _The Torch of Anarchy_, ran from July 1895 to June 1896.

82. Ironically Kropotkin's famous "Appeal to the Young" (in _Paroles d'un Revolté_) of 1885, did much to inspire the youthful fashion for anarchism. Indeed it is cited by "Meredith" as the inspiration for the Rossettis' juvenile propagandism. (also see _Oliver_, p.120-122).

83. CR, May 1884, p.628-9.

84. A Set of Six, as above, p.76.

85. ibid., p.77-8.

86. Conrad is known to have visited the Rossetti house in 1903 or 1904
    and to have met Helen Rossetti. Although it seems unlikely, she
    could have provided him with the details of the Greenwich Park
    explosion. (see Oliver, p.99-100).

87. Kropotkin clearly distanced himself from The Torch once it became
    an established journal. He is known to have thought that the
    Rossetti's could not present anarchism properly and he opposed their
    support for the tactics of the French terrorists Henry and Ravachol.

88. For an interesting treatment of this tradition of fiction as a kind
    of bourgeois cultural imperialism, see Mark Seltzer's "*The Princess
    Casamassima*: Realization and the Fantasy of Surveillance" in
    Henry James: Critical Assessments ed. Graham Clarke (East Sussex:
    Helm, 1991), Vol.IV, p.529.

89. A Set of Six, as above, p.131.

90. In Conrad's ironic inversion of conventional political expectations
    in "An Anarchist", it is the multi-national capitalist concern which
    proves to be the real anarchistic destroyer and exploiter of human

"gullibility".

91. Turgenev's Virgin Soil (1877) could have provided the Rossettis with

the precedent for the predicament of the revolutionary aesthete

caught in the midst of an unaesthetic people. His hero, Nejdanov, is

an artistic young man who writes poetry in secret but finds himself

heavily involved in the 1870's movement "to the people". Like the

Rossettis' heroine, he finds it difficult to overcome his distaste

for the masses, which he attributes to his aristocratic blood in

moments of bitter self-recrimination:

> How I loathe this irritability, sensitiveness, impressionableness,
>
> fastidiousness, inherited from my aristocratic father! What right
>
> had he to bring me into this world, endowed with qualities quite
>
> unsuited to the sphere in which I live? To create a bird and throw
>
> it in the water? An aesthetic amidst filth! A democrat, a lover of
>
> the people, yet the very smell of their filthy vodka makes me feel
>
> sick!
>
> [trans. Rochelle S. Townsend (London: Dent, 1963), p.240].

In Turgenev's novel, of course, Nejdanov's contempt for the masses

is a serious issue and leads to his destruction. The Rossettis'

heroine merely does something else.

92. The Flower of Doom; or, The Conspirator (London: Ward and Downey,

1885), p.50-1. (All further references are to this edition).

93. The Dynamiter (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1984), p.82. (All further

references are to this edition).

94. Reclus' formulation, in "An Anarchists on Anarchy", was:

> It is said that when the magicians of the middle ages wanted to
> raise the devil, they began the incantation by painting his iamge
> on a wall. For a long time past modern exorcists have adopted
> similar methods for conjuring anarchists.

It is a particularly apt way of describing the purpose of this
fiction.

95. Hartmann The Anarchist; or, the doom of the Great City (London:
Edward Arnold, 1895), p.17. (All further references are to this
edition).

Chapter Six

"The Imagination of Disaster.":

Some issues raised by James's *The Princess Casamassima*.

"A spectre is haunting Europe-- the spectre of communism" [1],

declared Marx and Engels in the foreword to *The Communist Manifesto* of

1848. Their words strike the keynote of the theme which was to obsess

the minds of writers, journalists, politicians of all persuasions, and

everyone concerned with the social and political issues of their time.

Clearly they had in mind the type of thoughts and "spectral" worries

from which Prince Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor, suffered in his

famous letter to Tsar Alexander of December, 1820:

> Kings have to calculate the chances of their very existence in the
>
> immediate future; passions are let loose, and league together to
>
> overthrow everything which society respects as the basis of its
>
> existence, religion, public morality, laws, customs, rights and
>
> duties, all are attacked, confounded, overthrown, or called into
>
> question. The great mass of the people are tranquil spectators of
>
> these attacks and revolutions, and of the absolute want of any
>
> means of defence. A few are carried off by the torrent, but the
>
> wishes of an immense majority are to maintain a repose which exists
>
> no longer, and of which even the first elements seem to be
>
> lost ... .

Metternich, the scourge of revolutionaries throughout Europe, believed

that "All revolutions are lies" and, in an impossible fiction of

security, wanted history brought to a "full stop" [2]. Ironically,

however, his sense of vulnerability and fear of "passions ... let loose"
and in "league" against him, are the perfect realization of the dread
and sense of disintegration that Marx and Engels wished to provoke with
their "spectre of communism". With very different feelings, it seems,
the extreme conservative and the extreme revolutionary were at least
united in the conviction that nineteenth century Europe was on the point
of revolution.

I begin with these contending observations for two reasons.
Firstly because it is only in that curious co-incidence between the
political expectations they express, that we can begin to understand the
difficult position of those novelists who undertook to write artistic
fiction about politics and revolution at this time and who wished not to
merely propagandize. Secondly because, despite their overt political
anatagonism, Marx and Metternich provide us with equally good examples
of the language of propaganda against which the genuine artist would
wish to define himself in his task: of fictional statements which claim
a real reference and power in the world, and attempt to agitate their
audience by constructing a gap between an ideologically defined and
authorized vision of that world and the unengaged vision available to
the ordinary "spectator". To revolutionary and conservative alike, "the
revolution" is a powerful imaginative and linguistic construct by which
he means to control the vision and direct the minds of men towards his
own political ends. Indeed, in raising this promise or threat of
revolution, both Marx's "haunted" Europe and Metternich's "immense
majority" in "repose" are turned into the audience for the politician's
attempt to transform his ideological fictions of revolution, his new and
energizing descriptions of a crisis ridden Europe, into the realities of

the political world. The novelist who enters this political theatre, and who wishes to construct a representation of the political world which is not politically commited, is thus faced with a unique difficulty and a unique temptation: the difficulty of not merely reproducing and adding to the propagandistic myths, fictions and half-truths with which he must inevitably deal; and the temptation to the power of expression and representation which acquiesence to those myths would bring.

Thus when, in the mid 1880's, James came to write _The Princess Casamassima_ (1886), a novel dealing with the revolutionary world of London, he did so against the problematic political background of a world which seemed threatened and dominated by that promise of impending social turmoil: a promise which issued, with equal urgency, from the most reactionary quarters of the political establishments of Europe and from the most revolutionary of their socialist and anarchist opponents. I say "seemed" because, as so many of the critics of his novel have pointed out and as James himself acknowledged, he had no precise information on European political matters and was therefore dependent for his notion of what the revolution was upon the pronunciations of statesmen and revolutionaries and on the journalists and writers who interpreted them. His novel was most directly a response to the myths and political fictions of his age, as they emerged from the twin authorites of the revolution and the state. His problem then, as an artist whose instinctive tendency was to withdraw from the political world, was to construct an imaginative realization of those myths which remained ideologically and formally distinct from their original political meanings and expressed James's own point of view. _The Princess Casamassima_, as artistic political fiction, is therefore James' attempt

to find an individual artistic language in which to represent the revolutionary myths of the public world; and, in the event, a construction of them which reveals the contradictions and difficulties at the heart of the literary engagement with the fictions of political thought.

The extent of the influence that such pronunciations and forecasts of revolution had over James can be gauged by those letters he wrote to his friends and family in the 1880's, in which he describes his impressions of England and takes the prospect of social conflict very seriously indeed. Consider the following reflections, in a letter to Grace Norton of 24-1-85:

> ... there is very little "going on"-- the country is gloomy, anxious, and London reflects the general gloom. Westminster Hall and the Tower were half-blown up two days ago by Irish dynamiters, there is a catastrophe to the little British Force in the Sahara in the air ... and a general sense of rocking ahead in the foreign relations of the country-- combined with an exceeding want of confidence-- indeed a deep disgust-- with the present ministry in regard to such relations. I find such a situation as this extremely interesting and it makes me feel how much I am attached to this absurd country ... The possible *malheurs* ... the "decline", in a word, of old England, go to my heart, and I can imagine no spectacle more touching, more thrilling and even dramatic, than to see this great precarious, artificial empire, on behalf of which, nevertheless, so much of the finest stuff of the greatest race (for such they are) has been expended, struggling with forces which perhaps, in the long run, will prove too much for it. If

only she will struggle, and not collapse and surrender and give up

a part which, looking at Europe as it is today, still may be great,

the drama will be well worth watching from (such) a good, near

standpoint as I have here. [3].

James' imagination of conflict and "collapse" often tends to be greater

than his grasp of the "forces" which will bring it about, and here his

sense of little "going on" is overcome by his visualization of a

forthcoming struggle. Here in fact one has the basic dramatic idea of

The Princess Casamassima in the vision of England "struggling with

forces", the nature of which James does not specify or identify beyond

feelings of "gloom" and visions of imagined and dramatic "spectacles".

Like Marx's "Europe", James' "old England" is a world threatened by

"forces", or haunted by "spectres", which it does not really understand;

or, maybe to be more precise, which James does not have the language to

describe and so figures in terms of those feelings and visions. Consider

another of his letters, this time describing the British ruling class to

Charles Eliot Norton in 1886:

> The condition of that body seems to me to be the same rotten
>
> and collapsible one as that of the French aristocracy before
>
> the revolution-- minus cleverness and conversation; or
>
> perhaps it is more like the heavy, congested, and depraved
>
> Roman world upon which the barbarians came down. In England
>
> the Huns and Vandals will have to come up-- from the black
>
> depths of the (in the people) enormous misery, though I don't
>
> think the attila is quite found (in the person of Mr.Hyndman).
>
> At all events, much of English life is grossly materialistic
>
> and wants bloodletting. [4].

Now, in his search for a language to describe those "forces" which
threaten the "old" world, James reaches back into historical precedents
or myths of other revolutions: into narratives which impose their own
ideological structure on events and seem to give them coherence, but
which ultimately get him no nearer to his subject. Indeed, what is
"going on" in the present is almost totally dissolved and so James can
indulge in his image of "bloodletting" without appearing cynical.

The relevance of these letters to The Princess Casamassima is
n t so much that they confirm James's expectation of a forthcoming social
conflict, but that they provide an example of the way in which he
represents that conflict and are another phase of his search for a way
to describe the political world which became the novel. Thus James, as
an American and as an artist, characteristically imagines himself to be
outside of the political world he observes: to be a fascinated but
detached and private spectator of a conflict in which he is not involved
and cannot describe, except in the most self-conscious of ways. James's
consistent strategy for representing that conflict is therefore, like so
many of the contemporary "anarchist" novels we have been looking at, to
build himself into it as its audience: his fascination for its drama
justified or politically neutralized by his own disengaged, powerless
and self-conscious position as spectator. Consider another letter; this
time a reaction to the aftermath of a violent political riot outside of
his new Piccadilly home in February 1886:

> ... I was at Bournemouth (seeing R.L.St.) the day of the émiente,
>
> and lost the spectacle, to my infinite chagrin. I should have
>
> seen it well form my balcony, as I should have been at home when
>
> it passed, and it smashed the windows in the houses (3 doors from

me) on the corner of Bolton Street and Piccadilly ... The wreck

and ruin in Piccadilly and some other places (I mean of windows)

was, on my return from Bournemouth, sufficiently startling, as

also was the manner in which the carriages of a number of ladies

were stopped, and the occupants hustled, ruffled, or slapped

and kissed, as the case may be, and turned out. The real

unemployed, I believe, had very little share in all this: it

was the work of the great army of roughs and thieves, who

seized, owing to the formidable nature of their opportunity,

a day of license. It is difficult to know whether the real

want of work is now, or not, so very much greater than

usual-- in the face of positive afffirmations and negations;

there is, at any rate, immense destitution. Every one here

is growing poorer-- from causes which, I fear, will continue.[5].

Whilst James displays what is a quite natural curiosity to see such a

dramatic "spectacle", his attitude towards it does at first sight seem

strange. He makes it sound as if the events he had missed were not so

much a serious public disturbance as the latest installment of some

ongoing popular drama at which he should have been a spectator able to

watch, with the air of the fascinated but detached observer, from the

safe distance of his "balcony". Thus the imaginary scenario he

constructs is a situation in which he, James, is looking at "it", the

riot, unable to forget his own social and literary identity. Even the

journalistic mythology, the postulation of a "great army of roughs and

thieves" behind the trouble, falls neatly into James' evocation of a

thoroughly melodramtic social and political world of which he, as an

outsider, is the bemused and powerless witness.

In his novel, of course, James turned this private act of
witness into his literary perspective on the "forces" which threaten
England. Whilst he was obviously free to express his imaginative visions
and vague political fears in his private correspondence, it is clear
that once those imaginings became part of an artistic expression in a
public context, then James felt the need to defend his position and to
deny the political import of his work. In his 1920 preface to the novel,
for example, James makes an explicit point of this:

> My scheme called for the suggested nearness (to all our
>
> apparently ordered life) of some sinister underworld, heaving
>
> in its pain, its power and its hate; a presentation not of
>
> sharp particulars, but of loose appearances, vague motions and
>
> sounds and symptoms, just perceptible presences and general
>
> looming possibilities. [6].

This is high melodrama in the tradition of those novels we have been
looking at in previous chapters. It is also, however, a loosely veiled
apology for the lack of "sharp particulars" in his novel, as he self-
consciously restricts his authorship to "appearances" and "spectres".
James, of course, was also aware of the other literary background
against which his novel would be received: a dominant tradition of
social realist novels which included the European realists like Zola,
with their "scientific objectivity" and "sharp particulars", and the
English social protest novels, with their apparently close knowledge of
working class life and conditions. He was, therefore, concerned to
distinguish his work from both aspects of this tradition and to
establish it as belonging to another genre altogether: to the
melodramatic literature of the city, shot through with the feelings of

isolation, alienation and unknown "possibility". In fact, far from any
kind of objective or omniscient perspective on the world it depicts, The
Princess Casamassima takes an excited imagination working on a lack of
knowledge as the very starting point of all its observations and James
implicitly foregrounds this fact at crucial points throughout the book.

This is clear in, for example, the description of Hyacinth
taking the air outside of the "Sun and Moon" anarchist club, shortly
before he takes his revolutionary "vow":

> The puddles glittered round about and the silent vista of
>
> the street, bordered with low black houses, stretched away in
>
> the wintry drizzle to right and left, losing itself in the
>
> huge tragic city where unmeasured misery lurked beneath the
>
> dirty night, ominously, monstrously still, only howling for
>
> its pain in the heated human cockpit behind him. Ah what could
>
> he do? What opportunity would rise? ... If he had a definite
>
> wish while he stood there it was that that exalted deluded
>
> company should pour itself forth with Muniment at its head
>
> and surge through the sleeping world and gather the myriad
>
> miserable out of their slums and burrows, should roll into
>
> the selfish squares and lift a tremendous hungry voice and
>
> awaken the gorged indifferent to a terror which would bring
>
> them down. (p.249).

It is the city in its psychological dimensions which interests James
most closely. Such is the geography of the city that whatever social
realities it can be said to contain must remain, for the most part,
hidden in the "lost" "silent vistas" of its physical perspectives. Thus
Hyacinth is able to project his agitated anxieties and needs onto the

outward aspect of his city world: his sense of its stillness becomes "monstrous" and "ominous"; the silence of the street gives way to a "howl" of "pain"; and his own misery, his own sense of paralysed alienation and his need of an "opportunity", is transposed into the form of an almost embodied figure of lurking "misery". This itself gives way to the more overt fantasy of Hyacinth's friend Paul Muniment leading an exciting revolutionary scenario: an act of visualization which reproduces James's own invention of this novel which, as he assures us in the preface, "proceeded quite directly, during the first year of a long residence in London, from the habit and exercise of walking the streets" (p 33). Indeed, he describes how "The history of little Hyacinth Robinson, ... sprang up for me out of the London pavement" (p.34). For James then, on his lonely walks, the city was a theatre of fantasy and Hyacinth is the correlative of his author here as he imaginatively projects his internal hopes and fears into an external fictional narrative (the "vow" is, of course, the equivalent of James's commitment to verbal constructions of his own).

The prospect of the revolution, then, becomes itself a product of fiction to James: in terms of his character's political understanding, of his own self-conscious fictional engagement with its dramatic appeal and power, and, by implication, in his denial of the capacity of a realist technique to describe it. The realist novel is based, of course, on the idea of the precise documentation of phenomena in language which is an objective representation of the world. As Zola famously argued, "the goal of the experimental method ... is to study phenomena in order to control them" [7]; by which he meant that the language of realist fiction is a language of power authorized by the

assumption or claim of a direct connection between the word and the world: between the writer's description and the thing described. James's imaginative constructions of "loose appearances", however, clearly belong to a dimension of political reality and a theory of language in which there is no such necessary or desired connection between the word and the world: since those "possibilities" are no more than an individual construction of, or submission to, the authority of those myths of revolution which seemed to dominate the public world he observed. James then, through his protagonist, is the recipient and "reverberator", but not the author, of the set of myths and fictions which represent the political world of his revolutionary London.

In fact _The Princess Casamassima_, again as so many critics have pointed out and as he himself acknowledges in the preface, represents a new departure for James in his attempt to represent the world: an abandonment of omniscient narration for the new technique of the central recording consciousness, which displaces narrative authority and excuses the author from the responsibility to provide a direct and final interpretation of the world he presents. James's use of this new technique of spectatorship to embody his vision of the forthcoming social crisis becomes an implicit formulation of the inadequacy of the realist novel, and of the linguistic theories of "scientific" representation which underlie it, to the type of political phenomena he wishes to describe. Thus his "sense" of the rising revolutionary forces in society becomes even more unknowing, detached and almost spectral as put into the mind of his confused and divided hero, his central recording consciousness, "little Hyacinth Robinson":

...-- the sense, vividly kindled and never quenched, that the

forces secretly arrayed against the present social order were

pervasive and universal, in the air one breathed, in the

ground one trod, in the hand of an acquaintance that one might

touch or in the eye of a stranger that might rest for a moment

on one's own. They were above, below, within, without, in every

contact and combination of life; and it was no disproof of them

to say it was too odd they should lurk in a particular

improbable form. To lurk in improbable forms was precisely their

strength and they would doubtless have still queerer features

to show ... (p.37).

Hyacinth's almost schizophrenic vision discloses the contradictions at

the heart of James' literary engagement with the "forces" of the

revolution, which he renders as simultaneously invisible and

omnipresent. Once again those "forces" are imaginatively conceived as a

ghostly presence "lurking" beneath the visible surface of society and,

as such, the perfect material for the melodramatist's novels and the

ideologue's myths, but not for the realist's documentation of "things as

they are". These "forces" are, in the world of James' novel, both a

fantasy and a potentially unlimited power. James, in a sense, wants it

both ways: he wants to evoke, or express, his own "sense" of social

crisis at the same time as he wishes to disclaim responsibility for

adding to the crisis in doing so; he wishes to experience the drama of

crisis, and at the same time to withdraw from that drama as no more than

the product of fiction with no larger political effect. These

reflections, for example, are presented to us through the heavily ironic

veil which James uses to distance himself from Hyacinth Robinson: the

point that is registered is that such things as "secret" revolutionary

"forces" can exist only in the imagination of the perceiver and that the belief in them, like any other political or cultural phenomenon, is what constitutes their only reality. "... among the disinherited there's a mystic language which dispenses with proofs" promises Hyacinth's revolutionary friend, Eustace Poupin, "a freemasonry, a reciprocal divination; they understand each other at half a word" (p.246). James uses Hyacinth's solipsistic tendency and submission to such a language to shift the responsibility for the authorship of those "forces", the construct of the crisis vision with which he sees "every contact and combination of life", to the imagined authors of the revolution by whom Hyacinth is influenced and directed: in the novel to the shadowy revolutionary Hoffendahl, described as the "great maestro" (p.362) of the revolution, and in life to the socialists and anarchists James could have read about in any newspaper or journal.

The consciousness that James is formulating in the novel is, then, his own "sense" of the complexities and contradictions involved in the writing of political fiction within the social context of an "old Europe" which seemed "haunted" and doomed to collapse. James's difficulty, projected into his "little" hero, is that he did not have any knowledge of revolutionary activities, nor grasp of scientific or "realistic" language, to abate his fear of what the revolution was; and so he could not provide any kind of a positive vision of what was happening in the world outside of his own social circles to counterbalence his sense of impending turmoil. His novel becomes a fiction which is only a fiction, a personal Jamesian language, with no external reference in the world; and his vision of the "forces secretly arrayed against the present social order" turns into a form of cultural

despair, with no boundaries other than those of his own frightened imagination.

The Princess Casamassima, like the other novels in this tradition which claim to be about the revolution, thus becomes the search for some kind of certainty and substance for what James suspects "goes on" (his own self-consciously vague phrase used continually in the preface) beneath the surface of society: the search for a plot or narrative to give formal shape, expression, and hence a "sense" of reality to that general public ignorance and fear of the "looming possibilities" that are the revolution. It becomes, in fact, James's search for his own personal political and social boundaries constructed in narrative form.

And he need not have looked too far into, what he calls, the "depths" of London life to get the "impression" that the revolution was a hidden force in preparation and only waiting for the right moment before it before it "awoke" [8]. He could have gathered that much from any of the newspapers and periodicals of the time. He could have gathered it, for instance, from the pages of The Contemporary Review in which Elisée Reclus threatened and thrilled his audience with the revelation of "a London accursed" and "horrors" which "we socialists look ... full in the face" but which lie beyond the reader's presumed middle-class purview. The assumption is that "socialism" begins with the ability or willingness to distrust the "outwardly well-ordered" aspect of society and to seek out what lies below or beyond it. The excerpts from James are, therefore, a sophisticated joke and parody of the type of "revelatory" rhetoric at which Reclus excels and an almost paranoid construction of it. Reclus is making the *factual* point that there exists

an unseen or ignored misery and horror beneath the surface of London life. James was expressing what was, for the uninformed but curious reader of _The Contemporary Review_, the _imagined_ consequences of that misery and horror: that the "apparently ordered life" of the middle-class gentleman was, as the phrase suggests, a sham based on fantasy, callous ignorance, and the careful control of information by a repressive state. The public world, beyond the domestic "world" of the gentleman, was a realm of melodramatic "possibilities" just waiting to e discovered and so James, again in his preface, poses the question which lies at the heart of his novel:

> ... what would be the effect of ... having so many precious things perpetually in one's eyes, yet of missing them all for any closer knowledge, and of the confinement of closer knowledge entirely to matters with which a connection, however intimate, couldn't possibly pass for a privilege? Truely, of course, there are London mysteries (dense categories of dark arcana) for every spectator, and it's in a degree an exclusion and a state of weakness to be without experience of the meaner conditions, the lower manners and types, the general sordid struggle, the weight of the burden of labour, the ignorance, the misery and the vice. With such matters as those my tormented young man would have contact-- they would have formed, fundamentally, from the first, his natural and immediate London. But the reward of a romantic curiosity would be the question of what the total assault, that of the world of his workaday life and the world of his divination and his envy together, would have made of him, and what in especial he would have made of them. As tormented, I say, I thought of him, ...

(p.39).

The point is that James's vision of the world of "the ignorance, the misery and the vice" is as much of a fantasy as his "little bookbinder's" vision of the "precious things" which he supposes make up the "mysterious" aristocratic world which fascinates him. James is, in fact, engaging in an elaborate form of imaginative transference here: change some of the terms and one has the difficulty and the "weakness" which James confronted in trying to "make" something of the revolution; and his protagonist is endowed with all the doubt, the ignorance and the curiosity from which James himself suffered, only from the reverse social angle. Thus his Hyacinth Robinson, his child of the slums and "*ab ovo* a revolutionist" (p.115), becomes an interloper between two worlds and gains a footing in the world that James himself really did know: the "outwardly well-ordered" circles of London society. This allows James the ironic distance to debunk his illusions, expose his vanity, and reveal his political ideas as solipsistic fantasy, without having to actually confront the concealed "misery" and "horror" of the social conditions his ideas "represent".

Hyacinth's aestheticism becomes the means by which James saves himself from having to lie in his representation of the revolutionary proletariat of London and a heavy ironic treatment of his hero becomes the means by which James examines his own tendency to fantasize and project his own fears and anxieties into narrative forms. Hyacinth Robinson's construction of imaginary narratives concerning what "goes on" in aristocratic salons is thus a reversed correlative of James's story of what "goes on" in the revolutionary world. Both are effectively debunked as total fiction.

James's irony however, his sophisticated and somewhat corrosive jokiness at Hyacinth's expense, becomes in his novel a kind of double-edged sword which, on one level, paradoxically brings him closer to a direct vision of the darker, more subversive truths which lie below the surface of things. The Princess Casamassima presents us with a world composed of a web of verbal inventions spun by characters who are finally the victims of those fictions; just as Hyacinth becomes the victim of the vast terrorist conspiracy of which he believes he is a part. Consider where this network of fictions left James: confronting a world where all order, including social order, is a sham and pretence designed to hide the unpleasant truth; in a world, basically, of anarchy overlain with delusions of order. And James was not, at times, averse to expressing this anarchistic strain in his thought more directly:

> Well that's one way of living-- treating life as not "all"
>
> solitude and syntax-- that has much to be said for it. But I
>
> have the imagination of disaster-- and see life as ferocious
>
> and sinister. [9].

Here, in a letter written some years after The Princess Casamassima was published, James makes explicit the avoided and unspoken implications of his novel. The vision of life as fundamentally "ferocious and sinister", driven by the belief that all our nobler instincts and passions are "all" and only "syntax", is a particular temptation of the verbally orientated or of the professional wordsmith conscious of the nature of the material of his work and its seperation from himself. But it is also a symptom of a cynical and potentially anarchistic, even if not exactly revolutionary, cultural despair: a despair to the temptation to deny all order as purchased at too high a cost because all order and systems are

merely the rationalizations over and disguise of the miseries and injustices that the social system produces. For James, in this phase of this thought and perhaps under the influence of his friend Henry Brewster, words and fictions are the only thing which give life meaning and save the individual from "solitude"; yet words are also only "syntax", which is an artificial medium serving to connect our direct sensual experiences into a coherent and formal narrative or plot. Again to put an anarchist slant upon it, the meaning that they give to life is therefore only obtained at the cost of the misery and injustice they license, by allowing man to live outside of the moment and in the artificial power structures they create. All large social meanings and purposes are, therefore, merely the fictional substitutes for that true individual meaning based upon the life in the moment and the direct vision of the truth. For James, man in his political character, his social identity, is as much of a formal construction as the characters within a novel who are defined by its plot; and, as such, a purely linguistic and hence fictional artefact. James's ironic distance has, on a purely abstract level, its logical conclusion in an anarchistic detachment from the political world.

It is here that one encounters the whole range of conceptual complexities and contradictions which face the writer of political fiction. The honest writer like James, caught in the conflict between the values of art and those of life, between truth and necessity, between detachment and commitment, tends to withdraw to an ivory tower of art; a movement which itself implies a despair with the social and political process. This implicit anarchistic perception is the source of the opposition between art and politics which, as so many critics have

pointed out, runs through James' novel. Politics and art are equally and similarly a linguistic response to the chaos of our direct experience; with the difference that political language serves to connect the events of the public world into the plots and stories of conspiracies which give them coherence and form, whereas art does the same for our private world. James himself, in the form of Hyacinth's suicide, comes down on the side of art as a way of life and that is hardly surprising; not simply because James was himself an artist and despaired of the public world, but because the outcome of that despair was a view of all human relationships as inescapably problematic and always potentially "sinister": as following the pattern of the essentially political personal relationships he presents to us in his novel. His commitment is finally to words and fiction as a value in themselves: to what Conrad would have called the "saving illusions" of individual life and work.

I have dwelt upon James because his dilemma in confronting his own ignorance and fear of the revolution is a complex version of that faced by many other of the novelists in this tradition. James mediates his glimpses of "the misery and the vice" of London life by regarding them only within the narrative context of a vast terrorist conspiracy against the "present order": a narrative which thrills and terrifies by its threat of revolution, yet which nevertheless defuses their "ferocious" impact by making them seem comprehensible and so controllable. A threat which is part of a conspiracy, a social and conventional intention, is understandable and so less terrifying than a pure unmotivated threat; a truth appreciated, perhaps most clearly in the fiction of that time, by Conrad's Vladimir in The Secret Agent. And thus, for James, plot is itself a means of controlling the fear of

anarchy and his novel is a highly self-conscious effort of control. It is as if the very act of telling the story of the revolution was an expression of authority over it; as if words themselves were a means of power

This, then, is the purpose of the tradition of popular fiction I have examined in the following sections of this chapter. Their purpose can be seen as an attempt to find a boundary to that potentially anarchistic cultural despair engendered by the suspicion the "below the London of fashion is a London accursed". The final point of all this is, of course, that all this is an anarchistic analysis: that the perception James reaches through the practise of his art, a kind of disillusioned conservatism and commitment to art as art, is in many respects the outcome of an anarchistic rejection of politics.

<p align="center">*</p>

Notes:

1. Karl Marx and Frederich Engels <u>The Communist Manifesto</u> ed. A.J.P. Taylor (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1964), p 51.

2. Cited by Stuart Millar in <u>Modern European History</u> (London: Macmillan, 1980), p.53.

3. <u>The Letters of Henry James</u> 2 Vol., ed. Percy Lubbock (London: Macmillan, 1920), vol.1, p.114. (Hereafter, <u>Lubbock</u>).

4. <u>Lubbock</u> vol.1, p.125.

5. <u>Lubbock</u> vol.1, p.121.

6. <u>The Princess Casamassima</u> (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.44-45.

   (All further references are to this edition).

7. "The Experimental Novel", in <u>Documents of Modern Literary Realism</u>

   ed. George J. Becker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963),

   p.168.

8. It is, of course, with this sort of imaginative and poetic language

   that Hyacinth attempts to transform the world into an image of his

   own desire, as he does the clientele of the "Sun and Moon":

   When the gathering at the "Sun and Moon" was at its best, its

   temper really seemed an earnest of what was the basis of all its

   calculations-- that the people was only a sleeping lion, already

   breathing shorter and beginning to stretch its limbs and stiffen

   its claws-- at these hours, some of the thrilling enough, Hyacinth

   waited for the voice that should alot him the particular part he

   was to play. (p.246).

   Hyacinth is a character apparently in search of an author.

9. From a letter to A.C.Benson cited by Taylor-Stoehe in <u>Words and Deeds</u>

   (New York: A.M.S. Press Inc, 1986), p.114.

PART THREE:

Conrad and Anarchism.

"Great Revolutions are not achieved by the unleashing of
evil passions ... I do not believe in the seriousness of
men who prefer crude force and destruction to development
and arriving at settlements ... One must open men's eyes,
not tear them out."   Alexander Herzen:
                          "To an Old Comrade" [1].

Notes:

1. <u>Selected Philosophical Works</u> trans. L. Nazarov (Moscow: Foreign
   Language Publication House, 1956), p.592-3.

Chapter Seven:

Conrad and Anarchist Theories of Language.

> "..there is no libretto. If history followed a set
> libretto it would lose all interest, become
> unnecessary, boring, ludicrous ... great men would
> be so many heroes strutting on a stage ... History
> is all improvisation, all will, all extempore--
> there are no frontiers, no itineraries."
>   A. Herzen. "From the Other Shore" [1].

"Where's the man to stop the crashing avalanche?", wondered a young and histrionically apocalyptic Conrad in a letter to a Polish friend, of 19 December 1885. He continued:

Where's the man to stop the rush of social-democratic ideas?

The opportunity and the day have come and gone. Believe me:

gone for ever! For the sun is set and the last barrier removed.

England was the only barrier to the pressure of infernal

doctrines born in continental back-slums. Now, there is

nothing! The destiny of this nation and of all nations is

to be accomplished in darkness amidst much weeping and gnashing

of teeth, to pass through robbery, equality, anarchy and misery

under the iron rule of militarism, despotism! Such is the lesson

of common sense logic ... Socialism must inevitably end in

Caesarism. [2].

Conrad, one could say, became a master of the "right word and the right

accent" in his later fiction, but this is certainly not one of his easier

formulations to swallow. His point is overstated and the identification of

"equality" with "robbery, ... anarchy, and misery" is at first sight both

highly offensive and strangely reminiscent of Razumov at the point of his

"conversion" to the doctrine of "autocracy": to the belief in "a man—

strong and one" [3]. The tone is almost hysterical and a mocking parody of

the type of language and ideas which he was later to dramatize in earnest in

his two major works of political fiction set amidst the world of revolution,

The Secret Agent (1907) and Under Western Eyes (1911). In fact, taken in

i olation, this statement as a whole provides excellent ammunition for those

who would see Conrad as either a reactionary conservative or as an outright

cynic. However, my aim here is to rescue Conrad from this charge by relating

the central point of this statement, that "Socialism must inevitably end in

Caes rism", to the type of political discourse against which he was

reacting, and to the perceptions which arose specifically from his practice

as a literary artist. It is at once an attempt to defend Conrad; to argue

that the form that his political thought assumed was shaped more by the fact

that he was an artist than by the type of prejudices he seems to display in

the above letter; and thereby to set the terms for a more detailed

discussion of his fictional engagement with revolutionary politics in later

chapters.

Indeed Conrad's world-view did not reject the socialist or

revolutionary democratic position so much as embrace or frame it within the

wider context of an ironic and tragic outlook: a form of vision more

appropriate to artistic than political expression, and one that is not

easily defined in terms of conventional ideological commitments or

allegiances. Certainly the anarchistic socialism of his time, that combination of positive idealism and negative fury as propounded by well known anarchists like Kropotkin or Bakunin, was something to which he partially responded and perhaps it is most accurate to say that it was Conrad's tragedy that he lived in a world where idealism seemed "inevitably" shadowed and debased by that fury which is its reverse side: where "equality" becomes the sanction of its moral opposite, "robbery ... anarchy, and misery". As the narrator of Under Western Eyes reflects, in one of Conrad's profoundest insights:

> ... a train of thought is never false. The falsehood lies deep
> within the necessities of existence, in secret fears and half-
> formed ambitions, in the secret confidence combined with a secret
> mistrust of ourselves, in the love of hope and the dread of
> uncertain days." (p.32).

"Theories are not to be looked upon as dogma but as guides to action" [4], said Mao Tse-Tung in a formulation which implicitly challenges the realism or literalism of political language. Conrad is making a similar point in the sense that the point of reference of a "train of thought", a "theory" like "autocracy" or "socialism", lies not outside of the individual thinker in some kind of objective reality that the theory describes, but within him as an expression of his needs and motivations. Thus "socialism", like any abstract system of thought in Conrad's view, is "never false" because it gives voice to the "secret" impulses and necessities of the human temperament: it shadows them forth and gives them a formal symbolic expression. The "falsehood" lies deeper than the "thought": not in what

conscious thought expresses, but in the "secret" and "half-formed" passions

that it leaves unstated but nevertheless brings with it. This is the heart

of Conrad's conservatism and of his opposition to "socialism" and to any

rigid ideological position: a fearful opposition, not to the attractive

idealism that it expresses, but to the unknown that lurks behind it:

> Everybody shows a respectful deference to certain sounds that
>
> he and his fellows can make. But about feelings people really
>
> know nothing. We talk with indignation or enthusiasm; we talk
>
> about oppression, cruelty, crime, devotion, self-sacrifice,
>
> virtue and we know nothing real beyond the words. [5].

It is the conservatism of the professional worker in words, conscious of the

limitations placed upon human thought (and hence its authority to govern our

lives) by the language in which it realizes itself: by the fact that words

give intellectual form and reality to feelings but are always inadequate to

them or unable to contain the complex combinations, the "irreconcilable

antagonisms" [6], that are the very essence of feelings. It is also, of

course, the conservatism of the imaginative artist concerned to challenge

the hold of realism over our minds: the hold of that tendency to literalize

belief or to translate the imaginative visions of philosophical and

political theories into empirical and hence authoritative statements about

the world in which we actually live. And so "Socialism must inevitably end

in Caeserism" because the language in which it discovers itself, the

imaginative and idealistic language of concepts like "equality", can come to

tyrannize over our existence by implicitly claiming a status and authority

it does not rightfully possess: by eliciting that "respectful deference to

certain sounds" that a misunderstanding of how language operates engenders in us. "Socialism", like any other totalizing theory, expresses only the positive and acceptable aspects of the "real" complex of motivations which lie "beyond the words" and thereby licenses the "secret" "robbery" and fury, the exploitative behavior of man, which it rationalizes out of our conscious existence.

This understanding of the inadequacy of language to our experience is one of the mainstays of Conrad's tragic vision, of his suspicion of politics, and of his concomitant view of human identity as unavoidably split between radically antagonistic needs and desires. This receives, of course, its ultimate expression in the figure of Razumov whose "conversion" to the doctrine of "autocracy" alienates him from a rational grasp of language and leaves him asking the question "How can you tell the truth from lies? ... The colour of the ink and the shapes of the letters are the same" (p.160): the ideological language which allowed him to fulfill one of the "necessities" of his existence, the need for stability and the "love of hope", inevitably licenses his betrayal of another, the "respect and natural love" (p.16) of other men. Indeed, as his question implies, he is driven to seek "the truth" of his existence, not in the world in which he lives, but purely in the words he uses in a linguistic isolation from his fellow man. Ironically he is left only with his written journal, words, at the same time that he is brought into full confrontation with the complex of antagonisms "beyond the words". The nature of his actions, the status of his thought, and hence his whole identity, are placed in a violent doubt which he has no way of resolving.

This point about language is, as I have said, absolutely central here. In Conrad's world, words are the only thing which offer any resolution to the "falsehoods" within the "necessities of existence" but they do so only at the cost of blinding self-deception about the nature of life and of words themselves; since man's thinking represents to him only the ideal or acceptable side of his actions and leaves the reverse side unsaid until it is forced upon him. It is as if each word that we use carries more meaning than we realize or that it always implies the presence of its antithesis: that Razumov's "loyalty" to Russia inevitably implies the "betrayal" of something else. Conrad provides us with a tragic view of man as desperately clinging to the power of words in order to give his life form and purpose, but at the same time neurotically resisting awareness of the instability and ambiguity of those same words. Our conscious life itself is a product of the words which give it form and of course Conrad, as an artist who dealt with words professionally, was particularly sensitive to the proper use of language and particularly aware of its limitations:

> Words, groups of words, words standing alone, are symbols of
>
> life, have the power in their sound or in their aspect to
>
> present the very thing you wish to hold up before the mental
>
> vision of your readers. The things "as they are" exist in words:
>
> therefore words should be handled with care lest the picture,
>
> the image of truth abiding in facts, should become distorted-- or
>
> blurred [7].

Language should be "handled with care" and understood for what it is: a fragile, symbolic and formal medium which is that one of the conditions of

human existence which gives us access to "truth" and consciousness, but not

the power of control over the other conditions which define our existence.

This is the basis of Conrad's view of "socialism" as an arrogant and

potentiallly tyrannical mode of power discourse which presents only the

ideal side of an action and thereby masks the darker "secret" motives which

also exist "in facts". It ends in chaos and "anarchy", Conrad believed,

because it destroys the true representative power of language: the very

thing which gives form to our existence.

Ironically this analysis of language is, in one sense, very

close to the revolutionary position which Conrad seems to deny. The

revolutionary socialist or anarchist came across very much the same

linguistic questions and difficulties, though from the opposite angle of one

who tries to shake up the inertia of a social system "shrouded" in the

superstition of words. Both Conrad and the anarchist were, for different

reasons, engaged with the effort to communicate a vision of life as

different from or more complex than that which can be elaborated by a

language which was purely representational in its working. Both needed to

attack the political language of their time, to construct a theory of

language as expression rather than representation, and to engage in types of

fiction in order to do so. In the next sections, therefore, I will pursue

this idea by comparing Conrad's major concerns with the way the same

questions presented themselves to the revolutionary world contemporary with

him.

Of course the very fundamental principles of Conrad's view of language, politics and the "necessities of existence" emerge from a consistent and definable view of the nature of human life itself which runs throughout all of his work. Conrad himself defined this succinctly in 1913:

> ... the fact is ... that I don't believe in the oneness of life.
> I believe in its infinite variety. And if you tell me that I
> am a shallow person thinking of forms and not of essence, I
> will tell you that this is all we have got to hold on to—
> that form is the artist's (and the scientist's) province, that
> it is all we can understand (and interpret and represent) and
> that we can't tell what is behind [8].

For Conrad life was a fluid, ever changing phenomenon, the "essence" of which it is not possible to capture or to directly "represent", but only to behold, as it were, at one remove: in the "forms" which language imposes upon it. Words never do justice to the "infinite variety" of life but, at the same time, are the very things which make it tolerable by creating the "necessary fiction" of an ordered and coherent existence. And of course "form" itself is "a train of thought", an interpretation or representation of life which pretends that it is a "oneness". Therefore "form", and the man who is its product, are ideological to the core of their very nature and purpose.

It is in this sense, of course, that words are themselves
inherently ideological as that term was defined much later by the French
existentialist Louis Althusser:

Ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship

of individuals to their real conditions of existence [9].

Like art, ideology is a purely fantastic formal construct. Ideology seems to
reconcile the contradictions inherent in existence in that it provides a
material manifestation of, and therefore an empowering sense of coherent
reality to, the "secret fears and half-formed ambitions" of the human mind.
As the narrator of The Secret Agent comments: "The way of even the most
justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into
creeds" [10]. And it is in this sense of ideology that Althusser goes on to
argue that "ideology" is less a set of ideas than a collection of images,
through which the individual sees or experiences his relation to his
situation before he thinks about it. An ideology re-enacts the movements of
the temperament or mind in terms of words which are image-concepts and which
are a reflection, in an artificial medium, of the feelings which are "real
beyond the words".

The similarities between Conrad's and Althusser's thinking
serves, not as any indication of any special sympathy between them, but as a
base from which we can begin to define Conrad's essential and principled
non-ideological political stance. Ideology is "imaginary" for Althusser and
for Conrad, not because it is in any sense untrue or unreal, but because it
gives the consciousness a set of images in which it discovers itself and
satisfies its need for coherence. Ideology imaginatively reconstructs the

real situation in terms of images that evoke or contain the feelings and responses of the self in relation to its environment. The important point is that it is therefore, like art, composed of language which is not directly representational in its working. Unlike art, however, the empowerment that ideology confers on the individual is not that purely formal and imaginative grasp of the "truth abiding in facts", but a much more ambiguous and potentially sinister fantasy that one can translate one's imaginative grasp of "truth" into "facts". Ideology, in distinction to art, encourages the belief that the language of which it is composed is literal and direct in its reference. Consider for example Razumov's "confession of faith":

> History not theory.
>
> Patriotism not internationalism.
>
> Evolution not revolution.
>
> Direction not destruction.
>
> Unity not disruption. (p.59).

None of these formulae "represent" anything concrete outside of the mind of Razumov, but they give acceptable form to the act of betrayal he has just performed and express in abstract the needs which motivated it. They rationalize, and seem to "realize", after the event beliefs he in fact came by irrationally and as a result of his own fears. Knowledge is avoided because it threatens pain, and ideology is the agent of that avoidance by its distorting or "blurring" use of language.

Thus it is in precisely the Althusserian sense of ideology as empowering fantasy that Conrad, as a man and especially as a writer, strove to be totally non-ideological in his thought. He was an artist and any idea

Of the acceptability of ideological thought, the notion that we can allow our social and political lives to be dominated by fictional constructions, was to him both dangerous and immoral. It was dangerous because it seemed to give the sanction of artistic license to the most outrageous statements a politician could make and it seemed to absolve man from the responsibility of telling the truth directly. It was immoral because, in the name of representing the "real conditions of existence", what it really did was to delude men as to the real nature and necessities of those conditions. This kind of linguistic theory is acceptable for fiction, but for politics it is disastrous and leads only to a babel-like anarchy and fantasy in public life. Revolutionary political ideology then, for Conrad, held no more than a mythic false promise, as he made clear in "A Familiar Preface" to A Personal Record (1911):

> The revolutionary spirit is mightily convenient in this, that it
>
> frees one from any scruple as regards ideas. Its hard absolute
>
> idealism is repulsive to my mind by the menace of fanaticism it
>
> contains. No doubt one should smile at these things; but ...
>
> all claim to special righteousness awakens in me that scorn and
>
> anger from which a philosophical mind should be free. [11].

Ideology feeds on vanity, "the mother of all noble and vile illusions" [12], and leads ultimately only to isolation and solipsistic fantasy. Thus the imaginary language of politics must not be confused with the "factual" language of art. Art, on the contrary, speaks with the voice of "scepticism," "the tonic of minds, the agent of truth-- the way of art and salvation" [13]. For Conrad, only art could present the "irreconcilable

antagonisms" inherent in the human condition without flattering vanity or reducing hope. Only art was adequate to what ordinary language could not capture: the "infinite variety" of life.

So it is that one can begin to perceive a common ground within the concerns and conditions which most directly confront the revolutionary political activist and those which Conrad faced in his fiction: concerns which themselves were an expression of the deep similarity of their position in relation to society. The revolutionary man is, like the artist, possessed of a vision of the world which isolates him from the mainstream of humanity. He is, if his translation of that vision into work is to be effective, thereby forced to find a means of re-engagement with society: a way out of alienation which inevitably forces him to become acutely self-conscious about the material of that engagement, whether it be words or actions. And this is, of course, a problem which Conrad himself explored relentlessly in his fiction through characters who find themselves in a similar isolated position. Jim is condemned and, he thinks, misunderstood by his society. Razumov is obliged to incarnate and live through all the contradictions of his society in loneliness and terror. The list is long: protagonists forced, by a combination of circumstance and character, to step out of the community and conventions of the society in which they live and so to become conscious of the purely formal nature of the social reality which binds men together. At the heart of their anguish is the urgently felt need to seek a new basis of commitment and communication with their fellow man since, as the narrator of <u>Under Western Eyes</u> reminds us, "No human being could bear a steady view of moral solitude without going mad" (p.37).

Indeed one could take one step further back and look at Conrad himself who famously experienced "three lives": that of a Pole from a revolutionary background, that of a seaman in the British merchant marine, and finally that of a British citizen writing fiction in English. Such radical cultural and professional changes surely led to a deep-rooted sense of detachment from those conventions and forms which structure and support the human identity within society. Consider, for example, this confession in a letter to Edward Garnett:

> My misfortune is that I can't swallow any formula and am thus
>
> wearing the aspect of enemy to all mankind [14].

He was not really a part of Poland any longer, nor of England, in the sense of being absorbed by its social-ideological systems and so his art was the attempt to communicate with "all mankind" on a new basis which avoids conventional social and political "formulae" of allegiance. This itself naturally raises some very fundamental problems and questions about the status and function of Conrad's art and its relationship to more overtly political forms of communication. If fiction is a communication-- and what else could it be?-- some searching questions follow as to what it is that distinguishes it from the political discourse to which it claims to form an alternative? Indeed, what sort of communication is it?, what sort of information does it convey?, and if the writer claims, as Conrad did, to be able to communicate "truth", or to be in a position to take a point of view on life, then is not that position or that "truth" itself a political stance? In other words, one asks a similar set of questions about the

political status of the literary vision as one does about the literary status of the political vision.

Conrad was deeply engaged with these problems and they are amongst the things which make his investigation of the problems of the outsider so intense. Being a novelist and being possessed of a tragic vision, he was not in the business of providing any answers but simply in the investigation of the questions. It is, nevertheless, rewarding to compare his analysis with some of the answers provided by more politically committed thinkers contemporary with him, because he was obviously to some extent reacting to them and implicitly subjecting them to searching criticism.

Before I go any further it is important to clarify this point of the identification of the artist, the writer of literary fictions, and the politician, the creator of political fictions. Apparently they are both placed outside of their society by the possession of alternative visions of reality. It is a connection with long traditions amongst the anarchists themselves. Herbert Read in our own time has been a great exponent of the idea of the anarchist as a romantic rebel fighting for beauty and truth in an aesthetically debased world. In Conrad's own time there were figures like Georges Sorel offering theories of political mythology consisting of visions, images and fictions to be verified by their practical effects. There was also Bakunin who went further and, like Conrad, reduced all belief to the status of fiction:

The first lie is god; the second lie is the idea of right.

And when you have freed your mind from the fear of a god

and that childish respect for the fiction of right, then

all the remaining chains, property, marriage, science,

civilisation, justice will snap asunder. Our first work

must be the destruction of everything as it now exists. [15].

Bakunin, in full rhetorical flight, fully confirms Conrad's identification

of verbal ideals like "equality" or freedom with the chaos and anarchy that

lie beyond them. But, as we have seen in previous chapters, Bakunin's target

was precisely those "forms" that were, for Conrad, all we have. Thus the

s lution to the lying "fictions" that were the basis of the modern state

was, for Bakunin, the practice of propaganda by the deed: terrorism, the

eloquence of action, was for him the answer to the problem of communicating

a vision of "truth" and a new political language. That this was seeing

himself as some kind of artist-in-reality, using people and action as the

material of his expression, was registered by many observers; notably Henry

James in his "mysterious Hoffendahl" character from _The Princess_

Cassamassima (1886), who is described as "The great maestro" and his victim

("little Hyacinth Robinson" who has vowed his life to him) as "a small part

in the composition" [16]. Bakunin, of course, also makes an appearance in

Conrad as part of the inspiration for Peter Ivanovitch, as well as the

background to the Professor's renuncation of words in favour of the language

of direct action and "the perfect detonator". Conrad's response to such

ideas is implicit in the overriding image of the Professor's dissolution

into a meaningless and barely maintained self-deception:

Lost in the crowd, miserable and undersized, he meditated

confidently on his power, keeping his hand in the left

pocket of his trousers, grasping lightly the india rubber

ball, the supreme guarantee of his sinister freedom, but after

a while he became disagreeably affected by the sight of the

roadway thronged with vehicles ... That was the form of doubt

he feared most. Impervious to fear! ... He had such moments

of dreadful and sane mistrust in mankind. What if nothing

could move them? Such moments come to all men whose

ambitions aim at a direct grasp upon humanity- to artists,

politicians, reformers or saints. A despicable emotional

state that, against which solitude fortifies a superior

character ... [17].

Conrad partly endorses Bakunin: politics is purely a matter of words and

only words, and pure action of a destructive nature with no interpretative

verbal structure around it is a negation of the system. But, and this is the

important point, such action is like all forms of revolutionary political

language: expression which refuses to engage with the actual and "real"

conditions in which men live, and therefore fails to be a language of any

validity. It means and will achieve nothing and is no kind of an engagement

with society since the very thing that it destroys, "form", is the only

possible medium of communication. Conrad knew of the presence in London of

Stepniak, the Russian nihilist turned novelist, and he may have been a more

direct source of inspiration for the Professor.

So the idea that the revolutionary was some kind of artist in

action was rejected by Conrad as dangerous nonsense, just as it was by other

literary figures. All the rhetoric, of revolutionary as artist, came from

the other side, from the anarchists themselves. Yet if pure action is a-

political, and politics is a matter of words-- of form-- then the question

remains of how one defines the difference between political ideology and

artistic political fiction. Both, apparently, are constructions of words and

both describe a reality which does not exist outside of the mind of the

speaker or the words used to describe it. The correlation between the artist

and the political demagogue holds on one level: each is expressing an

alternative and personal vision of the world which the rest of mankind can

either accept or ignore, and in both cases the means of expression are

identical to what is expressed: words and only words. Perhaps this is why

the anarchists were so sensitive to the power and status of language; why

they analysed it almost obsessively, always iconoclastically, and forever

sensitive to its limitations.

Consider, for example, Bakunin again:

The general idea is always an abstraction and for that very

reason in some sense a negation of real life ... Human thought

and, in consequence of that, science can only grasp and name

the general significance of real facts, their relations, their

laws-- in short that which is permanent in their continual

transformations-- but never their material, individual life,

palpitating, so to speak, with reality and life, and there

fore fugitive and intangible. Science comprehends the thought

of life, not life ... In this respect it is vastly inferior to

art which incarnates life in an artifice of its own, in forms

which, if not living in the sense of real life, none the less

excite in our imagination the memory and sentiment of life [18].

It is easy to recognize Conrad's conceptions of life and language in what
Bakunin is saying, as well as the idea that art appeals firstly to the
senses: language, words, cannot describe "real facts" and the relations
between those facts and others at the same time. Language is a social
construct which always presents a fiction to some extent because it can only
describe one of the antagonistic terms of reality, the individual and the
social, the real and the general, which together form the truth. The
"falsehood" lies beyond language: in what it implies or leaves unsaid. This
view of language as imposing general categories and conceptual classes upon
experience, and thereby falsifying it, is both an element of the Conradian
world-view and a central perception of anarchist theory. It is part of the
explanation of why the anarchists were so keen to make the connection
between their rhetoric and the language of art. Art seemed to provide a
means of communication which was more plastic and pliable, and therefore
more powerful and expressive, than the language which was the result of and,
as Conrad pointed out in _The Secret Agent_, one of the mainstays of the
current political establishment. Bakunin's discourse always tended towards
or merged itself into exhortation rather than explanation, expression rather
than representation; and, as we have seen, anarchism as a movement veered
toward a theory of language as more than purely referential or
representational in its functioning. They were elaborating a vision, a
product of their imagination, which had no substance in existent social or
political reality in much the same way that figures in a book of fiction
have no counterpart in reality, but nevertheless are claimed by their

creator to be vehicles of truth. So the question remains of what is the difference between political and literary fictions and the type of truth they contain.

Again as we have seen in earlier chapters, Conrad was very keen to make clear the distinctions between literary and political discourse, and to deny the anarchists the freedom of expression that they appeared to demand. I think part of the answer to this question lies, therefore, in the English teacher's response to the central question that Razumov is driven to ask in <u>Under Western Eyes</u>: "How do you tell the truth from lies?" The answer, so seemingly inadequate within the context, moves outside of the text to comment upon the difference between the political and literary construction: "The character of the publication, the general verisimilitude of the news, the consideration of the motive, and so on" (p.160). Fiction, Conrad is saying, does not deceive because it honestly announces its own status: it is a "publication" which declares itself to be a product of the imagination and thus places the reader under no illusion of reference. Fiction is honest, and therefore capable of conveying truth, because it is honestly based upon an obviously non-referential use and theory of language. The truth that a work of art, like a novel, contains is not any kind of representation of some pre-existent reality, but is something which grows in the process of writing and reading: something which is formed out of the reader's subjective or private responses, out of the impact it has upon him, or out of a union of "form" and content. As the narrator reminds Natalia Haldin, "idealistic conceptions" must be "fleshed out" if they are to mean anything at all. In the same way, the truth that a work of art contains is

not truth until it is "fleshed out" in the sense of responded to on a more

than purely intellectual level: on a level of one's whole being, since, as

Conrad states in the Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" (1899),

"Fiction-- if it at all aspires to be art-- appeals to temperament" [19].

So the teacher's answer to Razumov makes an implicit comment

upon the distinctions between political and literary fiction and upon all

the texts or "publications" in the novel: upon Peter Ivanovitch's books

"written with the declared purpose of elevating humanity" and full of

"m stic treatment and symbolic interpretation" (p.108)-- books written with

an arrogant intention, with a dishonest purpose and status, and attempting a

tyranny over the reader; upon the writings of the "violent pamphleteer"

Julius Laspara; and ultimately upon Razumov's own record. In fact this last

is the only honest text in the novel since it is written only for "self-

communion" and as such is not meant to impose its "temperamental" truths

upon others. Thus the judgement that emerges from Under Western Eyes is that

political books and political fictions, like Peter Ivanovitch's "cult of the

woman" and like "socialism", necessarily deceive because they are

constructions of the imagination which do not honestly define their status

and create in the reader an illusion of reference: they function as if the

words on the page described real facts and as if the reality that they

embody was pre-existent, definable and truth for all time. The creeds and

formulas of such works were, to Conrad, no more than a "dismal lie" [20] as

compared to the "temperamental truth" attainable in artistic fiction.

Thus "truth", to Conrad, was not a graspable, objective,

knowable "thing": "things" and statements about them are either true or

false, but "truth" is formed out of a complex of factors which include

subjective responses, perspectives, and a proper "consideration of the

motive": in other words, out of what is "real beyond the words". Truth is a

human and inconstant phenomenon: a reflection of the "irreconcilable

antagonisms" which it is the duty of art to express but not to determine.

II.

As we have seen, despite his stated opposition to "socialism"

and anarchism on a political level, at the deepest level of his artistic

thinking Conrad was remarkably close to the revolutionary position in terms

of his criticism of the philosophical notions and assumptions which underlie

our life as civilized social beings. Within his complex vision there was a

powerful streak of that reductive anarchistic analysis, which cuts through

fictions and ideological pretences in order to recognize the "truth" of life

for what it is when stripped of power and illusion. However, as we shall see

in the next chapter when I shall look at The Secret Agent in detail, this

tendency of thought is counterbalanced by the equal and antagonistic

recognition of the need for "sustaining illusions" in human life and of the

useless cruelty of destroying them. It is out of the dialogue of these

contending principles that Conrad's tragic vision emerges in that novel and

recognizes the very limited authority of any "truth" that can be obtained

through rational thought and analysis alone.

It is also out of this dialogue that emerges Conrad's opposition to "socialism" as a potentially tyrannical force in the world. As we later see in <u>Under Western Eyes</u>, at the centre of Conrad's opposition to all forms of social ideology was an artistically conscious concern with the preservation of language from its debasement and exploitation in politics. "Socialism", for Conrad, was a mode of political power discourse which, by employing a "realistic" theory of language and by claiming objective reference and authority for its imaginative visions, *manages only to destroy language as a* t ol for understanding the world and ultimately to alienate the individual from the truth which abides "in facts". As an artist Conrad was properly concerned with the expressive, not the power, capacities of language.

And yet that is not really an adequate description of Conrad's position on these issues. His "conservatism" was not, as this might seem to suggest, a version of the traditional artistic withdrawal from the political arena into some realm or ivory tower of art, motivated by that desire to protect the integrity of the artist. For Conrad, that could not be a serious position in the midst of the very real and urgent moral issues which surround the theory of socialism. Nor was it a position available to him, given his own family political background and the very active conception he had of his work as a moral agent of human "solidarity". On the contrary, Conrad had to seek a means of engagement with humanity and with the real conditions in which it existed; and that, of course, meant making a positive affirmation of the power and importance of fiction *within* the political world at the same time that he denied the validity of political fictions in the form of ideology.

Paradoxically, it was this necessity which perhaps also brought

him closest to anarchism, or to particular types of anarchism, and which

makes a comparison of his formulation of these problems with how they

occured to Henry B.Brewster quite instructive. Brewster, remember, was the

author of The Theories of Anarchy and of Law (1887) and the somewhat

eccentric anarchist whose linguistic ideas I have outlined in chapter three.

He makes a good comparison with Conrad because he too was centrally

concerned in his work with opposing notions of realism in the language of

social and political ideas, and with turning that opposition into an

affirmation of the power of fiction in our lives. Indeed, at times, he can

even sound like Conrad. Consider these formulations:

> Truth, however much you may get of it, is but a factor in a
>
> larger work, and its greatest value is not in that which it
>
> declares, but in what the declaration is ignorant of but tends
>
> to fashion and form. Whatever you may express, you are at the
>
> same time co-operating in the growth of a reality of a quite
>
> different kind, you are making something different from what
>
> you express. Truth is but a parcel of some becoming reality [21].

Here we have almost precisely Conrad's notion of words carrying meanings and

effects by implication: of an unspoken reality which our speech invents and

of which our conscious notions of "truth", our "train of thought", can only

be partially aware.

Indeed the general affinities between Conrad and Brewster are

very clear. The main thrust of Brewster's thought is an attack upon notions

of universal truth and law, and their unmasking as fictions which are

acceptable only so long as they do not deny their nature as purely verbal

artefacts: as long as they do not claim to be fact or a representation of an

identifiable and constant reality. The stated aim of _The Theories of Anarchy_

and Law is thus the "dethronement" of the "idol of truth," in favour of an

extremely eclectic and relative system of values in which "poetry" and

"expression" are more important attributes of a statement than any element

of representation it might contain. For Brewster, as for Conrad, man's

conscious activity is a confronation with all of the conradictions and

confusions (Conradian "irreconcilable antagonisms") inherent in his

condition. Thought is an open-ended dialogic process which reflects the

chaos of experience and which must be free of pre-conceptions, set ideas and

false resolutions if it is to remain alive. Just as in Conrad then, words

themselves become the central object of consideration, since it is only in

language that thought is realized.

So we can recognize here, simultaneously, some of Conrad's ideas

about truth and language, and some of the trends in contemporary thinking

which most gravely concerned him. Conrad and Brewster share a view of man as

dependent upon language for his rational existence and yet simultaneously

victimized by its fictive and almost ephemeral quality: as if man's grasp

upon reality were as insubstantial as to hinge upon grammatical structures.

Yet Brewster, despite his negative view of language as an interpreter of

reality, turns this "connecting" and falsifying quality of language into an

affirmation of its power and importance:

I would neither get the world out of man's mind nor our mind

out of the progressive integration of matter. I would get them

both out of speech and say to those who discuss their priority:

you are expressing no reality, you are creating one: you are

singing after a fashion- go on! (p.20).

Brewster is content to see everything reduced to speech, to see every belief

and statement as an essentially artistic expression, and to see the universe

as owing its existence to words:

There is no complete life without some great lie or romance,

some dream of love or grandeur, whose value is in its falseness.

There is no idealless reality. There is no true world of here

below unless there is, under some form or other, a kingdom

of heaven. (p.39).

This is very Conradian: dreams feed the imagination, make action possible by

presenting to the actor only the ideal reflection of his act, and provide

the forms which for Conrad and Brewster are what make life tolerable.

However, it is in relation to the consequences of all this that

Brewster and Conrad can be seen to diverge. In a sense it is the very

similarity of their initial analysis that makes the later differences

between them so interesting; and it serves as another example of the way

that temperament and necessity shape man's outlook and thereby confirm their

ideas. Perhaps one can understand Brewster's essentially solipsistic

position more easily if one remembers that he was a cosmopolitan gentleman

and essentially a privileged dilettante, who lived a very secluded and

sheltered existence. He never had to work, faced no extremes, felt the need

of no commitment, and was allowed by virtue of his financial and social

security to imagine that he could survey the political scene from a detached

perspective. The world was for him "but a place of many words" (p.7), as it

is for the English teacher of <u>Under Western Eyes</u> who lives amongst, but not

as part of, the "passionate" Russians. And so the overall perspective of <u>The</u>

<u>Theories of Anarchy and Law</u> is perhaps best summed up by this extract from

Brewster's abstract introduction:

> The above given opinions equally valid as natural products,
>
> but their value denied as expressions of truth; any attempt
>
> to decide between them is a misdirected effort. The error
>
> of criticism. Abstention from theories the result of
>
> particular conditions of thought, in which our interest
>
> is transferred from the contents to the mode of grouping
>
> of our ideas. (p.xii).

The "error of criticism" is to misunderstand the nature of ideas and the

language in which they are realized and to mislocate reality: it is to

believe that words have a "content" or that they "represent" something

outside of the human mind. To overcome this "error" is therefore to see

human consciousness, and so life itself, as a product of the "mode of

grouping of ... ideas" or, as Conrad would have put it, as a thing of

"form." For Brewster and his philosophy of "syntactism" this meant that,

since our mental life is created by language, then language can be used to

change it by constructing a "great lie of romance." The furthest point of

Brewster's vision is, then, a release from the "tyranny of forms": a type of

anarchism based on love and the acceptance of constant change, in which the

individual has learned to loosen his grip upon grammatical forms and

consequently escaped the tyrannical domination of other men's definitions of

reality. Man, in a Babel-like society, is free to construct his own image
and to find true fellowship with others in a mystical love.

What Conrad would have thought of such a conception of social
organization is very clearly implicit in one of his letters to Cunninghame
Graham, of 14 January 1898, in which he discusses the possibilities of
social change and the nature of our desire for it:

> The fate of a humanity condemned to perish from cold is
>
> not worth talking about. If you take it to heart it becomes
>
> an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you
>
> must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold,
>
> darkness and silence. In a dispassionate view the ardour
>
> for reform, for improvement, for virtue, for knowledge and
>
> even for beauty is a mere sticking up for appearances as
>
> though one were anxious about the cut of one's clothes
>
> in a community of blind men. Life knows not us and we do
>
> not know life- we don't know even our own thoughts. Half
>
> of the words we use have no meanimg whatever and of the
>
> other half each man understands each word after the
>
> fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and
>
> beliefs shift like mists on the shore; thoughts vanish;
>
> words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday
>
> is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow ... [22].

This passage provides a perfect counterpoint to the society that Brewster
imagines: a society in which man is linguistically isolated, in which it is
openly acknowledged that "each man understands each word after the fashion

of his own folly and conceit". Of course Conrad is not entirely in earnest here and rarely was when he discussed politics outside of his fiction, but this formulation nevertheless contains the essence of his tragic model of man. "Socialism must inevitably end in Cesaarism" because the "ardour for reform" is necessarily accompanied by its moral opposite of "folly and conceit" in the "irreconcilable antagonisms" of feeling. In other words, Conrad is like Brewster in the sense that he sees man as constructing himself in words which he "understands" in terms of his own needs and d sires: in terms of the ideal "appearances" behind which lie unknown, because unspoken, impulses. Man beholds himself in the "fictions" of language which, like the work of artistic fiction, make their appeal and give voice first of all to the human temperament. Human identity is itself built upon falsehood and fictions because made of words: the very stuff of fiction.

Where Conrad very clearly departs from Brewster, however, is in the ambiguous character of his response to this "anarchistic" analysis which, as we shall see in the next chapter, forms one aspect or principle of his own world-view. The ambiguity resides, of course, in the suspicion that it "is not worth talking about" because to do so is not only futile, since man is linguistically isolated and his words provide no more than "self-communion", but also because to do so is to break the spell and "connecting power" of language, the "saving illusions" and "tyranny of forms", which is "all we have got to hang on to". The experiences of the inadequacy, insubstantiality and yet creative "connective" power of language were forced upon Conrad in his practice as a writer; but he was also for many years a

practical working man who experienced the need for language to be a clear and unambiguous means of communication. Conrad was caught between these two types of experience, and the conflicting needs and perceptions to which they gave rise. What made him great, and tragic, was that he remained caught in and refused to falsely resolve the conflict either by the application of theories of artistic expression to questions of practical effect-- as the anarchists did-- by the reduction of his art to propaganda by applying narrow theories of realism, of scientific representation, to it.

Fundamentally, for Conrad, there were two possible ways of looking at and using language both of which fulfilled some needs of our nature and left others unfulfiled. On the one hand, we can delude ourselves into thinking that our words are directly representative of an objective reality, which allows us to act and, most importantly, fulfills our need for a feeling of fellowship of the type that Razumov feels so strongly:

... he felt the need of some other mind's sanction.

With something resembling anguish he said to himself-

"I want to be understood." The universal aspiration

with all its profound and melacholy meaning assailed

heavily Razumov, who, amongst eighty millions of his

kith and kin, had no heart to which he could open

himself. (p.36).

The tragic irony of his fate is, of course, that the action that his literal belief in his own language allows him to perform is the very thing which destroys his attachment to his fellow men. Alternatively, one can see language as a plastic, pliable mode of expression, which invents rather than

represents reality. This is the language of art, of beauty and truth and idealism. But in a Conradian universe this too becomes the agent of its own destruction when inappropriately applied; as again typified by Razumov whose recognition of the inventiveness of his own verbal facility drives him into a process of suffering which ceases only with the peace and silence of deafness; or as also typified by the "eloquent" Mr. Kurtz, whose tremendous capacity for idealistic rhetoric merely empowers the savagery within him. In Conrad's world, it is as if words were as much a curse as a blessing.

To conclude then, we can see that Conrad's "conservatism" was far from what it at first sight appears, since his world-view was more complex and wide-ranging than any one word can capture. His vision was fundamentally tragic and based on the recognition of "antagonisms" within human life which can never be resolved. That vision comprehended and contained the socialist or anarchist position within itself and it is perhaps most accurate to say that, in Conrad's view, it was the very value of the modes of thought and feeling represented by the word "socialism" that is the source of its own destruction: as if the greatest things in life act as a magnet to the worst, or as if they are all reverse sides of the same thing. If Conrad was a conservative, his was the conservatism of the artist concerned to protect the integrity of the language which is the material of his art. But, as we have seen, he was also extremely close in his analysis of linguistic problems to the anarchists he apparently opposes. Everything is "antagonistic" and nothing simple-- despite his desired belief in "a few simple notions"-- in the art of Joseph Conrad. And it is this that I intend

to prove in the following chapters by analysing in more detail _The Secret Agent_ and _Under Western Eyes_.

<center>*</center>

Notes:

1. Alexander Herzen, _Selected Philosophical Works._ trans. L. Navrozov. (Moscow: Foreign Language Publication House, 1956), p.440.

2. Letter to Spiridion Kliszcewski, 19-12-1885. _Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad_, ed. F.R.Karl and L.Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Vol.1, p.16. (hereafter, _CL_).

3. _Under Western Eyes_ (London: Methuen, 1911), p.32. All further page references in the text are to this edition.

4. _On the New Stage_, issued as a pamphlet.

5. _Tales of Unrest_ (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.108.

6. This phrase is from a letter to "The New York Times Saturday Review" of 2 August 1901. In it Conrad descibes his essentially dialectic theory of human feeling:

   "Egoism, which is the moving force of the world, and altruism, which is its morality, are two contradictory instincts of which one is so plain

and the other so mysterious, that they cannot serve us unless in the

incomprehensible alliance of their irreconcilable antagonism."

(CL,2, 348).

7. Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, ed. G.Jean Aubry (London: Heinemann,

   1927), Vol.1, p.280. (hereafter, LL).

8. Letter to Warrington Dawson of 20 January 1913. Joseph Conrad and

   Warrington Dawson (Durham N.C.: Duke Univ.Press, 1968), p.160.

9. Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy (London: N.L.B., 1971), p.67.

10.The Secret Agent (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.81.

11.A Personal Record (London: Dent, 1911), p.19-20.

12.The Secret Agent i.b.i.d. p.9.

13.LL, Vol.2, p.142.

14.LL, Vol.2, p.126.

15.Michael Bakunin, God and the State (New York: Dover, 1970), p.9.

16.Henry James, The Princess Casamassima (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1991),

p.362.

17. The Secret Agent i.b.i.d. p.42.

18. God and the State. i.b.i.d. p.64-5,67.

19. "Preface" to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" (London: Dent, 1899), p.4.

20 LL, Vol.1, p.86.

21. The Theories of Anarchy and Law (London: Northgate and Williams, 1887),
    p.42. All page references are to this edition.

22. CL, Vol.2, p.17.

Chapter Eight:

The Perfect Detonator.

> Then Souvarine, gazing with misty eyes into space,
> peacefully concluded:
> "Any reasoning about the future is criminal, for it
> prevents pure destruction, and holds up the march of
> the revolution."
> In spite of the cold chill this answer sent down his
> spine, Etiene had to laugh. Yet he freely admitted
> that there was some sense in these ideas, which
> attracted him by their terrible simplicity.
> <div align="right">E.Zola. Germinal [1].</div>

""Man is a vicious animal", wrote Conrad to Cunningham-Graham,

declining an invitation to speak at a socialist rally in 1899. He continued

in the same surprisingly cynical vein:

His wickedness must be organized. Crime is a necessary condition of

organized existence. Society is fundamentally criminal-- or it would

not exist. Selfishness preseves everything- absolutely everything--

everything we hate and everything we love. And everything holds

together. That is why I respect the extreme anarchists-- "I hope for

general extermination". Very well. Its justifiable and, moreover, it

is plain. One compromises with words. There's no end to it. Its like a

forest where no one knows the way. One is lost even as one is calling

out "I am saved." [2].

Written just two days after he had finished Heart of Darkness (1899) and

seven years before The Secret Agent (1906), these thoughts bear the

emotional imprint of the first work and find an echo in the second: of

Kurtz's "exposition of a method ... exterminate all the brutes" [3], and in

the Professor's formula of uncompromising action "Exterminate, exterminate!

That is the only way of progress" [4]. The letter, of course, is heavily

ironic and the fact that Conrad should employ the terminology of two of his

darkest characters is obviously not an indication of any sympathy of outlook

with them. And yet it is clear that his cynical pose reveals what is, not

exactly an aspect of the imaginative vision which created these works, but

more one strain or mood of the deeper emotional reaction to the world which

lies behind that vision: an almost nihilistic disgust and fury which was one

of the facets of Conrad's complex and by no means fully stable or rational

worldview. It is an attitude of his bleaker moments which in his private

life he was obliged to veil in irony: a turn of mind, or an instinctive

reaction to the indignity and squalor of the world which, however, he was

free to indulge, express, and analyse in his fiction. It partly links him in

the practise of his art, as the purveyor of political fiction, to the

"extreme anarchists" he ironically respects: the purveyors of fictional

politics.

Let me be clear about what I mean here. When Conrad spoke of

"anarchism", whether in the letter quoted above or in his fiction, what he

refered to was not the political philosophy of anarchist-communism as that

term is understood by the political scientist. It was no theory, no

"compromises with words". Rather it was that contempt and hatred for the

world, which is expressed and implied by anarchist theory: the reverse side

of a romantic or egotistic idealism, which issues in a purely negative and

reductive analysis of the world as it is and in the despairing urge to

transcend the limitations of the present human condition through direct and

violent action. In its most simplistic phase, anarchism is the total

rejection of social and political rhetoric and the philosophy of pure

individual and destructive action: action with no theoretical or systematic

meaning attached to it, and which is therefore conceived of as the only

channel for the expression of ideals in an inherently corrupt social and

intellectual system. Conrad's true anarchists, such as the Professor and

Stevie, exist in this phase: disillusioned or autistic idealists, they are

characters who have never had or who have lost their faith in human reason

and language as a method of translating their ideals into reality; and who

thus exist entirely within their own blind, instinctive and unmediated

passion. For Conrad, it was this isolationism and lack of common faith in

the complex of verbal constructions that hold humanity together, which

ultimately lies behind all anarchistic ideas of revolutionary change. Such

ideas were, of course, the opposite of his own and the very antithesis of

the purpose of his work. And yet, paradoxically, that same lack of faith, or

rather the fear and temptation of it, also formed a strand of Conrad's own

tragic political pessimism.

It is this, of course, which makes Conrad's fiction powerful and

interesting. It was in his novels that Conrad, the artist in words,

confronted and probed most directly the possibility that language could

become, far from the material that binds humanity together, the thing that

blows it apart and allows one man to prey upon another. Thus when Conrad

made anarchism, revolution and terror the subject of his fiction, he was

also partly making an imaginative commitment to his own vision of "general extermination" which is in a sense equivalent to the violent anarchist's commitment to destruction. It is, in fact, only the artist and the terroristic anarchist who can imagine and give objective form in their work to such visions of annihilation. The artist can represent the destruction of society in aesthetic images and the anarchist attempts to do the same in deeds that act like images: both are self-conscious performers concerned to orchestrate their images into a "communication" with their audience. So when a writer gives us a representation of society as oppressive and desperately in need of change, and yet in which all revolutionary political ideas seem intellectually bankrupt, as Conrad does in The Secret Agent; then that novel works in a way very similar to how the anarchistic terrorist ideally imagines his expression-- his bomb-- to work. It provides a revelation of suffering, a vision of hopeless frustration and the promise of a turn to destructive violence as a last desperate measure [5].

It is in this way that The Secret Agent sets out the conditions which create violence and terrorists like the Professor, and in so doing it works as his bombs work: to reveal and so to destroy the blind willfull illusions, the refusals to "look" and the "compromises with words" that sustain the "fundamentally criminal" society presented to us. Within the world of the novel, the act of revealing "secrets" is equivalent to the act of destroying the person who possesses them; and the bomb in Greeenwich Park forces people to discover and to understand the true nature of their relationship to their fellows and to society. Those closest to it, it shatters. It is the mini-image of a revolution which achieves nothing but

the negation of the "criminal" fictions which structure society. It offers

nothing in exchange. Parallel to it, *The Secret Agent* also forces the reader

to discover the "secrets" which exist behind language but, being art, it

does so in terms which offer a consolation in terms of the "pity" such

revelation evokes. This is obviously what Conrad was refering to in the

ambivalent final words of his "Author's Preface" (1920): "... I have not

intended to commit a gratuitous outrage upon the feelings of mankind"

(P.43). "Gratuitous outrage" sounds like a newspaper term for a futile

terrorist attack, and in the light of what follows of the "feelings of

mankind", Conrad is saying that this "outrage"-- this novel with its

terrible concentration on the pain and suffering that lie beneath the verbal

surface of society-- is by no means "gratuitous". Within Conrad's moral and

artistic world, revelation is not destruction but the agent of "pity"; and

the basis for a more direct and honest "solidarity" between men.

Of course, all this is not to suggest that Conrad in any sense

condoned or sympathised with terrorist or "outrage" tactics, even in written

form. Doing this in the world of a novel populated by fictional characters

is completely different from doing it in the "real" social and political

world populated by real people. "Criminal" fictions and deceptions, not real

human beings and honest beliefs, were the target of Conrad's literary

"scorn". In fact, for Conrad, the nature of the connection between language

and what we might term the human "reality" it describes, was not a simple or

direct relationship of word and object. Beyond the obvious material level of

our existence, our lives consist of deep human drives or passions which are

mediated and given meaning by the structure of language. Words create the

conscious part of reality and the fellowship between men which makes
possible the fulfillment in co-operation of those drives or passions.
However, and this is Conrad's most obvious point in The Secret Agent, they
also create the power structures which make possible the distortion and
exploitation of human passion and need. Words can do either of these things;
and our control over what they do is never total because, of course, we are
never totally conscious. Yet what control we do have is dependent entirely
on our awareness and understanding of language and its power. Thus Conrad,
who conceived of the purpose of his art as being to express sympathy with
his fellow man, is directing his anarchistic and reductive analysis not at
humanity, but at humanity's conscious and unconscious abuse of the power of
language to exploit each other.

Thus, in a causal sequence of which she knows nothing, Winnie
Verloc's acceptance of the label "wife" (a word re-iterated throughout the
book, as representing at once a personal relation and a social institution)
tragically locks her into a system of mutual expolitation and oppression
which extends from her relationship with her husband, via police stations
and embassies, to the governments of England and what we assume to be
Russia. Thus Conrad's attack upon revolutionary rhetoric in the preface:
"... the half-crazy pose as of a brazen cheat exploiting the poignant
miseries and passionate credulities of a mankind so tragically eager for
self-destruction. That was what made for me its philosophical pretences so
unpardonable" (P.39). This description could be said to apply, in extreme
form, to every character in The Secret Agent: all thrive upon the
exploitation of others through their abuse of the power of language and, to

some extent, all are condemned by Conrad. It is just that the revolutionary demagogue is particularly to be scorned, since he conceals his exploitation under "pretences": in words which make him dangerous to many others. Winnie, however, is particularly to be pitied because she, a woman "undemonstrative and silent" (P.277), is dangerous mostly to herself. These twin expressions of "scorn and pity", the attitude of the narrative voice in The Secret Agent, are the conflicting poles of a vision which recognises the "irreconcilable antagonisms" inherent in human existence: that sees, and makes the reader see, that while society is corrupt and human life morally intolerable if one "looks" close enough, any attempt to improve it through direct action against one's conditions leads only to isolation, incomprehension, and failure. Indeed such direct action, which reaches its most extreme and simplistic expression in the terrorism of the Professor and Stevie, is conceived of here as being at once a moral imperative and a hopeless futility destined to have nothing but evil consequences. Conrad's is a tragic vision and one that, on one level, has much in common with the classically anarchist vision of the world: with that violent idealism of the philosophical intellectual expressing himself in destructive force which actually negates or prevents the elaboration of his philosophy.

So when Conrad referred to The Secret Agent as an "outrage", perhaps that was a subtle admission of how close his work was to the anarchist position in terms of its analysis of society and, particularly, in its siting of language at the centre of the political struggle: as the actual machinery of alienation, oppression and injustice. This is what lies behind the books apparent "pessimism" and behind the charge, so often

levelled at Conrad, that the work is utterly bleak and nihilistic and leaves us no hope or idealism. Critics have defended him against this on the grounds that the novel contains a kind of negative idealism. For instance, Martin Seymour-Smith in the most recent Penguin edition argues that "the despair registered in The Secret Agent is finally affirmative" (P.30). He means that ideals are conspicuous by their absence. That they are implied in the virulent criticism the book makes of modern society and of revolutionary politics, since one does not criticize unless one can imagine or dream of something better; and that, for Conrad, was simplicity or the irreailizable dream of a life based on what he called "a few simple notions" [6]. That defence seems fair but it is also parallel to an idea familiar to the anarchists. Proudhon, and virtually all anarchist thinkers, were inspired by the idea of a regression to a more primitive, simplified form of society and by a resistance to what they saw as the corrosive intellectual complexity of modern life. Translate this into specifically linguistic terms and one has a model for formulating more accurately the nature of Conrad's lack of hope in The Secret Agent. The central subject of his novel is language: words are what makes human society possible and are "the secret agent" which, in constructing fellowship, allow the conscious and unconscious exploitation and reification of one man by another. The novel, rather than implying ideals, makes a principled refusal to verbalize or formulate them; since to do so would be to disguise its meaning in just the sort of "philosophical pretences" that Conrad found so "unpardonable" in the Greenwich Park "outrage". He was consistent, if severe.

So when Conrad described how "there had been times during the writing of the book when I was an extreme revolutionist" (P.42), he must be taken seriously. "I am long because my thought is multiple" [7] he wrote to Garnett in 1907, and in The Secret Agent Conrad was examining one strain of his own complex reaction to life: the reverse side of a romantic idealism which, in an unpropitious enviorenment, issues in a destructive rage. Of course, this is not to say that Conrad was an anarchist or that The Secret Agent is an anarchist novel: he had no consistent political creed and his novel is the embodiment of a tragic perspective which finally reduces to an absurdity the terrible naivéty of the dream that direct action can achieve anything. Yet at the deepest level of his being, and particularly in those moments of isolation when he sat writing his highly complex novels, Conrad surely felt the the attraction of the "simplicity" of anarchism: his analysis of the ills of society as being centred in the actual mechanics of language, in the intellectual complexity of modern life, is identifiably anarchist in its formulation.

"We may depend upon it that what men delight
to read in books, they will put in practise
in reality".   William Hazlitt:
        The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays [8].

Only the artist and the terroristic anarchist can give objective

form in their work to the dream of annihilation. The writer of a political

novel enjoys the same sort of "sinister freedom" in terms of the images that

he presents to the world, as the anarchist does in deciding what form his

expression will take. Each embraces the contradictory phemonenon of a man

devoted to a social cause, the communication of a vision, who is

nevertheless free of all the effective social relations he yearns for. Each

is isolated within his worldview and limited only by the strength of his

imagination and conscience. Thus the writer of a novel, if his conscience or

ideological commitment permit, can represent the world in polemical or

explicitly political terms: in a way interpretive of reality along narrowly

ideological lines, rather than as a pure representation of it. This is, of

course, an obvious fact: words in fictional or political books do not have a

simple one-to-one correspondence with things actually encountered in life

and do not just represent a pre-existent reality. Instead they correspond to

and connect with other words in the text to engage with and alter reality:

to create a "sense of life" in fiction and to actually construct reality, a

verbal-ideological reality, in politics. And so when these two types or

planes of discourse are placed together, as in political fiction, then one

has a very powerful and potentially dangerous medium: one that can make any ideological position seem tenable because it seems to be "real" and "lived".

This is what Maxim Gorky meant when he advised Chekhov that "... it is absolutely essential that contemporary literature should begin to embellish life, and as soon as it does so life will embellish itself, that is people will begin to live at a greater pace, more brilliantly" [9]. For Gorky, the writer need not, indeed should not, allow the reality of the life surrounding him to dictate the moral or aesthetic tone of his work. The writer, on the contrary, should enage that reality and he should make a positive assertion of values at the same time as he exposes how the life he describes falls short of those values. At its most programmatic, this means that the writer's duty is to place before his audience figures who embody those values alongside figures who embody the vices of the times. By seeing these figures pitted against each other, the audience is made conscious of the imperfections of the world. Thus people change, life changes, and words have altered reality.

All this is very simplistic and an obviously mechanical conception of the novel as a branch of ideology. It would be totally unable to contain a vision of any complexity and depth. However, social-realist critics would argue, and with some justification, that this is only another and more politically radical version of what classic English realism was doing when it explored social and political questions. The main difference is only that the ideological conflict that a "realist" like Gorky would have presented in terms of conflicting characters in order to simplify the "message", the "bourgeois" novelist would have centred within the

consciousness of one "hero" or leading character who has to choose between social values. In either case, the implicit assumption is that there are clear ideological alternatives which an individual can choose between in reference to objective systems of value. Therefore these "bourgeois" novels present us with non-problematic heroes whose consciousness, supposedly unstructured by ideology, is actually the model of a conservative and 'humanist philosophy of man as a free agent able to choose between alternative social values objectively. Thus the realist "social problem" novels of the nineteenth century criticize the injustice and social abuses prevalent in English society, but never present them as in any way inherent to it: as actually forming and structuring, being the very stuff of, the minds of individuals within it. They criticize the "condition of England" but nevertheless eventually embrace many of the assumptions which lie behind its organization, and sometimes even express them in their resolution. We need to look at the realist novel briefly in order to establish how misleading it is to label Conrad a conservative and then to show how The Secret Agent is in part a violent reaction both to this type of conservative novel and to the expectations of its English audience.

Mrs. Gaskell's Mary Barton (1840) provides a good example of the English conception of the political novel. Here the conflict between man and his society is flattened and rendered non-problematic by a presentation of political questions as ultimately external to the identity and domestic life of the protagonist. Its hero, John Barton, is a chartist driven to desperate violence by poverty, unemployment and class antagonism. It is set against a background evocation of the physical and moral degradation of working class

existence which is so vivid that one contemporary reviewer said that here
was the explanation of "why men turn chartists and communists" [10]. Indeed
early in the novel Gaskill herself makes explicit the connection between
class conditions and the need for revolution: "John Barton became a
chartist, a communist, all that is commonly called wild and visionary. Ay!
but being a visionary is something. It shows a soul, a being not altogether
sensual; a creature who looks forward for others, if not for himself" [11].
The revolution is seen as a generous ideal generated by social conditions,
and class violence as the rational response to those conditions. But
ultimately Gaskill is just as ideologically transparent as Gorky, in that
she refuses to let the material of the book, the lives of the poor, speak
for itself: the conditions which drive men to socialism are realistically
depicted but constantly mediated or refracted through a politically engaged
"omniscient" narrator who encourages her readers to see all this suffering
as temporary, and to believe that a reconciliation between the classes is
possible. This is not representation of the condition of England, but an
ideological interpretation of it. Thus trade unions are "unnatural" and
temporary phenomena, not an integral part of working class existence. Thus
the novel is shot through with the fear of "mob" violence, and the conflict
between capital and labour, initially the engine of the plot, is ultimately
resolved by melodramatic individual action. Thus Barton, whose experience
becomes an analogue of Gaskell's belief that individuals can transcend class
conditions and attain to an objective understanding, dies in the arms of the
capitalist whose son he has confessed to murdering:

"The eyes of John Barton grew dim with tears. Rich and poor,

masters and men, were brothers in the deep sufferings of the

heart ... now he knew he had killed a man, and a brother,- now

he knew that no good thing would come of this evil, even to

the sufferers whose cause he so blindly espoused". (P.435-42).

Conflict in modern society, the initial subject of the novel, is flattened

and dissipated by Barton's reconciliation with his society and the

assimilation of his negative virtues, his "generous" anger and desperation,

into a positive reformist vision of a capitalist Britain functioning

harmoniously. It ends with a vision of inter-personal morality which avoids

politics and ignores the connection between the personal and the political

which is so central to The Secret Agent.

In George Eliot's "political novel", Felix Holt: The Radical

(1872), one has a similar presentation of an essentially non-problematic

social world in which the working class hero comes to accept the need for

superior middle-class leadership and gradual reform [12]. Caught up in

senseless violence, Felix Holt quickly learns that the road to justice and

working-class power lies not in revolution, or even in universal suffrage,

but in the power of an enlightened public opinion, "...the ruling belief in

society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what

is shameful" [13]. Like Mary Barton, the vision sustaining Felix Holt: The

Radical, which mediates its presentation of political questions, is of a

society purged of true revolutionary tendencies and violence through reform

and education: the injustices and corruption depicted are an accident of

history rather than an integral part of the social system. Felix Holt, like

Barton, is a non-problematic hero: his identity and values are not

compromised by his reconciliation with society because he professes the same

humanitarian assumptions as the ruling class. He, like the novel, is the

product of an essentially English conservative and humanist philosophical

tradition, untouched by Europoean revolutionary idealism and untroubled by

the darker political perceptions to which it gave rise: by the vision of

man's individual identity as itself problematic and in antagonism with his

society. as represented by distinctively European characters like

Dostoyevsky's Kirilov or Conrad's Professor.

So when Conrad, in his dedication of The Secret Agent to

H.G.Wells, described the novel as "A Simple Tale of the Nineteenth Century"

he could be said to have had an ironic eye upon a predominantly middle-class

English audience accustomed to the traditions of "realist" political fiction

which defined as non-problematic the values underpining British society. In

fact Conrad was out of another tradition altogether: a more self-conscious,

more politically experienced, tradition of novels which explored politics in

terms of its essential similarity to fiction as a mode of human activity. As

Jacques Berthoud has rightly pointed out in Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase,

"The novel's central purpose is the exploration of conservatism" [14] and

not anarchism. Anarchism does not enter The Secret Agent as a subject but as

an attitude, radically split between destructive rage and humanitarian

passion, which is then applied to conservatism. Conrad's "scorn and pity" is

the expression of that attitude to the fictional conservatism of England: to

its political novels, linguistic fictions which do not allow us to see below

or question the values they represent life through; and to its social and

political belief systems, linguistic fictions which do not allow us to see

below the surface of social relationships. Thus when, again in the foreword,

Conrad discusses the "credibility" of his story of Winnie Verloc, he is

pointing the reader's attention to those "realist" novels that sought their

objective credibility in a compacted mass of closely observed details

lending an illusion of reference to their representation of society. Conrad

comments "I Had to fight hard to keep at arm's length the memories of my

solitary and nocturnal walks all over London in my early days, lest these

should rush in and overwhelm each page of the story as these emerged one

after another from a mood as serious in feeling and thought as any in which

I ever wrote a line. In that respect I really think that _The Secret Agent_ is

a perfectly genuine piece of work" (P.41). In other words, _The Secret_

Agent's credibility, its genuineness, lies not in any surface realism,

distracting the reader from the interpretive nature of what he reads, but in

a "sincerity" of "feeling and thought"; in the open and honest application

of a commited vision.

As I have said, Conrad can be seen as coming from another

tradition of political novel of the type of Flaubert's _Sentimental Education_

(1845), Turgenev's _Fathers and Sons_ (1862) and _Virgin Soil_ (1877), or

Dostoyevsky's _The Possessed_ (1871). All are novels which make explicit the

connection between the political nature of fiction and the fictional nature

of politics, by casting as their heroes overtly literary and artistic men

who are forced to choose between art and politics as modes of self-

expression [15]. All are also, of course, novels which exerted a tremendous

influence on English and American fiction and, especially, on its

presentation of the issues surrounding revolutionary politics. Indeed Henry

James, as we have seen in a previous chapter, was so influenced by Turgenev

that he imported the central idea of Virgin Soil for his own novel of

anarchist life in London, The Princess Casamassima (1886). Curiously James's

novel opens with a preface in which he explains that " ... this fiction

proceeded quite directly, during the first year of a long residence in

London, from the habit and exercise of walking the streets" [16]. James goes

on to explain how his "imagination" worked upon his "impressions" until a

story arose: "The history of little Hyacinth Robinson", which "sprang up for

me out of the London pavement" (P.8). The novel which follows is an

extremely literary performance with no false surface realism or claim to

representation of a reality outside of the mind of its author. Its

descriptions of London, often filtered through Dickens, are evocations of

the responses of the literary mind of James/H.Robinson and undercut their

own illusion of reference. Thus James's presentation of the world of

anarchism, of which he knew very little, is a self-confessed fantasy:

> My vision of the aspects I more or less fortunately rendered
>
> was, exactly, my knowledge. If I made my appearances live
>
> what was this but the utmost one could do with them? ... I
>
> had to bethink myself in advance of a defence of my "artistic
>
> position". Shouldn't I find it in the happy contention that
>
> the value I wished most to render and the effect I wished most
>
> to produce were precisely those of our not knowing, of society's
>
> not knowing, but only guessing and suspecting and trying to
>
> ignore, what "goes on" irreconcilably", subversively,
>
> beneath the vast, smug surface (P.22).

James is honest at least. He admitted that he had what he called in a letter "the imagination of disaster" [17] and that when he came to London he knew neither it nor what "goes on". Thus as he walked the streets, one of the "visions" which "sprang up ... out of the pavement" was the idea that London was threatened by a vast terrorist conspiracy; an idea which had more reality in the Turgenev's Russia than in James's England. Conrad had probably read The Princess Casamassima before he settled in London and so perhaps it was the "memories" of that kind of a vision that he had to "fight" against in the composition of The Secret Agent [18]. Certainly the belief in a serious revolutionary movement in London is one of the myths that his novel explodes. In fact, as we have seen, the "imagination of disaster" was what united the paranoid conservative and the lawless revolutuonary in terroristic fantasy: as that is found in hysterical newspaper reports, in popular fiction, and most seriously in acts of terrorism. But The Secret Agent works to oppose such fantasy. The imagination, in Conrad's world, is a force which creates one's vision and understanding of life and therefore the thing which makes it tolerable or intolerable: an excess of it, however, always tends towards the latter because it leads to invidious comparisons between the actual conditions of human existence and imagined states of perfection. Thus the narrator of Under Western Eyes, whose reliability we are assured derives from his lack of imagination, informs us that the "psychological secret" of the imaginative and idealistic Russians is "... that they detest life, the irredemiable life of the earth as it is" [19]. So in The Secret Agent Conrad, unlike James and a whole tradition of popular and conservative

novelists, refused to allow his imagination to work on what he tells us he "knew nothing" of: the anarchist world of London. The novel resists all imaginative visions upon the grounds that they are potentially destructive: it refuses to formulate ideals and refuses to provide a vision of subversive danger because Conrad knew that these things can be, and are, used to evil ends.

It is here that we approach the phenomenal, deeply divided, complexity of Conrad's vision. The imagination, and the words which are its agent, are the things which make life possible, beautiful and meaningful. Yet they are also the things which destroy man's integrity by leading him into patterns of thought which license exploitation, "madness" and "despair". Conrad simultaneously develops these two radically opposed perspectives and balances them through a criticism of the words that are their source.

From this point of view The Secret Agent can be seen as a kind of answer to the comparatively superficial political analysis of The Princess Casamassima. James created a hero of "romantic curiosity" (P.9), whose ignorance leads him to imagine that society is on the point of violent change. He imagines:

> ... that the forces secretly arrayed against the present social
>
> order were pervasive and universal, in the air one breathed,
>
> in the ground one trod. ... They were above, below, within,
>
> without, in every contact and combination of life; and it
>
> was no disproof of them to say it was too odd that they
>
> should lurk in a particular improbable form. To lurk in

improbable forms was precisely their strength... (P.415).

James's humour is often quite fine as he captures the language of the
linguistically isolated: the above statement, for example, is obviously
irrefutable even though it is a proposition, since all it possesses is a
syllogistic illusion of reference. It is inventing reality, just as James
does in his novel, and the connection between political fiction and
fictional politics is clearly registered. Ultimately, however, James seems
unable to push this analysis very far and the novel becomes no more than an
evocation of "not knowing", but "suspecting".

The Secret Agent, in marked contrast, makes a much more
powerful, comprehensive and radical analysis of the same linguistic
questions and explodes James's "imaginings". Again the imagination and "not
knowing" are absolutely central concepts, but Conrad approaches his
exploration from the opposite angle and presents us with a central character
instinctively unromantic and incurious. In fact the whole ironic narrative
strategy of the novel is organised around Winnie Verloc's "tragic suspicion"
"that life doesn't stand much looking into" (P.41); and the impersonal
narrator, in so far as he exists independently of the characters' voices,
makes a principled refusal to interpret, speculate or "look into" anything.
For just one arbitrarily chosen example of the narrative tone and technique
in the service of this suspicion of imagination and words, consider the
description of Verloc as he walks towards his meeting with Vladimir in
chapter two. Verloc is "undemonstrative and burly in a fat-pig style" and
the narrator begins to speculate upon the "impression" he might make if one

oberved him in his passage along the street, only to immediately turn away
and deny all knowledge (remember what James made of his "impressions"):

> He might have been anything from a picture framer to a locksmith;
>
> an employer of labour in a small way. But there was also about him
>
> an indescribable air which no mechanic could have acquired
>
> in the practise of his trade however dishonestly exercised;
>
> the air common to men who live on the vices, the follies,
>
> or the baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism
>
> common to keepers of gambling hells and disorderly houses;
>
> to private detectives and inquiry agents; to drink sellers
>
> and, I should say, to the sellers of invigorating electric
>
> belts and to the inventors of patent medicines. But of that
>
> last I am not sure, not having carried my investigations
>
> so far into the depths. For all I know, the expressions of
>
> these last may be perfectly diabolic. I shouldn't be
>
> surprised. What I want to affirm is that Mr.Verloc's
>
> expression was by no means diabolic (P.52).

The point being registered here, and which will be made explicit in the
forthcoming story, is that Verloc is indeed a moral nihilist (in all senses
of that word) who exploits the "baser fears of mankind". But the passage
does more than that and effects an implicit commentary upon the nature of
imaginative "impression", perception, and language. Thus the movement away
from direct description of Verloc towards speculation upon his
"indescribable air" and what it resembles, reveals a multitude of men just
like him: he is not a devil of the imagination, but an ordinary man just

like a "locksmith". The horror that the narrator finds in him, speculation allows him to discover everywhere. That is what the passage is saying on one level. On another, the break in the description and the digression into "But of that last I am not sure...", bounces the reader out of his involvement and suspension of disbelief and into an awareness of the type of discourse this is: an imaginative fiction based upon "not knowing" and trying to describe the "indescribable". And so the ironic "not having carried my investigations so far into the depths" re-iterates and reproduces, on the level of the narrative, the stated attitude of Winnie Verloc "that life doesn't stand much looking into". Remember that, in the "Preface" to The Nigger Of "The Narcissus" (1897), Conrad defined the task of his art as "by the power of the written word, to make you feel, to make you hear, it is above all to make you see" [20]. In fiction the "reality" that you "see" is the product of verbal form and, in The Secret Agent, Conrad is making the point that the same is true in life. In the above passage we are made aware of this through the narrator's confession of ignorance which in a sense explodes the illusion of reference: it is more a refusal to look and speculate and thereby use words to direct vision, than an inability to "see". Thus he first encourages us to "see" what "might" lie below the surface of Verloc's appearance, and then he reminds us that anything we "see" there is only a matter of the words he uses. Hence the withdrawal of the word "diabolic", the application of which is first suggested by "gambling hells", and which may even be appropriate if one looks "far into the depths". Words come first, one's grasp on reality thereafter.

It is in this way, bouncing the reader in and out of the text, that Conrad promotes a consciousness of the way that language operates: in fiction and, in what is a very similar process, in those constructions of words we call beliefs and which constitute our relations with society. This is what I mean when I say that Conrad's analysis of society in this novel is anarchistic in its conception and effect. The anarchist theory of terrorism, propaganda by the deed, was based upon the idea that the sight of spectacular and negative acts of violence could induce in the observer an wareness of the desperation and suffering which support society. Placing a bomb in a crowded cafe is an act of terrible desperation and so its occurence proves the existence of such desperation. It is a spectacle which executes, on a level of action, what the anarchistic analysis of language does to social and political beliefs: it exposes them as rationalizations, mere verbal and logical formulae, covering and licencing vicious human desire. Thus Emile Henry, who placed such a bomb, claimed that his savage action was an engagement with the reality that lies behind social ideology. At his trial he described his progress towards terrorist expression: a Kurtz like descent to barbaric action:

> Each day I shed an illusion. Everywhere I went, I witnessd
>
> the same miseries among some, and the same joys among others.
>
> I was not slow to understand that the grand words I had been
>
> taught to venerate: honour, devotion, duty, were only the
>
> mask concealing the most shameful basenesses. [21].

His bomb was a demonstration of pure negation and his expression he called "the *voice* of dynamite" [22]. It was an attack upon the rhetoric which

disguised the true nature of the drives and passions which hold society together. Bombs force people to look and, by undermining the hold of words, to see the real nature of the relations which sustain their lives. The Secret Agent aims to reproduce this effect on every level of the text. Within the confines of the story, the exploding Stevie "detonates" or activates the most basic instincts and passions of the other characters: he explodes the fictions and tacit assumptions contained in the words people use to hide the nature of their desire. He makes them, and the reader, look and see. On the level of the narrative we are, as we have seen, made aware of the nature of representation: that every word which does not have a clear one-to-one correspondence with an object of sense, as is the case in fiction or belief or speculation, creates rather than represents reality. This is why the descriptions of London contained in the novel are either insistently metaphorical or versions of free indirect speech, seen from the perspective of the characters, and why the narrative voice itself is an implied rather than a definite presence: it is a kind of merging of all the characters' voices.

The Secret Agent, then, makes us see the fictions and falsifications which sustain a conservative society and the lives of individuals within it. It makes it clear that these are illusions and that they lead to relationships that are morally intolerable, if one looks "far into the depths". Yet paradoxically, this "anarchist" analysis is ultimately rejected by the novel because, while it is used as a method leading to a kind of truth, that truth is finally too unfeeling and undercuts the possibility of social existence. It is here that we again get to the very

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centre of Conrad's view of human life as built upon "sustaining illusions" [23], whose value is in their falseness. Man is a being split between selfish material instincts and rational thought. His consciousness and his life are therefore composed of the dialectical interaction of these forces: one provides his basic drives and the other mediates, socializes, and makes possible the fulfillment of them in co-operation with other men. This, of course, is a common enough idea and one that lies behind centuries of literature. However, what makes *The Secret Agent*'s *formulation of it modern* and interesting, and what turns it into a distinctively "Conradian" worldview, is the terrible ambivalence in which it is held. To apply this analysis is to arrive at a position where all the verbal superstitions that sustain social life are negated, and where man is no more than an isolated and selfish animal. *The Secret Agent* applies it, and in a sense endorses it as leading to a kind of truth, but it is also made clear that it also leads to the kind of end at which Winnie Verloc and the professor, each in their own way, arrive: "... an anarchistic end of utter desolation, madness and despair" (P.43). The "truth" of anarchism is tempting, but ultimately corrosive.

    The Secret Agent pushes us towards a vision of this "anarchistic end" and simultaneously makes us aware of how it is a denial of life itself: an expression of "scorn" at humanity and therefore subject to the same unmasking as a non-dialectical rationalization of desire as it applies to other ideas. What makes this novel tragic and properly dialectical is, to put it very simply, the addition of "pity": the recognition that thought alone (the "mad" pure thought of the professor) is merely destructive of the

very illusions that make life possible. Feeling must be fused with thought and fictions are the form in which it does so. Fiction is necessary because "life doesn't stand much looking into".

This perception, this "scorn and pity", is the source of the massive and tragic ambiguity of The Secret Agent: of its alternation of looking and turning away; of using words to analyse and then to deny the import and application of those same words. The text is massively conscious of words and therefore of itself because, as Conrad said, "things "as they re" exist in words: therefore words should be handled with care lest ..." [24]. The "things", reality, exist in words and thus in fictions. The writer or speaker is therefore responsible for the reality which he creates; and if that reality is intolerable he must be condemned. Upon this basis The Secret Agent condemns unambiguously both the exploitative language of established society and of the corrosive anarchistic alternative, because both are the agents of intolerable "things". For Conrad it was only the framed, formal language of his art that could lead him to a reality which was true in "thought and feeling" and therefore tolerable. And, of that, The Secret Agent is the expression.

But of course The Secret Agent is not a philosophical or linguistic treatise, but a novel. It contains little in the way of abstract statements. So in the next section I shall trace these ideas through the text in more detail and see how they shape and frame the whole novel.

In the buses and the trains and the trams the silent
passengers sit side by side and no man troubles about
his neighbour. But the mysteries of modern London are
represented in the crowded vehicle and in the packed
compartment. The quiet-looking woman sitting opposite
you in the omnibus knows the secret that the police have
been seeking to discover for months. The man who politely
raises his hat because he touches you as he passes from his
seat would, if the truth were known, be standing in the dock
of the Old Bailey to answer a capital charge.
            G.R.Sims The Mysteries of Modern London (1906) [25].

"I suppose I am impressionable and imaginative", confesses the

somewhat disingenuous narrator of "The Informer" (first published in A Set

of Six in 1908, but written just before The Secret Agent) [26]. It is a

quality which unites him momentarily in terroristic fantasy with his dining

companion and co narrator, the "polished" and "exquisite" Mr.X, "The

greatest rebel (revolté) of modern times" (P.72). In fact one of the ironies

that this story "unmasks" is just how united in appearance, temperament, and

tastes, these two apparently opposed men are. One is an English gentleman,

and the other, a foreign "firebrand" of the revolution; but the story

insists that they are both at base identical in lifestyle and spirit. What

divides them socially and politically is no fundamental divergence of

temperament, but more what seems to be a matter of pure accident given

reality and form by language: as if man realizes himself in terms of words

and images which he borrows from the world in which he finds himself. This

conception of human identity is one which Conrad developed throughout the

entire body of his work, but which assumed a special poignancy when he came
to a direct treatment of political subjects [27].

Thus when, over a quiet dinner table, Mr.X "remarked, casually,
in the course of conversation "There's no amendment to be got from mankind
except by terror and violence"...", the narrator continues, feigning shock:

You can imagine the effect of such a phrase out of such

a man's mouth upon a person like myself, whose whole

scheme of life had been based upon a suave and delicate

discrimination of social and artistic values. Just imagine!

Upon me, to whom all sorts and forms of violence appeared

as unreal as the giants, ogres, and seven-headed hydras

whose activities affect, fantastically, the course of

legends and fairy tales. (P.74).

This whole passage works as a kind of ironic counterpoint to everything that
has come before and everything that follows. The terms "such a man" as Mr.X
and "a person like myself", as if they came from different worlds as the
narrator tries to suggest, work directly against the suggestions of the
narrative up to this point: against the "frightful" discovery that Mr.X "was
not even Chinese", that he "wore a coat and hat like mine, and had pretty
near the same taste in cooking", as well as having that same "suave and
delicate discrimination" in the appreciation of bronzes which first brings
them together. The perception that Conrad moves us towards is that the
difference between these two men is largely a matter of the phrases that
they use and their relation to them. Mr,X survives as an "extreme writer" of
"flaming red revolutionary pamphlets" which threatened to "overwhelm the

powers of every continental police" (P.72). However his "phrases", the

embodiment of violent fantasy, seem to the narrator to possess only the

semantic status of "legends and fairy tales" or of the "anarchist" novels so

popular at this time. In keeping with Conrad's promise in the "Preface" to

The Nigger of the Narcissus, they make him "... hear above the festive

bustle and clatter of the restaurant the mutter of a hungry and seditious

multitude"; and then they make him "see" a "disturbing vision of darkness,

full of lean jaws and wild eyes, amongst the hundred electric lights of the

place" (P.74-75). This hell-like vision of reality is a direct product of

the words he has heard combined with his own imaginative and instinctive

responses: it is, in other words, essentially a literary experience in which

the listener is made to momentarily inhabit the world of the speaker, full

of the clichés of popular and journalistic fiction. Hence the "wonder and

terror" (P.75) with which Mr.X's books are received by his largely middle-

class audience and hence the accusation of "cynicism" which the narrator

levels against him (this is a point which, of course, is taken up in Under

Western Eyes in which the word "cynicism" could be said to denote something

like an unwillingness to consider the effects of one's words upon another:

or an unwillingness to distinguish between the proper expression of one's

personal desire and its metaphorical extension into political ideology).

It is within this context, of breaking down the distinctions

between political and artistic fictions, that "The Informer" implicitly

brings into question the validity of any claim to a detached or "objective"

perspective in politics or in the writing of novels. One's political

outlook, and hence one's social identity, is as much a part of the body of

words which are politics, as the authorial viewpoint is a part of that body

of words which is a novel. Thus the story Mr.X relates of the secret agent

Sevrin in effect forces the narrator to look into the world of anarchism and

find it peopled not, as he imagines by "ogres", but by people much like

those with whom he himself associates. "Even in England..." Mr.X reflects:

> "... where you have some common sense, a demagogue has only
>
> to shout loud enough and long enough to find some backing
>
> in the very class he is shouting at. You too like to see
>
> mischief being made. The demagogue carries the amateurs
>
> of emotion with him. Amateurism in this, that, and the
>
> other thing is a delightfully easy way of killing time
>
> and of feeding one's own vanity- the silly vanity of
>
> being abreast of the ideas of the day after tomorrow.
>
> Just as good and otherwise harmless people will join
>
> you in ectasies over your collection without having the
>
> slightest notion in what its marvellousness really
>
> consists" (P.75-76).

As we have seen, it was Kropotkin who in 1904 dismissed British anarchism as

"*anarchie de salon*-- epicurean, a little Nietzschean, very *snobbish*" [28]

and Conrad is making a similar point here. As his portrayal of the hostess

in The Secret Agent also demonstrates, Conrad had a scathing contempt for

that radical chic amongst the British aristocracy for entertaining and

supporting notorious figures from the anarchist world. Such engagement with

anarchism on the level of fashion was itself symptomatic of the decadence

and inertia of a society which could no longer provide a genuine stimulus or

creative opportunity for its members. Yet it was also, as Mr.X points out, a superficial "amatuerism" based on a complete failure to grasp the seriousness of anarchism. Conrad, on the contrary and as he assures us in the preface to The Secret Agent, was "serious" and his fiction administers a dose to aristocratic frivolity in the form of a vision of what anarchism really was. Thus, as the case of Winnie Verloc demonstrates, anarchism is a mode or form of feeling which can be made available to or forced upon anybody; and often with tragic consequences. And it is to clarify this point that Conrad employs two levels of narration in "The Informer": Mr.X's story does to the narrator what his narration does to us, which is to make us perceive the fragility of those words we use to structure and classify our identity and experience. Words such as political and fictional, or conservative and anarchist, soon begin to disintegrate under the force of Conrad's anarchistic irony. "Revolution, Legality- counter moves in the same game; forms of idleness at bottom identical" (P.94), to quote the Professor on the same point.

"The Informer" ends on a note which gathers up and detonates all the ironic parallels and oppositions that it has discovered. The narrator tells Mr.X's story to his friend in Paris, just as he tells us; and when he comments upon its cynicism, his friend replies:

"Oh, abominable! abominable!" assented my friend effusively.

"And then you know, he likes to have his little joke sometimes," he added in a confidential tone.

I fail to understand the connection of this last remark. I have been utterly unable to discover where in all this

the joke comes in. (p.96)

The point is, of course, that there is no "joke" and that the final irony is at the expense of the narrator's "wealthy, well connected and unprejudiced" (p.71) friend, who includes Mr.X amongst his collection of "curiosities". As becomes clear in _The Secret Agent_, anarchism a matter for only the most sardonic humour and the result of such misplaced "curiosity" in the activities of anarchists is not the exotic form of entertainment that the bored sophisticate imagines, but rather that "anarchistic end of utter desolation, madness and despair" (p.43) at which Winnie Verloc arrives.

In this story, therefore, we can see a simplified form of the narrative strategy which Conrad was to use in _The Secret Agent_ and which implicitly develops that anarchistic analysis of language as a rationalization of instinctive and egotistical desire. The uncomprehending narrator of "The Informer" perhaps does not see the "joke" because he does not want to: because to believe in Mr.X's "fairy tales" is to place anarchy at a respectable distance from himself, whereas the effect of the narrative ironies is to discover it within him. He is one of a series of character-narrators who enact that basic requirement of existence in a Conradian world: the need to avoid "looking" into things too deeply and to believe in the surface meaning, the illusion of reference, of words. This is the source of his genuine resistence to Mr.X's "phrases", which is less a horror of the vision they summon than a reaction to the "cynicism" with which they are wielded, because "I am sure that if such a faith (or such a fanaticism) once mastered my thoughts I would never be able to compose myself sufficiently to sleep or eat or perform any of the routine acts of daily life. I would want

no wife, no children; I could have no friends it seems to me ..." (P.73). To
use words in such total disjunction from the deeds one performs, as Mr.X
does, is to undercut the most fundamental tenets of social existence, to
leave oneself linguistically isolated, and to make life itself impossible.
It is, in fact, anarchy.

This technique, using a narrator in some way concerned with or
forced to attach themselves to the surface reality of words, finds its
fullest expression in The Secret Agent. Stevie is the extreme example of an
uncomprehending character baffled by the way men use language so cynically
(which he himself does not understand of course), and his simplicity is used
by Conrad as a method of implicit comment upon the divorce between words and
deeds in the world of the novel. Again this concern is so central that one
could turn to any section of the novel to demonstrate it, but the scene in
chapter three where Stevie overhears the the political debate of the
"anarchists" gathered in Verloc's parlour provides a particularly good
example. Conrad has so ranged his characters and their reactions to words as
to make the connections easy for the reader. Thus when Stevie "swallows"
Karl Yundt's "terrifying statement" like "swift poison" in the kitchen of
Verloc's house, his reaction is in direct distinction to every other
character:

> The venomous spluttering of the old terrorist without
>
> teeth was heard.
>
> "Do you know how I would call the nature of the present
>
> economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic. That's
>
> what it is! They are nourishing their greed on the

quivering flesh and warm blood of the people- nothing

else" (P.80).

Over the following six pages Conrad so ranges and implicitly counterpoints
the reaction, or lack of reaction, of each hearer of these words. Michaelis
for whom "the mere fact of hearing another voice disconcerted him painfully"
(P.75), "gave no sign of having heard anything" (P.80). The "robust Ossipon
yawned vaguely" (P.81). Verloc "was not satisfied with his friends. In the
light of Mr.Vladimir's philosophy of bomb throwing they appeared hopelessly
f tile" (P.81). According to his most basic instincts and desires each man
construes words after his own fashion; and so their reaction to the
description of society as "cannibalistic" (a description the novel in fact
bears out, because it too employs ideological "unmasking" and describes
London as "a cruel devourer" [29]) is a reflection of who they are rather
than anything the word might mean. In other words, they do not really react
at all, because Conrad is presenting us here with linguistically isolated
men who use words not to engage with others but to construct their own
verbal world: like Michaelis, they all refuse to understand the words of
others because that would interfere with the flow of the words they use to
shield themselves from social reality. Language is not transparent: it is
not a tool through which we see and understand the world but a medium in
which, to borrow a phrase from Under Western Eyes, we "commune with
ourselves". It is Stevie's reaction to Yundt's words which is the agent of
this "unmasking" of how language really functions: he "prowled around the
table like an excited animal in a cage" (P.83), the perfect victim of the

anarchist analysis his "heart pounding like a hammer" (P.86). As Winnie

says:

> "That boy hears too much of what is talked about here ...
>
> He was out of his mind with something he heard about
>
> eating people's flesh and drinking blood. What's the
>
> good of talking like that?"
>
> There was a note of indignant scorn in her voice ...
>
> "I had to take the carving knife from the boy... He
>
> was shouting and stamping and sobbing. He can't stand
>
> the notion of any cruelty." (P.86-87).

Where the others hear nothing, Stevie "hears too much". His "simplicity"

exposes that ironic distance from words which protects the others and allows

them to "stand the notion of ... cruelty". Central to anarchist criticism of

the corrupting effect of the intellectual complexity of modern society is

the idea that it is the metaphorical dimensions of language, its

systematized abstractions, which allows us to distance ourselves from our

own behaviour and therefore to tolerate and commit acts of cruelty and

exploitation. It is in this sense that Stevie is "the perfect anarchist" who

translates his humanitarian passion directly into action: because he is

oblivious to metaphor and takes language seriously [29], he is forced to

engage with the literal meaning of "cannibalistic" and reacts with the

horror that would possess anyone who thought that such a word was the

reflection of an objective, impersonal reality. Incapable of systematic or

conscious cruelty, he paradoxically expresses his disapproval of

"cannibalism" by prowling "around the table" with a "carving knife": an

action which is a poetic image of Yundt's "venomous" analysis of man's behaviour in society.

Stevie is Conrad's parody of the type of person who is possessed by the anarchist rhetoric and a confirmation of that certainty, felt by the narrator of "The Informer", of the personal disorder and disintegration that would follow if anarchism "once mastered my thoughts". But Stevie is not, of course, the target of Conrad's "scorn" in this novel: Stevie is an extremist, and Conrad, as his letter to Cunninghame-Graham demonstrates, respected extremists. Conrad's "scorn" is reserved, not for the honest anarchist in action, but for the dishonest "anarchists" in thought and word: for Michaelis, Verloc and Ossipon, whose failure to react to Yundt's description and readiness to "stand the notion of ... cruelty", is itself the expression of "scorn" at humanity. It is evidence of the failure to engage in that "solidarity" with one's fellow man which is the highest value in Conrad's moral world; and of that isolated "selfishness" which, in a squalid and degraded world that Conrad loathes, "preserves everything". Thus Conrad's art becomes the means by which he effects a corrosive criticism, not of the "extreme anarchists", but of the conservative "moral nihilism" of Verloc and his friends. They are men who preserve a corrupt and exploitative society by refusing to listen to others: by refusing to acknowledge and take responsibility for the suffering that such listening would reveal.

The Secret Agent then, like all of Conrad's art, is a challenge to the isolated egotism of modern society and the attempt to establish communication between men. To that end, it is anarchistic in the sense that it discovers and reveals the "secret" anarchism that lies within the hearts

of all its characters and behind the screen of their purely self-reflexive use of language. It is also anarchistic in the "respect" it evinces for the "extreme anarchists", whom Conrad praises elsewhere for being "justifiable" and "plain". And it is anarchistic in the sense that it makes us aware of the power embedded in language: it exposes our sophisticated and non-representational use of language as being the means by which we license exploitation and cruelty, and "preserve" a "Criminal" society. However, this anarchistic tendency is ultimately beheld only within the larger tragic "antagonisms" of Conrad's artistic thought; in which the limits of anarchism and the necessity of language are recognised. Thus Winnie's question, "What's the use of talking like that?", reproduces the central inquiry of the novel about its own method of analysis: what is the "good" of expressing anarchistic "scorn" at humanity's debased condition? The answer is, of course, that it is no "good". It is futile in the sense that, as in the reception of Yundt's self-communing words, it will not be listened to by the ordinary man and can express, at most, nothing more important than the speaker's own personal "venom". It is also futile in the sense that, even if it is listened to and taken seriously, it still begs the question of utility: what is the "use" of exposing a man to images of himself as a "cannibal" or as "an excited animal in a cage", when the most that it can achieve is "stamping and sobbing"?

Winnie's question is, then, also Conrad's question about the value of his art and his own use of the metaphorical dimensions of language. Conrad's notion of the purpose of his art, as being to "bind" humanity together, is an ideal of a form of communication or discourse operating

beyond the conditions that he exposes in the world of his novel. Thus all

the characters in The Secret Agent avoid true communication and when it does

occur, as when Winnie really understands her husband for the first time, it

leads merely to exposure of criminal secrets and an "anarchistic end". In a

tragic contradiction, words isolate us from the reality of the world and

sanction behaviour which could metaphorically be described as cannibalism,

but they also insulate us from the knowledge of the "vicious animal" that

lies beneath our social identity and thereby make society possible. For

Con ad, society is the "cage" which restrains men from being animalistic,

yet it is also "fundamentally criminal" because based upon the type of

"criminal" fictions which prevent communication and so "preserve" Winnie's

existence from being totally unbearable. It is against this idea of an

essentially "autistic" society that Conrad poses that ideal of artistic

communication and "recognition" that he outlined in 1901:

> Fiction, at the point of development at which it has arrived,
>
> demands from the writer a spirit of scrupulous abnegation. The
>
> only legitimate basis of creative work lies in the courageous
>
> recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make
>
> our life so enigmatic, so burdensome, so fascinationg, so
>
> dangerous-- so full of hope. They exist! And this is the only
>
> fundamental truth of fiction. ... whatever light he (the writer)
>
> flashes on it, the fundamental truth remains, and it is only
>
> in its name that the barren struggle of contradictions assumes
>
> the dignity of moral strife going on ceaselessly to a
>
> mysterious end-- with our consciousness powerless but concerned

> sitting enthroned like a melancholy parody of eternal wisdom
>
> above the dust of the contest. [30]

In art, as opposed to in life, "recognition" of the truth does not bring

destruction, but "dignity". Thus Conrad's ideal of artistic "consciousness"

as "powerless but concerned" is, like "scorn and pity", the ideal of a mode

of communication which can only occur as "art" and which combines

"recognition" of the truth with "solidarity" of feeling. Words, therefore,

must be "handled with care": must be used with an awareness and

u derstanding of their power to artistically construct, not politically

destroy, human fellowship. It is only in these linguistic terms that

Conrad's "conservatism" can be understood. It is not a political

conservatism, but the conservatism of the professional writer who withdraws

from the political world in order to "preserve" the integrity of his

language. As such it is a negation of both the isolated egotism of a

conservative society and the loose and "filthy loquacity" [31] of its

political alternative. And it is non-political in the same way that

anarchism is non-political and attempts to cut across conventional political

questions.

This awareness of language is, as we have seen, reproduced on

every level of The Secret Agent. So when Conrad described it as "A simple

tale of the nineteenth century" he was not merely refering to the traditions

of English realism, but also to the anarchist perspective which forms part

of his own complex worldview. He was refering to the simplicity of Stevie's

relationship with words and to that desire for simplification that the whole

novel expresses: the inevitable counterbalance to the complexity of Conrad's

own thought. On one level, of course, Stevie can also be seen as the parody

of the type of response Conrad hoped to provoke with his art: the ironic

embodiment of the author's power fantasy of using words to "move the world".

But, of course, Conrad overcame such fantsay and his novel is

not really "simple", neither in the life it represents nor in the way it

represents it. However, it is still essentially a "tale", in the sense that

it is organized and structured around a single and recurrent figure of

speech: at once both abstract and concrete, it is an idea embodied in an

action repeated and reflected on every level of the work. To discover what

this is we need to look no further than the "Author's Note" which explains

how the novel grew out of a vision:

> ... 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 for any passion,
>
> variety enough there for any setting, darkness enough
>
> to bury five millions of lives.   (P.40-41).

As we have seen, vision itself is a product of the type of discourse one

employs and reflects more closely the needs and feelings of the speaker,

than anything which might be said to lie outside of him in some kind of

objective existence. Conrad constantly makes us aware of this and makes no

"pretences" as to what kind of a discourse and vision his novel is: it is

the expression of a "mood", a union of "feeling and thought", with no claim

to scientific "realism" or objective representation of a reality outside of

itself. This is the substance of the novel, a commited vision discovering

the "monstrous" beneath the surface of "domestic" life, and it is organized,

as I have said, around a single figure of speech, "... the figures grouped

aroud Mrs.Verloc (are) related directly or indirectly to her tragic

suspicion that "life doesn't stand much looking into"" (P.41). In fact the

whole novel is an alternation of looking and not looking; of being forced to

see what one does not want to see; and of using words to construct a vision

only to then undercut and expose the illusion of reference that those words

project.

Thus, like "An Informer", The Secret Agent discovers anarchy in

the heart of "ordinary" individuals who naively suppose themselves to be

non-political and untouched by the guilt and ideological conflicts of their

society. As in the letter to Cunninghame-Graham, anarchy here can be defined

as that descent into the unmediated passion which lies below the surface of

the words we use, and which expresses a lack of faith in human reason. But,

of course, anarchism is also the struggle for human freedom and, in Conrad's

tragic vision, that is an aspiration which can only be constructively

expressed in art: in life it is merely equivalent to smashing the "cage"

that restrains the "excited animal" inside.

Winnie Verloc's fate is, of course, the paradigm of all this.

She has built her life upon fictions that the anarchistic activities of her

husband and brother destroy, and thereby convert her into an anarchist

possessed of a "sinister freedom". She has constructed her life around an

"ardour of protecting compassion exalted morbidly in her chidhood" (P.86),

which she is forced to realize in terms of the opportunities that society

presents to her and which she then represents in terms of language which covertly implicates her in the politics of her society She is the ultimate case of the reification, alienation and victimization of the indivdual by a society which, in providing the opportunity for individual to realize and express their passion, actually and sometimes tragically distorts that passion and turns it into something very different from the individual's conception of it. The best of human qualities, the "ardour", are thus susceptible to being put to the worst of ends. Thus Winnie's vision is the embodiment of that "ardour", mediated and given form by the words and images she borrows from her world; and, in this passage, she transforms the fact that Verloc is prepared to take Stevie out with him into an image embodying her desire:

> Winnie, at the shop door ... watched the two figures down
>
> the squalid street, one tall and burly, the other slight
>
> and short, with a thin neck, and the peaked shoulders raised
>
> slightly under the large semi-transparent ears. The material
>
> of their overcoats was the same, their hats were black and
>
> round in shape. Inspired by the similarity of wearing
>
> apparel, Mrs.Verloc gave rein to her fancy. "Might be father
>
> and son", she said to herself. She thought also that Mr.Verloc
>
> was as much of a father as poor Stevie ever had in his life.
>
> She was aware also that it was her work. And with peaceful
>
> pride she congratulated herself on a certain resolution she
>
> had taken a few years before. It had cost her some effort,
>
> and even a few tears.   (P.179).

She projects her passionate drives, in this case a displaced maternal instinct, onto the world and sees what she wants to see. So in this passge the mere "similarity of wearing apparel" is transformed, in one of her few flights of fancy, into a metaphorical image of the thing she desires: that they "might be father and son". She "thought in images" (P.235), Conrad tells us, with the consequence that she is totally isolated from those around her and unable to engage with the meaning of the words and hence the reality of even those people officially closest to her. Thus she constantly does not hear or misunderstands the things said to her, and her relationship with Verloc is based on an "accord of prudent reserve without superfluous words, and sparing of signs, which had been the foundation of their respectable home life" (P.235). Like her husband, her relationship to the society of which she forms a part is thus that of a secret agent and is centred around her relationship to its language: a relationship which is distinctly selective. She selects those words which seem to represent her needs, words like "wife" and "father and son", and disregards those which seem to interfere with their representation. Her question, "what is the good of talking like that?", could be more directly phrased as "what is the good of talking at all?"; and her fate in the novel proves that, coming too late, it is no good at all.

Winnie, essentially, has sacrificed and socialized her desires and made a "bargain" with society which means that physically she must sexually prostitute herself to Verloc, and metaphysically she must realize or define herself in terms of words and images which do not belong to her. Undisturbed this "bargain" would seem to be a good one, allowing her to live

a dishonest but "respectable" life. What she did not "bargain" for, however,
is this contract's implications for her. On a personal level, it implicates
her with a man possessed of an anarchistic contempt for contracts, who does
not fulfill his part of the marriage "bargain" and turns out to be a "moral
nihilist" prepared to "murder" his brother-in-law. On another level, through
him, it implicates her with a "criminal" society which also fails her in
that it does not provide the social security presumed to be involved in the
acceptance of the label "wife". This word in fact locks her into a
"annibalistic" political system so pervasive and interconnected that the
needs and decisions of foreign governments can find their vicious
fulfillment in the lives of the most private and non-political individuals.
It is a corrosively complex system and one "crying out" for the anarchist
solution.

And so, in accordance with the theory of propaganda by the deed,
the exploding Stevie sheds light on those around him and brings Winnie to an
awareness of the terms of her "bargain". She is forced to "see" the "truth"
of the anarchist analysis, that she has been exploited and deceived, as her
past is illuminated:

> The exigencies of Mrs.Verloc's temperament, which, when stripped
> of its philosophical reserve, was maternal and violent, forced her
> to roll a series of thoughts in her motionless head. These thoughts
> were more imagined than expressed. Mrs.Verloc was a woman of
> singularly few words, either for public or private use. With the rage
> and dismay of a betrayed woman, she reviewed the tenor of her life in
> visions ... but the visions of Mrs.Verloc lacked nobility and

magnificence. She saw herself putting the boy to bed by the light of

a single candle on the deserted top floor of a "business house" ...

the dreary shadow of the Belgravian mansion descended upon her

shoulders. It was a crushing memory, an exhausting vision of

countless breakfast trays carried ... of endless haggling over pence,

of the endless drudgery of sweeping, dusting, cleaning ... while the

impotent mother, staggering on swollen legs, cooked in a grimy

kitchen." (P.219-20).

She is forced at last to "look" into both the squalor and frustration in her

own experience that she has avoided seeing and, most tragically, into the

guilt that her existence as a social being necessarliy sponsors in her.

"Don't you make any mistake about it", warns Verloc cruelly, "if you will

have it that I killed the boy, then you killed him as much as I" (P.231);

and ultimately he is right, even though it is in ways he doesn't appreciate

and although it is a statement too unfeeling to be comprehensive "truth".

The exploding Stevie is, then, the "perfect detonator" of all

the hidden and submerged passions within the breast of his sister. It is a

political spectacle, a vision of a "rainlike fall of mangled limbs ... like

the last star of a pyrotechnic display" (P.233), and the perfect

representation of the power of politics to cripple and destroy the

individual life. Anarchism, in the world of the novel, is a "respectable"

and valid response to this "display"; and its rejection of language as the

agent of oppression is acted out by Winnie in her passage into anarchism,

"... what were words to her now? What could words do to her for good or evil

in the face of her fixed idea?" (P.225). It is, therefore, the intellectual

and verbal complexity of their society that is the undoing of the silent Vinnie and her simpleton brother, both of whom become anarchists before their end. The bomb smashes the cage in which they had been contained.

And it is not just the passions and vision of his sister that Stevie detonates, but those of all the other characters in the novel. Verloc is given, at the moment of his death, a vision of the chaos and "simple forocity of the age of caverns" that lies behind the ordinary and commonplace, "His wife had gone mad-- murdering mad" (P.234). Heat, Sir Ethelred, the Assistent Commisioner, Ossipon, are all forced by the promptings of their instincts of survival to look into what this "mystery" represents and all are thereby brought to an uncomfortable knowledge. The only exceptions to this are the novel's three true outsiders who have no real involvement in this society: Stevie himself, Vladimir, and the Professor.

Stevie, as we have seen, is in many ways the perfect anarchist: having no verbal facility himself he is truely outside of the linguistic fictions that sustain society and license oppression. Incapable of irony, ironically he sees right through the full meaning of the words people use: through their metaphors, to a full realization of the pain and horror of existence in a "cannibalistic" social world:

"I am a night cabby, I am ... I've got to take out what they will

blooming well give me at the yard. I've got my missus and four

kids at home."

The monstrous nature of that declaration of paternity seemed to

strike the world dumb. A silence reigned, during which the flanks

of the old horse, the steed of apocalyptic misery, smoked upwards in

the light of the charitable gaslamp ... In the face of anything which

affected directly or indirectly his morbid dread of pain, Stevie

ended by turning vicious. A magnanimous indignation swelled his frail

chest to bursting and caused his candid eyes to squint. Supremely

wise in knowing his own powerlessness, Stevie was not wise enough to

restain his passions. The tenderness of his universal charity had two

phases as indissolubly joined and connected as the reverse and

obverse sides of a medal. The anguish of immoderate compassion was

succeeded by the pain of an innocent but pitiless rage.   (P.165-66).

He fulfills, in other words, one version of that paradoxical archetype of

the anarchist mixing *positive idealism and negative violence: "immoderate*

compassion" and "pitiless rage".

       It is part of The Secret Agent's view of the "truth" of human

existence as finding expression only in statements which mix "feeling and

thought", that the only character to fully express the idea of proaganda by

the deed is also the most free of attachments and idealism. Vladimir's

"philosophy of bomb throwing" (P.66) is too unfeeling and too cynical to

express anything but the most absolute detachment from human society:

       "... what is one to say to an act of destructive ferocity

       so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost

       unthinkable; in fact, mad? Madness alone is truly

       terrifying, in so much as you cannot placate it either

       by threats, persuasion, or bribes."   (P.67).

Violent madness, the anarchistic stage of linguistic isolation in which you are not understood and do not understand others, is the object of Vladimir's agitation [32]. Ironically it is he, the man free of concern for human exploitation and oppression, who initiates the process and does most towards dismantling the machinery which makes them possible.

The Professor, the novel's other philosopher of violence and "perfect anarchist", is the other character whose vision remains essentially unaffected by Stevie's explosion, except as that becomes an image of the mistaken futility of his own activity. This is because he has already renounced words and society altogether and reached that "anarchistic end of utter desolation, madness, and despair" (P.43). He is Conrad's parody of the Stirner-esque egotistic anarchist and also owes something to the "lost man" of Bakunin and Nechaev's Revolutionary Catechism [33]. As such he represents another "respectable" extreme of psychopathic self-assertion, as opposed to Stevie's pyschopathic sympathy [34]. Like Stevie, Conrad introduces the Professor at strategic points in the novel in order to effect a comment on how close to that "anarchistic end" the other characters are. We first encounter him in chapter four, in the company of the "anarchist" Ossipon just as the news of the bomb is spreading. His conversation is placed in ironic counterpoint to that of the anarchists gathered in Verloc's parlour in the previous chapter:

"You revolutionists ... are the slaves of the social convention,
which is afraid of you; slaves of it as much as the very police
that stand up in defence of that convention. Clearly you are
since you want to revolutionize it. It governs your thought, of

course, and your action too, and thus neither your thought nor your action can ever be conclusive ... The condemned social order has not been built up on paper and ink, and I don't fancy that a combination of paper and ink will ever put an end to it, whatever you may think." (P.95).

Here the Professor reiterates the dilemma common to the revolutionary and the artist: how does one communicate a vision, a conception of a different order and system, when the very materials of one's expression-- "paper and ink"-- are a part of the "social convention" one fights against. And The Secret Agent is itself , of course, a "combination of paper and ink" and subject to the same limitations as all fiction. The Professor re-iterates the novel's suspicion of its own form: of the "forest of words" which compose every complex statement and which make the simplicity of direct unmediated passion tempting and attractive. Direct action is "clear" and "plain" and the Professor echoes the terms and attitudes of Conrad's letter to Coningham-Graham: he, like the letter, is the embodiment of that pure destructive and nihilistic rage; the negative side of idealism and infinitely more "clear" and "plain" than the words in which Ossipon and his companions "lose" themselves. Thus the Professor's faith in "the perfect detonator" is unambiguous and plain: with his Conradian "few simple notions" he goes to work like any respectable "bricklayer" [35] and, paradoxically, this "mad" criminal is the only character who does not act in secret in a criminal world.

In chapter five The Professor is moved into juxtaposition with Inspector Heat: a meeting which forces both of them to look at the

assumptions around which they construct themselves and to come to a
disturbing vision. Heat is forced to confront, in the person of The
Professor, a world of "mad" criminality and a mode of discourse with which
he is unable to deal:

> ... Chief Inspector Heat, arrested within six paces of the
>
> anarchist nicknamed the Professor, gave a thought of regret to
>
> the world of thieves- sane, without morbid ideals, working by
>
> routine, respectful of constituted authorities, free of all taint
>
> of hate and despair ...
>
> "You are not wanted I tell you," he repeated ...
>
> "Not yet. When I want you I will know where to
>
> find you".
>
> They were perfectly proper words, within the tradition and
>
> suitable to his character of a police officer addressing one of
>
> his special flock. But the reception they got departed from
>
> tradition and propriety. It was outrageous. The stunted, weakly
>
> figure before him spoke at last.
>
> "I've no doubt the papers will give you an obituary notice
>
> then..."
>
> With all his healthy contempt for the spirit dictating such
>
> speeches, the atrocious allusiveness of the words had its effect
>
> on Chief Inspector Heat. He had too much insight and too much
>
> exact information to dismiss them as rot ...   (p.111).

In one of the novel's many ironic inversions, here the policeman is
"arrested" by the criminal. Just as Vladimir predicts, the Professor is

"truely terrifying" because he is beyond the reach of the most basic

assumptions contained in language: the assumption of a common set of human

motivations and aims, mediated and reflected by a common language. He is

beyond social conventions and his existence reveals to Heat that implacable

world of "madness and despair" that lies beyond them. The Professor, on the

other hand, is also forced into an unwelcome awareness: the doubt as to his

own individual potency against a massive society represented to him by Heat:

> That was the form of doubt he feared most. Impervious to fear!
>
> Often while walking abroad, when he happened also to come out
>
> of himself, he had moments of dreadful and sane mistrust of
>
> mankind. What if nothing could move them? Such moments come
>
> to all men whose ambitions aim at a direct grasp upon
>
> humanity-- to artist, politicians, reformers, or saints.
>
> A despicable emotional state this, against which solitude
>
> fortifies a superior character ... (P.103).

The Professor's "despicable emotional state" is the projection of Conrad's

own feelings in his moments of solitary "doubt" and "fear". And, of course,

his work on the "perfect detonator" is the analogue of Conrad's literary

efforts to "move" humanity.

Unlike Conrad, however, it is not silence but words that the

Professor fears. Having once failed in his efforts to "raise himself in the

social scale", the perpetuation of his "exalted conviction of his merits" is

dependent upon his not being understood by a society which once failed to

understand him, and consequently treated him with "revolting injustice"

(P.98). That is his "fixed idea" and his expression of it is the embodiment

of the "simplicity" that Conrad found so attractive in anarchism. It is with
him, then, that the last words of the novel are concerned. After Stevie's
exlosion has given him an image of his own futility, his absolute self-
deception in believing that direct action can achieve anything is forcefully
registered:

> And the incorruptible Profesor walked too, averting
>
> his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had
>
> no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts
>
> caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked
>
> frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable- and terrible in
>
> the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to
>
> the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He
>
> passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the
>
> street full of men. (P.267).

This final picture of the Professor, a principle of death "unsuspected" in
the midst of life, has become one of the standard images of the anarchist in
our culture [36]. It can be seen as an emblem of what the novel as a whole
does: discovers anarchy in the midst of the ordinary and then turns away
from it as "shabby, miserable- and terrible". And yet, as I have shown, it
is a mistake to imagine that Conrad's engagement with anarchism in The
Secret Agent goes no deeper than a rejection of it on political grounds:
Conrad's criticism is equally directed against conservative as against
progressive political positions. It is significant therefore that Conrad's
final judgement on the Professor should be that "Nobody looked at him": a
recognition, not of the error of anarchist ideas, but of the futility of all

action in a political world in which nobody "looks" and nobody "hears".
Indeed, for Conrad, the opposite of anarchism is not conservatism, but art.

The Secret Agent is, then, a novel which is concerned with
recognizing the contradictions and pain at the heart of our social
existence, whilst simultaneously refusing the false resolutions and
intoxications of political thought and language. At its centre is that sense
of human dignity brought about by the powerless recognition attainable only
in art. As Conrad wrote in a letter to Arthur Symons about his work on Under
Western Eyes:

> One thing I am certain of is that I have approached the object
> of my task, things human, in a spirit of piety. The earth is a
> temple where there is going on a mystery play, childish and
> poignant, ridiculous and awful enough, in all conscience. Once
> in I've tried to behave decently. I have not degraded any quasi-
> religious sentiment by tears and groans; and if I have been amused
> or indignant, I've neither grinned nor gnashed my teeth. In other
> words, I've tried to write with dignity, not out of regard for
> myself, but for the sake of the spectacle, the play with an
> obscure beginning and an unfathomable *dénouement*. [37].

The contradiction at the heart of The Secret Agent is that its anarchistic
"scorn" and contempt for the world of revolutionary London, is combined with
that "spirit of piety" for human life which is the source of all value in
Conrad's moral and political vision. And at the centre of the novel is that
view of human nature which was perhaps most clearly formulated for Conrad by
the narrator of "An Anarchist", another short story from A Set of Six:

Warm heart and weak head~ that is the word of the riddle;
and it is a fact that the bitterest contradictions and
the deadliest conflicts of the world are carried on in
every individual breast capable of feeling and passion. [38].

Anarchism, the intoxication of pure feeling and violent action, is one kind
of reaction to, or resolution of, this conflict and pain; and as such it is
terribly appealing. Conrad on the contrary, whilst recognising that appeal
and feeling it in his bleaker moments, was concerned not to act but to write
in a political world. His art can therefore be seen as the attempt to work
out a more lasting solution to these problems by changing our relationship
with words, and only then with each other. It is in the way that _The Secret
agent_ sets out the problems and lays the groundwork of recognition for which
Conrad's next political novel, _Under Western Eyes_, seeks the solution.

<div align="center">*</div>

Notes:

1. Emile Zola, _Germinal_, trans. L.W.Tancock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954),
   p.237.

2. Letter to R.B.Cunningham-Graham (in french) declining an invitation to
   speak at a socialist rally. 8-2-1899. _Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad_,
   ed. F.R.Karl and L.Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983),
   Vol.2, p.30 (hereafter _CL_). Compare Bakunin's formulation, in "The Bear
   of Berne and the Bear of St.Petersburg", which represents the type of
   sweeping anarchist pronunciation Conrad was satirizing: "Crime is the

necessary condition of the very existence of the State" [Cited by Paul

Berman in Quotations from the Anarchists (London: Praeger, 1972), p.180].

3. Heart of Darkness, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.87. (further

page references in the text are to this edition).

4. The Secret Agent, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p.263. (All page

references within the text are to this edition).

5. The idea and purpose of "propaganda by the deed" has perhaps been

most clearly formulated by Alexander Berkman, the Russian anarchist

and attempted assassin of the American industrialaist Henry Frick

in 1892. In An ABC of Anarchism (1929), Berkman justified terrorism

as "a means of avenging a popular wrong, inspiring fear in the enemy,

and also calling attention to the evil against which the act of terror

was directed" [(London: Freedom Press, 1973), p.6]. The idea of the

writer as artistic "incendiary" was, as we have seen, part of the

anarchist aesthetic developed by George Woodcock (see chapter one).

6. "A few simple notions" ???

7. Letter to Edward Garnett of 18-10-1907. CL, Vol.3, p.304.

8. William Hazlitt on Coriolanus in The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays,

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), p.63.

9. Cited by F.M.Barras in _Maxim Gorky_, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.48.

10. Cited by K.Tillotson in _Novels of the Eighteen-Forties_. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.206-7.

11. Elizabeth Gaskill _Mary Barton_, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p.22. (All further page references in the text are to this edition).

12. As a side note it is interesting to consider Conrad's presentation of middle class leadership and political reform in the figure of the "revolutionary", reforming Sir Ethelred. His activities, it is clear, are impotent and irrelevant gestures in the light of the very real personal and political problems that Conrad reveals to us.

Felix Holt's vision is an evangelical and moral idea which actually ignores social and economic conditions as factors determining what is right and wrong. Thus he demands of the working class an impossible patience and understanding which nobody in the book, especially those in power, actually possesses.

13. George Eliot, _Felix Holt: The Radical_ (London: William Blackwood and sons, 1924), p.286.

14. J.Berthoud, _Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase_, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.132.

15.For a particularly interesting exposition of this idea see Taylor-Stoehe, _Words and Deeds_, (New York: A.M.S. Press Inc., 1986). Especially the chapter on Henry James.

16.Henry James, _The Princess Casamassima_, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.7. (All page references within the text are to this edition).

17.The phrase is from a letter from James to A.C.Benson of 1896. Cited by Taylor-Stoehe, _Words and Deeds_, (see note 15).

18.For Conrad there was, of course, more than simply James's imaginings to "fight against". Given his political and family background, Conrad was acutely aware of the power of literary "imaginings" to become weapons in political struggle and to voice the political hopes and aspirations of oppressed people like his own Polish nation. This, however, was not a power or potential that Conrad _understood to exist_ in the heavy formalism and inertia of a British political _culture in_ which literature was clearly identified as a particular form of fictional expression, distinct from what forms the political. In the essentially protestant and individualistic historical culture of Britain, unrestrained indulgence in political "imaginings" could lead only to the destruction of the truth of art and its descent into meaningless fantasy.

19._Under Western Eyes_, (London: Methuen, 1911), p.91.

20. "Preface" to The Nigger of the "Narcissus", (London: Dent, 1897), p.5.

21. Emile Henry, "A Terrorist's Defence" from George Woodcock, The Anarchist Reader, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p.190.

22. Woodcock, i.b.i.d., P.192.

23. Heart of Darkness, i.b.i.d., p.108.

24. Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters, ed. G.Jean-Aubry (London: Heinemann, 1927), Vol.1, P.280.

25. G.R.Sims, The Mysteries of Modern London (London: C.Arthur Pearson, 1906), p.81.

26. A Set of Six, (London: Methuen, 1908), p.75. (All further page references are to this edition).

27. Conrad, indeed, must have been acutely aware of the fragility and relativity of all political belief or identity. This was a consciousness forced upon him by the obvious anatgonism between his own identity, as an English novelist, and that of his father, "who wanted to serve-- and did serve-- his country with his pen" [Letter to Conrad from his uncle, Thaddeus Bobrowski, of 20-6-1881. Cited by G.Jean-Aubry in The Sea Dreamer (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1957), p.91].

28. Cited by Malcolm A. Miller, <u>Kropotkin</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.169.

29. In this respect, of being incapable of irony and metaphor, Stevie is very like Captain McWhirr of "Typhoon". McWhirr's direct simplicity is, of course, a source of value in the society he presides over. As the narrator comments:

> Having just enough imagination to carry him through each
>
> successive day, and no more, he was tranquilly sure of
>
> himself; and from the same cause he was not in the least
>
> conceited. It is your imaginative superior who is touchy,
>
> overbearing and difficult to please; but every ship Captain
>
> McWhirr commanded was the abode of harmony and peace. It
>
> was, in truth, as impossible for him to take a flight of
>
> fancy as it would be for a watchmaker to put together a
>
> chronometer with nothing except a two-pound hammer and
>
> a whip-saw in the way of tools. <u>Typhoon and Other Stories</u>
>
> (London: Heinemann, 1927), p.4.
>
> McWhirr is the embodiment of those "few simple notions", directed
>
> towards the fulfillment of a practical and moral duty, that *form*
>
> the ideal basis of social organization in a Conradian world.

30. <u>CL</u>, Vol.1, p.348-9.

31. "Filthy loquacity" is the term used to describe the vicious rhetoric of

Donkin, the "consummate artist" of rabble rousing in _The Nigger of the_

"Narcissus". Conrad's narrator describes the effect of his words on the

normally quiesent crew, effectively inventing their discontent:

> He talked with ardour, despised and irrefutable. His picturesque and
>
> filthy loquacity flowed like a troubled stream from a poisoned source.
>
> ... We were oppressed by the injustice of the world, surprised to
>
> perceive how long we had been under its burden, without realizing our
>
> unfortunate condition, annoyed by the uneasy suspicion of our
>
> undiscerning stupidity.
>
> (London: Dent, 1902), p.101-2.

32. Vladimir's theory of terrorism, as purely absurd and meaningless

expression, beyond even the more traditional confusion of freedom and

violence from which the terrorist suffers, is not as fanciful or

unlikely as one imagines. Consider the German terrorist Hans-Joachim

Klein who, amongst other actions, was involved in the kidnapping of

OPEC ministers in the 1970's. In 1978 he gave an interview to

Der Spiegel, in which he outlined his ideal of propagandistic acts

and gave one example:

> We asked ourselves ... what would be an action that no one can
>
> disregard ... We looked for a focal point where everything
>
> would come together: the Germans still wrestling with their
>
> past; the newly arising Palestinian problem; a starting gun
>
> for an urban guerrilla fight. Such an action that could not be

disregarded by anyone, from liberals to old nazis, ... We

found it: a bomb exploding in the Jewish community house--

on the very anniversay of Kristallnacht ... Even though the

bomb did not explode, this story went halfway around the

world.

> [quoted in "Lost in the Terrorist Theatre", Harper's,
> Oct. 1984, p.51].

33. The full formulation is:

> The Revolutionary is a lost Man; he has no interests of his own,
> no cause of his own, no feelings, no habits, no belongings; he
> does not even have a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single
> exclusive interest, a single thought and single passion-- the
> Revolution. [Cited by Franco Venturi, The Roots of Revolution
> trans. francis Haskell (London: Wiedenfield and Nicholson, 1960),
> p.365].

34. Obviously I do not use the term pyschopath here to mean simply
the popular notion of a murderous individual (although Stevie and
the Professor are clearly capable of murder), but in the sense in
which Sanguinetti uses it (see chapter four). That is to signify the
pathological condition of a person or institution that has become so
isolated from the world, as to interpret it solely in the light of
its own egotistical interest and desire. To be a psychopath is, like
the Professor and Stevie, to either anarchistically spurn or to be

ignorant of the ethical systems which intervene between our emotions and our actions.

35. In the essay "Guy de Maupassant" Conrad spoke of the similarity between his own conception of "literary honesty" and the "ideal honesty of the respectable majority, ... the honesty of law-givers, of warriors, of bricklayers, of all those who express their fundamental sentiment in the ordinary course of their activities, by the work of their hands" [Notes on Life and Letters (London: Dent, 1921), p.30]. Again the desire that Conrad most clearly expresses is for that simple engagement with the world obtainable in direct action, as opposed to the high complexity of his own art (see chapter eight).

36. The influence of this image can easily be appreciated by a cursory glance through the numerous books on anarchism whose authors feel obliged to mention Conrad's character as the stock type of the anarchist, if only to contradict Conrad's version of anarchism. Typical in this respect is Peter Marshall's Demanding the Impossible (1993) an extremely fine history of anarchism, which opens with an acknowledgement of the influence of Conrad's portrayal:

The anarchist finds good company, it seems, with the vandal, iconoclast, savage, brute, ruffian, hornet, viper, ogre, ghoul, wild beast, fiend, harpy and siren. He has been immortalized for posterity in Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* (1907) as a fanatic intent on bringing down governments and civilized society.

(London: Fontana Press, 1993), p.ix.

37. Letter of 29-8-1908. Cited by G. Jean-Aubry in _The Sea Dreamer_ (London: George, Allen and Unwin, 1957), p.254.

38. _A Set of Six_ (London: Methuen, 1908), p.143.

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Chapter Nine:

The Perfect Reader.

"To find beauty, grace, charm, in the bitterness of
                        truth is a graver task."
                                J.Conrad, "A Glance at Two Books" [1].

"It must not be supposed that I claim for the artist in fiction

the freedom of moral nihilism," insisted Conrad in "Books", an article

written in 1905, shortly before he began The Secret Agent (1907). He

continued:

> I would require from him many acts of faith of which the first
>
> would be the cherishing of an undying hope ... What one feels so
>
> hopelessly barren in declared pessimism is just its arrogance.
>
> It seems as if the discovery made by many men at various times
>
> that there is much evil in the world were a cause of proud and
>
> unholy joy unto some of the modern writers. That frame of mind
>
> is not the proper one in which to approach seriously the art of
>
> fiction ... To be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary
>
> to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that
>
> there is no impossibility of its being made so. [2].

Conrad later repudiated this article, but this particular formulation

nevertheless deserves our attention for three reasons, all of which bear

directly upon the form and purpose of his political fiction. Firstly it

demonstrates, along with so many of his public statements about art and its

purpose, Conrad's sensitiveness to the charge of "pessimism" so often

leveled at him [3]: the charge that in his fiction he in fact exercises that

"freedom of moral nihilism" he disclaims, to produce a terroristic, bleak

and despairing vision of the world. Secondly, and relatedly, the terminology

that Conrad employs here, that "freedom of moral nihilism," hints that

behind that sensitiveness lies a deeper fear of the power of literary

fiction to become a potentially anarchistic force in the world: a fear that

fiction could become, in an inversion of its proper purpose, a means of

loosening the "bonds" which hold people together. Thirdly, and very basis of

these first two reasons, the polemical form of this statement and the

opposition Conrad constructs between the "act of faith" of "cherishing of an

undying hope" and the "discovery" of "much evil in the world," alerts us to

the fact that his romantic and heroic conception of the role of the literary

artist in society, of which this formulation is an expression, is a

extension of or inference from a larger conception of the purposes and duty

of all men.

This "cherishing" of a belief that "there is no impossibility"

of the world being "made" "good" despite the "discovery" of "evil," which

Conrad prescribes for the "artist in fiction" here, is in fact a pre-

condition of all work and even of survival in the tragic fictional world of

his novels; where all such beliefs are subjected to an ideological unmasking

and beheld, in the terms of The Secret Agent, in the antagonistic lights of

"scorn and pity". And so that "faith," the rejection of "declared

pessimism," which Conrad requires of the artist is only a special version of

what he requires of every man: to seek a means of positive commitment to his

fellow man with the "hope" of making the world a better place. As he

remarked in the preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus (1897), the purpose

of the artist is to reveal the feeling of "solidarity ... in hope, in

uncertain fate, which binds men to eachother and all mankind to the visible

world" [4], and this purpose is only a special case of what every man must

do because he is self-conscious about the means of his commitment and

"solidarity"; and because his "act of faith" can be realized only in terms

f words, the very stuff of fiction, as opposed to deeds, the material of

fact.

Let me be absolutely clear about what I mean here. Conrad's

public statements about art, and his art itself, are centrally concerned

with and move towards the breaking down of the distinctions between the

artist and the ordinary worker, between the "fictional" and the "real", and

between the processes of inventing stories and of understanding our lives.

The artist invents "fictions", constructions of words, which claim to

reflect or represent the "real" world outside of that fiction. The

individual speaks of facts, of things and deeds, and thereby also claims to

represent a reality outside of the words he employs. As we have seen in The

Secret Agent and as we shall see in Under Western Eyes (1911), Conrad's

fiction is centrally concerned with foregrounding the essential similarities

of these two activities. For Conrad, all forms of human expression emerge

from the same conditions and needs, and so are bound by the same moral

requirement: that, if they occur in the public domain, the artist or speaker

must be responsible to his fellow man for the effect his words, or his work,

have. That effect, of course, is not simply a correlative of the factual

truth or falsehood of any statement, whereby truth leads to positive and

falsehood to negative results (the categories of absolute truth and

falsehood are, in any case, absent in Conrad's work; and language is not a

simple representational medium). It was Marlow, Conrad's spokesman in Heart

of Darkness (1899), who reflected that there "is a taint of death, a flavour

of mortality in lies-- which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world

..." [5]; but Marlow also goes on to tell lies. He does so because the claim

f the human and living delusion, the "saving illusion," his lie preserves

is greater than that of the dead and darker truth he kills. In other words,

the artist and the ordinary worker are bound by the same "simple idea" of

"fidelity" to the "temporal world" of man and his needs; and the artist must

be "tied to the earth (even as the hewers of wood and drawers of water are

tied to the earth) in the exercise of one's imagination, by every scruple of

honour and conscience ...," to borrow Conrad's words from his essay "John

Galsworthy" [6]. As Conrad remarked in another essay, "Guy De Maupassant":

> ... literary honesty ... does not differ greatly from the
>
> ideal honesty of the respectable majority, from the honesty
>
> of law-givers, of warriors, of kings, of bricklayers, of all
>
> those who express their fundamental sentiment in the ordinary
>
> course of their activities, by the work of their hands. [7].

This is at the same time a highly romantic and a severely realistic

conception of the work of the artist and of man: each must discover and

express in that work "undying hope" whilst remaining honestly "tied" to the

actual facts and conditions of human existence, however "evil" they might

be. And it is out of the dialectical antagonism of these two principles of

thought and work that the "truth"-- the expression of the mixture of

material needs and human idealism-- emerges.

And it is, of course, in the "irreconcilable antagonism" within

Conrad's own work of these two requirements of art and life, that the

"truth" of his "temperamental" art consists: its "honesty" and "hope"

guaranteed by the fact that the author, in the process of writing, is

seeking the solutions to the same problems of "solidarity" as the characters

who are the objects of his representation. Any rigid boundaries between what

is fiction and what is real are thus abolished in Conrad's art, as is

clearly attested to in this formulation from 1904 in which he defines

himself against the literary traditions of England:

> The national English novelist seldom regards his work-- the
>
> exercise of his art-- as an achievement of active life by which
>
> he will produce certain definite effects upon the emotions of
>
> his readers, but simply as an instinctive, often unmeasured,
>
> outpouring of his own emotions. He does not go about building
>
> up his book with a precise intention and steady hand. It never
>
> occurs to him that a book is a deed, that the writing of it
>
> is an enterprise as much as the conquest of a colony. [8].

The justice of Conrad's criticism of English literature here is irrelevant.

What is crucial, however, is his implied attack upon the conventionalized

distinctions, which exist in a historical and formalized culture, between

what forms the "literary" and what forms the "real"; between what is a word

and what is a "deed". "The national English novelist," whoever he might be

(he later uses the example of Thackery), represents to Conrad that school of

thought which regards literature as predominantly a form of self-expression;

as an "outpouring" of the individual artist's thoughts and emotions set down

without any consideration of the moral or political effect his work might

have. Conrad did not necessarily have an argument to make against such

"outpourings" of emotion in themselves. Indeed, in "A Familiar Preface"

(1911), he remarked "I think that all ambitions are lawful except those that

climb upwards on the miseries or credulities of mankind. All intellectual

and artistic ambitions are permissible, up to and even beyond the limit of

prudent sanity. They can hurt no one" [9]. He did, however, have a problem

with what such "outpourings" could do to the reader of fiction, in the sense

that they place him in a passive and detached position as the recipient and

uninvolved observer of an officially sanctioned literature or literary

spectacle (I use the term "spectacle" here in the anarchist-situationist

sense, from which Conrad was not very distant, of art as a cultural

commodity presented as a finished product to the masses of men, who are

thereby alienated from the artistic process). For Conrad, purely

"instinctive" and emotional works can derive their literary authority, not

from the truth and "solidarity" with which they speak, but from the fact

they occur within the conventions of the "literary" or "fictional"

expression. The "fictional" is, of course, a category traditionally distinct

from what defines the "real" in a formalized culture, and so accorded less

credibility and less influence over how we live our lives than other forms

of discourse. The ultimate effect of the "English" conception of art is,

thus, the disempowering of literature as a force in the world: turning a "deed" into a mere "book".

And, of course, we must remember at this point that Conrad came from a social, cultural and political tradition altogether more turbulent and far less formalized than the long historical traditions in which the "national English novelist" worked: a tradition in which the "artist in fiction" tended to become a social and political commentator, and in which the political thinker tended to express himself in artistic forms (his father, Apollo Korzeniowski, and Dostoyevsky are but two particularly pertinent examples of this [10]). In the Poland of Conrad's childhood, a land of political and cultural repression, there was no clear formal barrier between the "literary" work, which represented imaginary and fictional truths, and the political work, which represented apparently real and factual truths. The comfort of believing that one's novels will be looked upon as purely literary and artistic exercises, as pure aestheticism, was therefore not available to Conrad. Consequently, he really had little choice but to identify himself against what he thought of as this "English," passive conception of the novel and to regard it as naive: as a expression of local cultural conventions and forms which it is the duty of the true artist to unmask so as to reveal the "truth" behind them, and so to construct the conditions under which he can begin to make his "appeal" to "all mankind". For Conrad, therefore, the novel is an action, "a book is a deed", because it enters and constructs the public domain (the language; the social, cultural and ideological reality of its "temporal world", in which

all men must live) exactly as a "bricklayer" constructs the world by his

work. And, like the "bricklayer", the artist must render "good service":

... I have carried my notion of good service from my earlier

into my later existence. I, who have never sought in the

written word anything else but a form of the beautiful, I

have carried over that article of creed from the decks of

ships to the more circumscribed space of my desk; ... [11].

"Good service" is outward and not inward looking. So the artist must not

look solely to his own emotions in his work, but must consider the "certain

definite effects" his book will have upon "the emotions of his readers" and

thus set up the conditions under which author and reader can co-operate in

creating the meaning of a work. Just like work on the "decks of ships,"

fictions-- whether the work of the artist or the beliefs we construct to

understand or disguise our own actions-- must recognise and promote the

"hope" of solidarity amongst men. Otherwise, contrary to Conrad's

formulation quoted above, "artistic ambitions"-- fictions-- can "hurt".

It is this perception then, of the power of fictions to both

fortify and hurt us, that is both the controlling moral principle behind

Conrad's artistic "work" and, especially in the political fiction, at the

same time its subject. It is what lies behind his reflection, in "A Familiar

Preface," on the difficulties faced by the author who turns to his own

experience and imaginings for his subject without the support of literary

and social conventions to temper and control his expression:

In that interior world where his thought and his emotions go

seeking for the experience of imagined adventures, there are

no policemen, no law, no pressure of circumstances or dread

of opinion to keep him within bounds. Who is then going to

say Nay to his temptations if not his conscience? [12].

Like the nihilistic characters in his fiction-- like the Professor in The

Secret Agent or like Razumov in the first part of Under Western Eyes-- the

"temptation" to which the novelist is exposed is that of using fictions,

whether consciously or not, to negate the rights of others or to indulge in

the "freedom of moral nihilism". Finding himself outside the "bounds" of a

controlling social context, the novelist is "tempted" to "exaggeration," to

imagining that his own "insistent emotion" is the "only reality in an

invented world" [13] which he can therefore express without regard for the

effect of his words on others. If he succumbs to it, the result is a fiction

that is in effect an abuse of words since, in ignoring the actual and real

conditions of human existence, it negates rather than promotes that social

"solidarity" amongst men which is the very source of the language of which

it is constructed. Thus fictions, in the name of communicating "truth," act

like lies to construct in the reader a false view of reality; novelists

become linguistically isolated, do not enter into true dialogue with their

society and so negate their own claim to be expressing "truth"; and "novel-

writing" becomes "a mere debauch of the imagination" [14]. In other words,

art has become an anarchistic force in the world.

It is here that we once again come to the very centre of

Conrad's view of human life as being a dialectical process built in part

upon fictions. Man, in the Conradian view, is an isolated being motivated by

deep material drives and desires which are mediated and given form,

direction and cultural meaning by language. The language of a society is therefore the public domain, the conscious and public part of reality, in which is built the fellowship between men which makes possible the fulfillment in co-operation of those drives and desires. In doing so, however, words do not simply represent the reality of those drives in a direct one-to-one corespondence between words and things, but rather they disguise or "mask" them in verbal formulations-- in fictions-- which provide man with an ideal and socially acceptable reflection of his own "selfish" and "vicious" motivations, to echo the terms of a Conrad letter to Cunningham-Graham written at a time when he was not being true to his own prescriptions [15]. But, of course, words do not just reflect and find the ideal value in those motivations, because this is a truly dialectical process and words in fact go back to work upon reality: they control and shape the expression of human motivation, giving it a specific cultural and political identity. Human idenity and, to some extent behaviour, is thus dependent upon fictions: upon verbal formulations that the individual discovers in his world and adopts to his own ends but never fully controls. This is why Conrad charges the "English" novelist with being naive: since he is trapped within a culture and ideology which regards the production of fictions as a discrete area of human activity distinct from "real" work, he cannot appreciate how his own works of fiction construct a "spectacle" which places his audience in the role of passive receivers and so re-inforce the social-ideological reality of his age in which the "ordinary" worker does not engage in artistic activity, but only observes it. Consequently he is never fully conscious or in control of the effect of his own expression.

Consider Razumov, for example, said to have a "frigid English" [16] manner. His fate becomes the paradigm of the reasons why Conrad identified himself against that conception of art as only individual self-expression; and, in what is a very similar thought process, why he denied the legitimacy of ideological political thought in his life and in his ficton. Razumov, we are told in the "Author's Note" (1920), is "an ordinary young man with ... an average conscience" (p. 4) whom Conrad has projected into a very un-English and unstable social environment which forces him to live through, see, and experience directly the very concrete effect of the social and political fictions which he and others generate in the course of their activity. As the narrator remarks, "It is unthinkable that any young Englishman man should find himself in Razumov's situation" (p. 10); indeed it is, since he is ultimately forced to see behind the conventions and fictions which sustain a social and ideological system by the very weakness and transparency of these things in Russia.

Being alone in the world, Razumov-- like the author who "descends within himself"-- depends to an exceptional and initially unacknowledged degree, upon the forms and conventions of his society for his identity and for his power to act: upon social and ideological traditions to shape, classify, and control his work and expression. Consequently he is victimized and rendered powerless by the lack of these things in any historically coherent or distinct form which, as the narrator tells us, characterizes Russian society. Even his intellectual ambitions, his pursuit of recognition in the form of the "silver medal", is thus made dependent

upon a political allegiance which requires him to surrender his personal

integrity to an outside power. As the narrator tells us:

> His closest parentage was defined in the statement that
>
> he was a Russian. Whatever good he expected from life
>
> would be given to or withheld from his hopes by that
>
> connection alone. This immense parentage suffered from
>
> the throes of internal dissensions, and he shrank mentally
>
> from the fray as a good-natured man may shrink from taking
>
> definite sides in a violent family quarrel. (p.13).

Razumov is ultimately a victim of the conflicting ideological fictions which

form the public domain in which he lives. His act of desperate self-

preservation, betraying Haldin and himself, is publically expressed as an

"act of providence" affirming the power and authority of Russian autocracy

beyond all other claims. Thus he is "made a personage without knowing

anything about it" (p.73), by his fellow students who believe he is a

revolutionary. "Life is a public thing" (p.49) reflects Razumov, and for him

this is true because he has to seek the meaning of his life, his

"solidarity" with his fellow man, entirely in the public domain; and that,

in the Russia of Under Western Eyes, means that he enjoys-- or, perhaps more

appropriately, suffers from-- the "freedom of moral nihilism".

Razumov's delusion up to the point where Haldin enters his room

is precisely the idea that he may "shrink" from the "quarrel": that his work

and his self-expression, like that of the "English national novelist," is

personal and non-political because formally or conventionally distinct from

what forms political and ideological activity. Indeed change "Russian" to

"Pole" here-- the "Pole" of Conrad's christening poem-- and one would have
an extreme case of Conrad's own predicament at the start of his career, and
perhaps it is possible to say that Razumov's fate is a version of one of the
options available to him [17]. Thus, like Conrad who was caught between the
antagonistic forces of his father's nationalist political mysticism and his
own sceptical assessment of the real conditions in Poland guided by his
uncle's more sober advice to seek a career in the Tsarist state, Razumov is
caught between:

> ... the people and the enthusiast.
>
> Between the two he was done for. Between the drunkenness of
> the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of
> the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things, and
> the true character of men. It was a sort of terrible childishness.
> But children had their masters. "Ah! the stick, the stick, the
> stern hand," thought Razumov, longing for the power to hurt and
> destroy. (p.30).

Conrad, it could be said, continued to "shrink" "mentally from the fray"
until he came to write this book, but Razumov as we see here embraces other
kinds of fiction: the fictions of ideological language. As the anarchist
Georges Sorel explained, ideology is not "ordinary language" but "a body of
images which, by intuition alone, and before any considered analysis be
made, is capable of evoking as an undivided whole [a] mass of sentiments"
[18], and this is precisely what Razumov's language does here. Working by
association rather than analysis, Razumov's mind slips through images of
"children" to "masters" and finally to "the stick" which becomes the formula

of the "mass of sentiments", the fear and frustration, he experiences at Haldin's interruption of his life and hopes. Razumov, remember, has an 'average conscience": he is one of "the respectable majority ... who express their fundamental sentiment in the ordinary course of their activities, by the work of their hands", as Conrad put it in the "Guy De Maupassant" essay. Thus the "stick" with which has just beaten Ziemianitch, the concrete symbol of his personal sentiment, is transformed by its entry into Razumov's language into a political and social icon which fixes his relation to his world and his place within its ideological conflicts. And it is based, like all ideological constructs, upon the denial of the value of others and the conception of the individual as the recipient rather than the generator of ideas: the "child" to be educated, rather than the "master" who educates.

As I have said, it is this power to imaginatively extend the concrete and particular object or feeling into a political-ideological reality through the generalizing tendency of language, that lies at the root of Conrad's rejection of both ideological thinking and that practise of fiction writing as individual self-expression. Conrad in fact comes very close to the anarchist position in his analysis of the role that verbal abstraction plays in the conduct of our lives: of the way that words lock us into a power system which insulates us from the reality of our actions and allows us, sometimes indeed forces us, to commit deeds which we would otherwise be unable to morally countenance. The narrator of Under Western Eyes makes much the same point as this in a passage from the manuscript which was excised from the novel:

It may be that when Mr. Razumov seized the pen it was with the

intention of building up in written words a resting place for

his remembered sensations to the end that they should cease

haunting him in all their force. It does not require the

animosity of an old man and weary teacher of languages to

discover that words are but the grave of all that makes a

thought wonderful and an emotion poignant. Involved in the

commonplace associations of speech, thought becomes acceptable

to the commonplace world and emotion bearable to the relieved

soul. [19].

Individual man seeks a reflection of himself in words which denude him of

his very individuality and which transform his unique and personal

experience, his "thought" and "emotion", into reflections of the "common"

experience of all men: into verbal constructions, fictions, which fit his

identity into formal types or catagories which can be understood and

accepted by other men.

This, indeed, is the very source of that sense of "solidarity"

which Conrad believed it was the purpose of language and fiction to

generate. However, as nothing is simple or one-sided in the Conradian world,

it is here that we approach another of those "irreconcilable antagonisms";

for that same power of words to bond men together is what allows them to act

as an anarchistic force in the world. Thus Razumov's "stick" becomes the

formula of a negative and nihilistic mode of thought and Razumov himself

effectively becomes an anarchist when he seeks the solution to his own

peculiar problems in the anarchistic, "commonplace", public domain: in the

fictional analogues to his own experience provided by ideology. Hence his

own inability and reluctance to take action in order to save Haldin pushes

him into the psuedo-mystical perception of Russia as the embodiment of:

> ... a sort of sacred inertia. Razumov felt a respect for it.
> a voice seemed to cry within him, "Don't touch it". It was a
> guarantee of duration, of safety, while the travail of maturing
> destiny went on-- a work not of revolutions with their passionate
> levity of action and their shifting impulses-- but of peace. What
> it needed was not the conflicting aspirations of a people, but a
> will strong and one: it wanted not the babble of many voices, but
> a man- strong and one! (p.32).

"God (is) the autocrat of the universe" (p.11) asserts Mr.de P--, in an

ideological proposition which sets up the fiction of a metaphysical

authority which sanctions his work of violent repression and which, as we

see here, Razumov invokes in order to absolve himself from his bond and

responsibility to his fellow man. Thus, like the author in that "interior

world" who imagines that his own "insistent emotion" is the "only reality in

an invented world", Razumov is "tempted" into "exaggeration" of his own

sentiments, and into the "freedom of moral nihilism". He therefore borrows

the material of the public domain-- the words and images of his time and

place-- to construct a vision of the world in which "All a man can betray is

his conscience" (p.35); as if the individual's "moral bond" to his fellow

was a function of whatever particular political ideology he cares to invoke.

Thus Razumov uses words anarchistically to send Haldin to his

death in the name of "society"; in the name of another *form* of human

"solidarity" with "it" [Russia]; and to smash the "solidarity" between men

which language creates. Between the actor and his act, and between the act

and its impact, he places the shadow of verbal abstraction; and he becomes

the living example of Conrad's general belief that all ideological language

is ultimately anarchistic in its effect, because it is "disguised" and

assertive self-expression, and based upon the negation of the "living

appeal" of the value and activity of others. And, of course, his fate also

becomes the model of the final self-destructiveness of engaging in this kind

of thinking: his recognition that "it was myself, after all, whom I have

betrayed most basely" (p.302) registers the complex truth that the self-

deception and isolation he has experienced, has occured only because he had

a particularly strong commitment to being rational and social in a situation

where that reason is overridden by the fear of his life descending into

chaos; of "sinking into the lowest social depths amongst the hopeless and

destitute-- the night birds of the city" (p.25). Thus to think ideologically

and to use ideological language is to ignore the existence of "bonds" and

commitments which one possesses and the authority of which one in some sense

acknowledges: it is to rationalize, like Razumov, decisions one comes to

instinctively and irrationally.

Razumov's experience of deception and of the destructive effect

of his deeds provides, then, an analogue of Conrad's objections to that

other kind of fictional "disguising" of one's "outpourings of emotion" to be

found in fiction. It points out, with the assistance of the narrator's

commentary, the essential similarity of the artistic and ideological

processes of generating fictions and becomes the means by which Conrad

insists upon the ethics of such activity: that each fictionalizer must be

"tied" to the "earth" in the production of fictions, whether that be in the form of the "living appeal" of a man like Haldin or a proper working engagement with his audience based upon the recognition and acceptance of the "real conditions under which men live". In Under Western Eyes, therefore, Conrad was seeking the ground for another kind of communication through fiction based partly upon the anarchist criticism of that formal cultural hegemony, which situates the individual outside of the artistic and ideological process, and partly upon the formalistic criticism of anarchic cultural freedom, which potentially empowers and legitimizes the nihilistic and "selfish" desires which men possess. It is a communication based upon the activization and the participation of the consumer of art; upon a working dialogue between author and reader from which the meaning or "truth" of a work emerges, and which is itself the model of that "solidarity" between men which is the aim of art. Again, the paralell to Conrad's own personal situation is clear and relevant since, as Keith Carabine has argued:

> ... Conrad's determination to capture "the very soul of things
>
> Russian" actually involved, as he slowly realized, an exploration
>
> and a reassessment of his troubled, divided feelings with regard
>
> to his Polish past and heritage. Razumov's dilemma and his
>
> different modes of writing began to refract Conrad's own need
>
> to seek "discourse" with, to be understood by and, perhaps, to
>
> exorcise, his haunting, inescapable Polish shades. [20].

In this novel, then, Conrad confronts and seeks the solution to the problems arising, not only from the fact that he was a writer living in England and

thereby forced to work within a highly formalized cultural tradition, but also from the insight bestowed upon him by his experience of the anarchy of Russian dominated Poland.

Thus the big question which lies behind Under Western Eyes, and which it attempts to answer, is whether such a perfect and ideal communication is possible: whether it is possible for the "artist in fiction" to engage in a "living" dialogue with his reader, free of the rigid and limiting authority which a formalistic culture places between "artist" and "man," and yet providing that sense of "solidarity" and form which total anarchic freedom tends to destroy. I have dwelt at length upon Conrad's conception of his art, and his criticism of others, because his formulations consistently concern themselves with this question; and because Conrad's attempt to answer it occurs within the context of a criticism of both formalism and anarchism in art and in life. As he tells us in his preface, he owed the story and the characters to:

> ... the general knowledge of the conditions of Russia and of
>
> the moral and emotional reactions of the Russian temperament to
>
> the pressure of tyrannical lawlessness, which, in general terms,
>
> could be reduced to the formula of senseless desperation provoked
>
> by senseless tyranny. What I was concerned with mainly was the
>
> aspect, the character and the fate of the individuals as they
>
> appeared to the Western Eyes of the old teacher of languages ... (he
>
> is) useful to the reader both in the way of comment and by the part
>
> he plays in the development of the story. (P.4).

Under Western Eyes is the continuation or re-application of the antagonies is vision, split between "scorn and pity", anarchism and conservat in that we have seen elaborated in The Secret Agent. It takes up Conrad s concerns from a very different angle, however, and employs that conservative and formalistic attitude to life and art, so violently "unmasked" in the ear ier novel, as a "framed" narrative perspective beyond which the reader s encouraged to see. This perspective, in the person of the old teacher of languages with his constant concern for the "proprieties to be observed" in "the conduct of an invented story" (p.88), is projected into the "moral anarchism" of Russia in which "The whole world is inconceivable to the strict logic of ideas" (p.93). The result is a clash of understandings and perspectives in which the reader is activated into making his own connections and judgements; and encouraged to see the shortcomings of both types of thinking.

Ultimately however, through this activation of the reader Under Western Eyes moves beyond criticism and sets up the conditions for the solution of the problems it propounds. As I shall argue in the next two sections, at the centre of this solution is Conrad's conception of the relationship between author and reader, between giver and receiver of fictions, made concrete by the "pivotal" [14] relationship between Razumov and Natalia Haldin. In her understanding of Razumov's "confession" she is the prototype of the perfect reader which Conrad tried to create for his own novels: her response to it, "My eyes are open at last and my hands are free now" (p.315), is testimony to the freedom that "truth" and the "hope" that

art bring. In this sense Under Western Eyes can be seen as driving towards

the solutions to the problems which The Secret Agent exposed.

II.

> "The problem of language is at the heart of all struggles
> between the forces striving to abolish present alienation
> and those striving to maintain it; it is inseparable from
> the entire terrain of those struggles. We live within
> language as within polluted air ... But real opposition
> calls for a communication that undermines all separate power.
> Wherever there is communication, there is no state."
>   "All The Kings Men", Situationist International Journal [21].

"The artist in his calling of interpreter creates (the clearest

form of demonstration) because he must. He is so much of a voice that, for

him, silence is like death," remarked Conrad in an essay on Henry James [22]

in which he enthusiastically affirmed his "faith" in the "magic" power of

art "for the edification of mankind", and, what is the same thing,

acknowledged his fear of the despair and inertia that "silence," the lack of

a "voice," would bring with it. This "faith" and fear are feelings which, of

course, bleed everywhere into his fiction and present us with a world in

which the possession of a "voice," the "gift of expression," seems to confer

power and control over one's conditions; and the lack of a voice

correspondingly condemns one to a dehumanizing abandonment to the chances of

one's environment. It's a familiar enough idea in the history of literature,

appearing in the theories of Hobbes for example [23]; but what makes

Conrad's formulation of it interesting is the terrible ambiguity with which

it is held and applied to the interpretation of the modern world. Sometimes, for the individual in the Conradian world, it seems better not to speak since language, the tool by which one understands one's world, opens one's access only to an unwelcome consciousness; and the silent acceptance of the words that others apply to and impose upon one, seems preferable because it is easier, safer and more practical. And sometimes the possession of a "voice" is a form of a "magic" curse, because the control it bestows often entails the destruction of one's integrity and individual identity: it means "one must surrender oneself to occult and irresponsible powers, either outside or within one's own breast" [24]. Either way lies loss of freedom and self-control.

Consider, for example, the "nameless", "silent" (p.130) Tekla in Under Western Eyes. She "has not the art" (p.138) of conversation and expression and, consequently, she is abandoned to the chances which fate throws to her to express her "fundamental sentiments" in practical activity. As she says to Natalia Haldin:

> "Here I stand talking to you, and when I think of all the
> cruelties, oppressions, and injustices that are going on at
> this very moment, my head begins to swim. I have looked
> closely at what would seem inconceivable if one's own eyes
> had not to be trusted. I have looked at things that made me
> hate myself for my helplessness. I hated my hands that had no
> power, my voice that could not be heard, my very mind that
> would not become unhinged. Ah! I have seen things." (P.134).

Like Stevie in *The Secret Agent*, Tekla's is the dilemma of the individual who is forced to live without the linguistic facility to protect or distract herself from reality. Unlike Razumov, she is incapable of verbal abstraction; and so unable to use words to "unhinge" her mind and to break those "ties" with her fellow men which would enable her to act freely and without regard for the effect of her words and deeds on others. She thus represents a central human dilemma in that she has "no power" to act as an individual in a social cause and, unlike the eloquent revolutionaries by whom she is surrounded, she has no "voice" with which to mediate, re-construct, and thereby take verbal control over the the "things" that she has "seen". Like the professor in *The Secret Agent*, the anarchist totally outside of the linguistic and ideological structures of his environment, she is forced to express herself only in direct action and as a result becomes merely the "blind instrument" (p.128) of the voices of others. "What's the good of speech to me?", she asks Razumov, "Who would ever want to hear what I could say?" (p.204). Her life has been a series of roles conceived by the words of others: she takes dictation of the "inspired books" of Peter Ivanovitch; her biography and revolutionary activity, recited to Natalia Haldin, is largely the story of the "young workman" she nursed and of "important papers" (p.133)-- the communications of others-- she has smuggled across borders; and her future is to play the "good samaritan" (p.313) to Razumov's victim.

Language, and the ability to use it, are here the very source of power and Tekla is used by Conrad as an object case of what happens to those without a "voice" in society; whether that society be the revolutionary

coteries of Geneva or the official state societies of Russia or England. Consequently she embodies that fear of the power of art which, as we have seen, pervades his literary criticism: of the power of art, of fiction, to construct negative and exploitative visions of social reality and to make the individual its passive and suffering subject, exactly as Tekla is brutalized and has her "illusions destroyed" by being subjected to the works of her "great author" (p.128). In this sense Peter Ivanovitch is the "author", and source of all "authority" in the society of Genevan Russians, whose "inspired books" set up just that form of repressive and alienating discourse that Conrad feared artistic fiction could become. He is, in a sense, the artist turned tyrant who is able to dominate and terrorise others through the "magic" power of words and Tekla's relationship to him, of "child" to "master", can be seen as an inversion of that proper relation between the "author" and the recipient of fictions- ultimately the reader- which *Under Western Eyes* tries to construct.

Of course she later abandons him for Razumov since, having "seen" "the secret of the composition" of his books and "seen" him "grope for words as if he were in the dark as to what he meant to say" (p.128), she is forced to "see" behind his inspiration and to understand the connection between the humanitarian "genius" of his public self and the "inconsiderate man" which lies beneath. The result is disillusionment and disbelief in the universal "authority" which great art seems to construct. Her choice of direct action, of nursing Razumov to express herself, is thus the result of her experience which "seemed to freeze my very beliefs in me" (p.128) because it denied her the opportunity to actively express or exercise those

beliefs in the way that she knew how. It represents her rejection of "faith" in a society that, for those who lack a "voice", is nothing but a system of repressive "voices" imposed upon them. It is, essentially, an anarchistic rejection of all words and theories, and of the power and powerlessness that they create, in a way which reflects most closely the Professor's abandonment of his society in The Secret Agent.

Tekla, then, provides a later elaboration of the theme of language as a form of terrorism that is so central to the earlier novel which, as we have seen, presents us with not just a social circle but a whole world dominated by a repressive and alienating discourse. The London of The Secret Agent is a society paralysed by a weight of historical precedent and tradition, in which the dominating "authorial" and authorizing "voice" has become embedded in the very structure of society and in which the forms that social interaction assumes, the legalism and contractualism that control individual behaviour, express the sanction or disapproval of that dominant "voice". Conrad is, of course, making the point that societies, by definition, always work repressively through words: that all societies, revolutionary coteries and established historical state systems alike, employ a unifying and authorizing discourse which subverts, reifies, and victimizes the individual at the same time that it endows him with his identity, his "voice" and consequently his "faith". Words are a double edged sword in the Conradian world: they are the means by which the individual is empowered to act in relationship with others but, and this is Conrad's point in The Secret Agent, when that relationship is unequal -- when one partner

in the relationship is active and the other is passive -- those words
themselves become a form of terror.

Such are the "real conditions of existence" faced by mankind in
the London of The Secret Agent: a world in which the individual is balanced
precariously between the "antagonistic" extremes of "faith" in and "fear" of
words and is thereby bound into, and made an expression of, the ideological
conflicts and problems of his age. And in order to resolve those conflicts
as they arise in his position he must think and speak ideologically or, in
 ther words, make a blind and primitive assertion of the self whilst
negating and denying the other. Thus Winnie, in order to realize her
displaced maternal passion, must likewise speak ideologically. She must
accept and have "faith" in certain words, words like "wife," which lock her
into a power system through which she "hopes" to attain her ends; and yet
she must also believe that "life doesn't stand much looking into" and that
involves the rejection and "fear" of other words, of the revolutionary
rhetoric she hears from her husband's associates for example, which threaten
her position and bring only an unwelcome consciousness of realities and
interpretations different from her own. Thus the Professor, the "perfect
anarchist" totally unengaged in the language process, is perhaps the
ultimate and perfect example of the terrorism of words that society employs
to reduce and victimize the individual. Like Tekla, his rejection of the
whole verbal process and descent into pure unmediated action to express
himself is a reaction to his one time passive surrender to the mythical
fictions which reflect and sustain the form of his society:

... his imagination had been fired early by the tales of men

rising from the depths of poverty to positions of authority

and affluence. The extreme, almost ascetic purity of his thought,

combined with an astounding ignorance of worldly conditions, had

set before him a goal of power and prestige to be attained without

the medium of arts, grace, tact, wealth- by sheer weight of merit

alone. [25].

The Professor is deceived by "tales," "artistic fictions," that set up an

ideal and spectacular biography against which he must measure himself and,

iven the conditions in which he lives, inevitably find himself wanting. He

is thus labeled a failure through his own submission to the "authorizing"

and terrorizing fictions of his age. His answer is to oppose it by his own

"spectacle" and fiction of terror: "the perfect detonator" which negates all

"authority" in explosions which turn the tables on those fictions-- "the

great edifice of legal conceptions sheltering the atrocious injustice of

society"-- and render their proponents passive recipients of his

"expressions".

The Secret Agent leaves us, then, with this vision of the

Professor attempting to "break up the superstition and worship of legality"

(p.73) in response to a language system which has become a tool of power: an

instrument which makes direct or true communication between individuals, a

dialogue free of alienating "authority", utterly impossible. Once again

Conrad is very close to the anarchists here, in the sense that the Professor

is the figure through whom he makes explicit those unbreakable connections

which are so central to the anarchist position: between the wielding of

power, the forcing of one's voice on others, and their consequent alienation and pacification:

> He was a moral agent-- that was settled in his mind. By
> exercising his agency with ruthless defiance he procured for
> himself the appearances of power and personal prestige. That
> was undeniable to his vengeful bitterness. It pacified his
> unrest; and in their own way the most ardent of revolutionaries
> are perhaps doing no more but seeking for peace in common with
> the rest of mankind-- the peace of soothed vanity, of satisfied
> appetites, or perhaps of appeased conscience. (p.81).

Just like the society he opposes, the Professor is dependent upon the fictions which his "expressions" generate: upon the "appearances of power and prestige" provided by a mode of communication, bombs and explosions, which neccessarily exclude, pacify, and alienate the other. The Professor merely imitates his society, and "his agency" of terror is another version of the terrorizing fictions whereby society attains power through the alienation of the individual from itself. Conrad is making the point that power is, in fact, intrinsically based upon the alienation of others and that that alienation is, in turn, based upon the ability to command a "voice"-- of words or deeds-- which turns the individual into a passive recipient and object of its discourse. Language is power in that it allows one to communicate, to "authorize", and therefore fulfill, those deep rooted and hidden "appetites" which, in a Conradian world, motivate the individual.

This is, of course, an identifiably anarchist idea and Conrad's analysis of the problems of living in a formalized, historical society like

England has much in common with the anarchist criticism of capitalism and the ideological systems it generates to "authorize" primitive "appetites". For example, consider Bakunin's attack upon formalized and contractual language as an "agent" of alienation and "slavery":

A tacit contract! That is to say a wordless and consequently thoughtless and will-less contract! A revolutionary nonsense! An absurd fiction, and what is more-- a wicked fiction! An unworthy hoax! For it presupposes that while I was in the state of not being able to will, to think, to speak, I bound myself and my descendents-- simply by reason of having let myself be victimized without raising any protest-- into perpetual slavery. [26].

Conrad's hostility to Rousseau and the ideas of the "Social Contract" are also central to Bakunin here, who gives particularly direct and effective voice to the criticisms that Conrad makes of London in The Secret Agent and the West in general in Under Western Eyes: that as formal historical democracies they provide the verbal abstractions and conventions which license exploitation, oppression and violence:

The instinct to command others, in its primitive essence, is a carniverous, altogether bestial and savage instinct. Under the influence of the mental development of man, it takes on a somewhat more ideal form and becomes somewhat ennobled, presenting itself as the instrument of reason and the devoted servant of that abstraction, or political fiction, which is called the public good. [27].

Bakunin's terminology here is close to the cannibal imagery which Conrad used to describe the London in The Secret Agent. Bakunin could also very well be

describing the Professor or Razumov or indeed himself here, all of whom employ notions that the violence they directly or indirectly create is for the ultimate "good" of mankind.

Conrad, then, to a large extent follows the anarchist analysis of "Western" political systems as sustaining themselves through the projection of "authorized" "fictions", of officially sanctioned "spectacles" and images, behind the conventions of which the reality of human "appetite" operates. The result is that man, as an individual, is alienated both from others and ultimately from himself; and the language he uses, supposedly his means of understanding the world, becomes merely a means of "self-communion" (to echo the old Teacher of Languages, p.8), of isolation, and of power over others. The possession of a voice, for Conrad and for the anarchists, is a form of "magic" allowing one to transform the appearance of things-- of one's motivations especially-- and thus bestowing that "freedom of moral nihilism" on the actions of its possessor.

Of course Conrad's reactions to the consequences of this analysis, and the remedy he offers, are very different to those of the anarchists even though based, essentially, upon a similar rejection of the principle of authority. For the anarchists the solution was obvious: to awake man from the passive reception of authority through acts of terror and violence which undermine his dependence upon and confidence in the social conventions of his age. In response to a society they saw as criminal, they abandoned all legal and moral laws and declared, with the Professor, their own "force of personality" (p.68) to be "the only reality in an invented world". And in response to a language system which they saw as "masking"

that criminality, they abandoned, if not all language, all conventional

linguistic rules for assigning "truth" to propositions about reality: the

words they used did not "represent" some pre-existent and conventional

"truth", but nakedly expressed the reality of their desires and instincts.

This, they hoped, would itself be revolutionary. Thus Julius Laspara,

"Polyglot ... anarchist, with a pedantic and ferocious temperament, and an

amazingly inflammatory capacity for invective ..." (p.242), both edits and

controls the "Living Word" and:

> He could not understand how anyone could refrain from writing
>
> on anything, social, economic, historical-- anything. Any subject
>
> could be treated in the right spirit, and for the ends of social
>
> revolution. ... "We must educate, educate everybody-- develop the
>
> great thought of absolute liberty and of revolutionary justice.
>
> (p.243).

But, as Conrad demanded in "Books", the writer must:

> ... mature the strength of his imagination amongst the things of
>
> this earth, which it is his business to cherish and to know, and
>
> refrain from calling down his inspiration ready made from some
>
> heaven of perfections of which he knows nothing. [28].

To think, speak or write in "absolutes" is to "unhinge" one's mind from the

world as it exists to the senses. One of the clearest messages of Under

Western Eyes is that any such abandonment of the representative principle in

language, any "cynical" total disregard for conventional "truth" (an

understanding composed of and defined by conventional and comprehensible

rules), is an intoxicating, dangerous and open-ended process leading to where one "knows nothing."

Under Western Eyes is, as I have said, Conrad's own attempt to find a solution to, or a way out of the problems revealed by the anarchist analysis and as such it contains an equally critical response to that anarchist solution. It is a novel constructed on many oppositions, but central to them all is the clash of the two modes of discourse, the formalist-"Western" and the anarchist-"Russian" ways of using words to access the world, which are represented most obviously by the old Teacher of Languages and the Russian revolutionaries in their conflicting efforts to understand and influence the lives of the "pivotal" [29] couple: Razumov and Natalia Haldin. Ultimately, their equal failure becomes the means by which Conrad effects an activation of the reader into challenging the "authority" of all systematic interpretations in the book and, equally, into rejecting the "anarchist" "cynicism" of using words without being "tied" to the actual and immediate needs of one's fellow man. And this opposition is, in fact, the frame through which the reader is moved towards the vision of another kind of solution which involves the denial of all abstract systems, theories, or pre-conceived methods of using words to command power: a solution which rejects totally that equation of language and power and is based upon the conception of a free and equal form of *communication* between individuals. Natalia Haldin's "defenceless" (p.315) reading of Razumov's "living" "confession", in which both giver and receiver of language renounce all power and "authority" over the other and acknowledge their own weakness

and error, is the model of that working co-operation in "solidarity" which

Conrad saw as the aim of his art. In this sense, <u>Under Western Eyes</u> is his

"confession", like Razumov's, of "independence" and "perdition" (p.303). It

represents his renunciation of all collective and ideological solutions tp

alienation and his attempt to develop an "art voice" which integrates the

individual reader into the communication process. To quote the Situationists

again, "where there is communication, there is no state"; and Conrad's

communication in <u>Under Western Eyes</u>, strives towards that ideal of an equal

di logue between author and reader which is free of political and

ideological distortions at the same time that it recognizes how pervasive

and inescapable, how embedded in words themselves, these things are.

This is, of course, what Conrad meant when he said that art

"appeals to temperament" [30]. He knew that "half the words we use have no

meaning whatever, and of the other half each man understands each word after

the fashion of his own folly and conceit" [31]; and so it was the duty of

the "artist in fiction", not to intellectually control men with words, but

to activate men's "temperamental" response to and use of words. This is the

purpose of the complex narrative techniques of <u>Under Western Eyes</u>, which

make us conscious of the fictional process in the novel and, by implication,

of the fictionalizing which goes on in our own "real" lives. The novel, in a

sense, aims at an equality between author and reader. In the next section I

shall examine in some detail a few reresentative passages and strands from

the novel which I hope will illustrate this point clearly.

"No theory, no ready-made system, no book that has ever
been written will ever save the world. I cleave to no
system, I am a true seeker."   Michael Bakunin. [32].

Under Western Eyes is, as I have said, a novel which seeks a

solution to the problem of alienation, as that is conceived of as a

condition arising from a surrender to ideological powers outside of oneself

and the consequent loss of self-control it involves; or, what is the same

thing but stated or imagined differently, from an improper use of or

relationship to the social and political language of one's world. In the

fictional world that Conrad establishes, man must realize himself, must come

into consciousness, in terms of words and images which do not intrinsically

belong to him: words and images which form part of the ideological and power

structures of his age and which he assumes or, in a sense, borrows. Man's

identity, and his ability to realize his desires through co-operation with

his fellows, are thus seen to be dependent upon his possession of a "voice"

which allows him to act by giving him access to those power structures.

However, as we see time and again in Conrad's fiction, there is a very thin

dividing line between the possession of and the possession by the "voices"

of one's society: between the enslavement and freedom which the gift of

language endows. And, as this passage from "A Familiar Preface" illustrates,

Conrad himself, as an artist in words, was particularly fearful of the

alienation that "possession" by an external voice would bring:

    ... to be a great magician one must surrender oneself to occult

and irresponsible powers, either outside or within one's own

breast. We have all heard of simple men selling their souls

for love or power to some grotesque devil. The most ordinary

intelligence can perceive without much reflection that anything

of the sort is bound to be a fool's bargain. I don't lay claim

to particular wisdom and distrust of such transactions. It may

be my sea-training acting upon a natural disposition to keep

good hold on the one thing really mine, but the fact is that

I have a positive horror of losing even for one moving moment

that full possession of myself which is the first condition

of good service. [33].

For Conrad here, personal power and alienation are but different aspects of

the same thing: of the "surrender" of self-possession to unknown and hence

uncontrollable "powers" or, as in Razumov's extreme and negative experience,

to those "devils" of the imagination which endow him with the "power to hurt

and destroy". The "fool's bargain" is, of course, that the control one seeks

is attained only at the cost of being "hurt and destroyed" oneself: of being

the alienated slave of the tools of power one employs. "Good service", on

the other hand, is based upon the renunciation of "magic" powers and upon,

as Conrad put it in the "Guy De Maupassant" essay quoted earlier, the "ideal

honesty" of those who act, not by "occult and irresponsible powers", but "by

the work of their hands." Indeed Conrad's "good service" to the reader of

his fiction is, as I intend to argue, based upon a use of words which is

diametrically opposed to that possessed language of power so tragically

illustrated in Razumov's fate: upon a use of words which purifies them of,

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or detaches them from, the social power contexts in which they normally operate. Conrad's "work" is thus the attempt to use fiction as a direct means of communication between writer and reader divorced from the politically and culturally constructed contexts in which they normally encounter one another: it is the material, the "bricks", out of which is "built" that understanding and "solidarity" which is the purpose of his art.

In <u>Under Western Eyes</u> then, the attempt to find a way out of alienation, Conrad's "work" is grounded on his own principled renunciation of the "magic" and conventional power of the author to fully command and dominate the fictional world he creates. It opens, of course, with just that renunciation of the powers of the "artist in fiction": with the old Teacher's disclaiming of "imagination and expression" (p.7) which creates the narrative context or frame for the whole novel. To be clear about what this frame means and the effect it has, we must remember that we are presented with the events of this story within the framework of a narrative which, on the surface, denies its own status as a "fictional" mode of communication, whilst simultaneously foregrounding the very artfulness and literariness of its methods. And we are guided into them by a narrator who confesses "that I have no comprehension of the Russian character" (p.8), and yet who expounds at length upon that very theme before apparently surrendering us to the "documentary evidence" of Razumov's "journal" (p.7); itself a narrative which blends so seamlessly into his own narration. We are, in other words, sent conflicting signals as to the "authority" of both the material narrated and of the narrator to interpret the world he presents, so that we are constantly looking for the hand of the narrator in

the "journal" and for Conrad's hidden hand in the conduct of the framing narrative.

Conrad, of course, is having an ironic swipe here at the reader's conventional understanding of what to expect from a work of fiction and thereby destabilizing the normal or customary patterns of communication between author and reader of literary fictions. This work, he makes clear, is no "instinctive" "outpouring of ... emotion" in the "English" novelistic tradition, but a book built up with a "steady hand" and "deliberate effects" whose purpose is to frustrate the reader's suspension of disbelief and surrender to the "illusion of reference" upon which the impact and enjoyment of "fiction" is conventionally based. In Conrad's novel, on the contrary, we are encouraged to actively seek the "authority", art and meaning of the narrative outside of the confines of the narrative itself and in the wider context of its presentation: not in the "authority" that the words themselves carry, but in the "authority" that we, as readers of fiction, assume to lie behind those words. Thus all his elaborate and transparent manipulations of perspective and all his artful "effects" are designed to make us aware of our own context as passive individuals sitting down to read a novel whose meaning and impact is at least partially constructed by that contextual relationship between the passive and powerless reader and the active and powerful author. This is what I mean when I say that the purpose of Conrad's art is to use words detached from the power contexts in which we usually encounter them: it is through these techniques that Conrad is pushing us towards the perception that, in the conventions of literary and political discourse, it is the reader's contextual assumption of power and

authority behind words which actually gives them their *power* and not anything that the words themselves do. Conrad in fact shares with the anarchists to whom he was politically opposed, the perception that the vast majority of our conventional public language is a literally meaningless and solipsistic rationalization of brute power, authority and desire. His art therefore, not being conventional in this way and being in conception a "deed", seeks to make us aware of the empowering contexts in which we encounter words in order to strip them of their implicit, "magic" assumptions of power and authority and to thereby establish the grounds for a different, more conscious and active kind of language use.

As we have seen in *The Secret Agent*, Conrad's art works as a kind of revelation of what lies behind words, with the purpose of making us aware of how we use language to alienate and exploit our fellow men and, by implication, of how we could potentially use it to construct an artistic vision of a different pattern of human relationships. The London of that novel is the conservative social power context which normalizes and empowers the anarchistic and solipsistic language use of its inhabitants. *Under Western Eyes*, another such act of revelation, is equally concerned with the exploitation, cruelty and alienation which words sponsor, but now within the anarchistic social power context of a Russian society which perverts and disempowers the language that its inhabitants use to search for solidarity with their fellow man. The more overtly artful, or transparent, narrative techniques of this later novel are thus the means by which Conrad clarifies the basis of the artistic solution to the problem of alienation which is glimpsed at in *The Secret Agent*. They are, as I have said, the means by

which Conrad brings us to an understanding of how language should ideally operate outside of the contexts of power and which is diametrically opposed to that form of language use to which Razumov, as the ultimate victim of his social and political context, falls prey.

To give just one example of what this means in practise, and the use to which it is put, let us examine for a moment the series of interviews between Razumov and the Russian authorities after he has betrayed Haldin. What these interviews demonstrate is, what Conrad calls in the "Author's Note", the "ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism" (p.5). In fact they provide us with a comprehensive illustration of the working of language as power and alienation in a way which is closely implicated in the novel's central concerns and directly opposed to the purpose of its highly self-conscious narrative techniques.

The most obvious thing about these interviews is, of course, the direct parrallel between the position of Conrad's reader, faced with the formal disclaimers of the old teacher, and the position of Razumov himself, as he tries to come to grips with the messages contained in the words addressed to him by Mikulin and the other representatives of Russsian state "anarchism". Take, for example, this section of the first interview with the Prince K. and the General T.:

The general unexpectantly developed a thought.

"Fidelity to menaced instititions on which depend the safety of

a throne and of a people is no child's play. We know that, *mon*

prince, and— *tenez*—" he went on with a sort of flattering

harshness, "Mr. Razumov here begins to understand that too."

His eyes which he turned upon Razumov seemed to be staring out of

his head. The grotesqueness of aspect no longer shocked Razumov. He

said with gloomy conviction--

"Haldin will never speak."

"That remains to be seen," muttered the General.

"I am certain," insisted Razumov. "A man like this never speaks.

... Do you imagine that I am here from fear?" he added violently.

He felt ready to stand by his opinion of Haldin to the last

extremity.

"Certainly not," protested the General, with great simplicity of

tone. "And I don't mind telling you, Mr.Razumov, that if he had

not come with his tale to such a staunch and loyal Russian as you,

he would have disappeared like a stone in the water ... which

would have had a detestable effect," he added, with a bright,

cruel smile under his stoney stare. "So you see, there can be

no suspicion of any fear here." (p.42-3) (all the ellipsis is

Conrad's)

The point being made here, as in all Razumov's conversations with fellow

Russians, is that the Russian "simplicity of tone" cloaks, as the narrator

assures us, a "hopeless cynicism" (p.91). Thus the paradoxs of "flattering

harshness" and "a bright, cruel smile under his stoney stare" alert us to

the fact that the General is employing a disguised language of power here: a

repressive discourse in which "authority" takes power over the individual by

creating a discrepancy between the literal meaning and contextual form of an

utterance or statement. To phrase an order from a source of authority as if it were a request, as Mikulin later does to Razumov for example, is more than to merely enforce it, but to strip away the power of the individual to fully understand or connect with what is being asked and hence to think or act meaningfully at all. It is to bring one's hearer directly up against the brute power contained in the context, whilst denying them the formal opportunity to respond to it. Similarly, the discrepancy here between the General's actual words and the veiled threat contained in his paradoxical tones and body language, undermines Razumov's ability to understand what is said to him; and so, within the implicit power context of his relationship to the General, it verbally and mentally disempowers him. This is the beginning of a process in which Razumov is forced into always looking beyond the words addressed to him: into questioning the status or communicational mode of every sentence he hears, and not knowing whether it is literal or metaphorical or ironic, for example.

This process of, what the anarchists would call, "mystification" [34] by the language of power reaches full expression in Razumov's interview with Mikulin. Here Razumov's position is curiously close to what, in the terms of modern psychology, is known as a "double bind" [35]. This term was first used by psychologists in the 1950's to explain the causes of schizophrenia in terms of an identifiable pattern of communication between parents and children which creates schizophrenia in the child. It involves placing the child in a position where he receives conflicting and mutually exclusive messages from the same authority, which he has no way of deciding between. Essentially it is a position in which the meaning of the discourse

one receives is formally undecided, but where the context of the *discourse* is constructed to ignore this fact. Obviously it would be false to make too much of this analogy, but it is tempting: Conrad's novel employs images of "child" and "master" as a central motif, especially in these interview scenes, and Conrad could have met with very similar ideas and terminolgy in Bakunin [36]. The point is, however, that Conrad is presenting power as based on just that kind of double-binding repressive discourse; and Razumov, like the schizophrenic, finds "His strung up individuality had gone to pieces within him very suddenly" (p.76) as a result of his contact with it. For example, consider this sequence:

But everything vanished at the voice of Councillor Mikulin. Razumov felt profoundly grateful for the even simplicity of its tone.

"Yes. I have listened with interest. I comprehend in a measure your ... But, indeed, you are mistaken in what you ..." Councillor Mikulin uttered a series of broken sentences. Instead of finishing them he glanced down his beard. It was a deliberate curtailment which somehow made the phrases more impressive. But he could talk fluently enough, as became apparent when changing his tone to persuasiveness he went on: "By listening to you as I did, I think I have proved that I do not regard our intercourse as strictly official. In fact I don't want it to have that character at all. ... Oh yes! I admit that the request for your presence here had an official form. But I put it to you whether it was a form which would have been used

to secure the attendance of a ..."

"Suspect," exclaimed Razumov, looking straight into the official's
eyes. They were big with heavy eyelids, and met his boldness with
a dim, steadfast gaze. "A suspect." The open repetition of that word
which had been haunting all his waking hours gave Razumov a strange
sort of satisfaction. Councillor Mikulin shook his head slightly.
"Surely you do know that I've had my rooms searched by the police?"

"I was about to say a "misunderstood person," when you interrupted
me," insinuated quietly Councillor Mikulin. (p.78-79) (all ellipsis
is Conrad's).

Here, as throughout Under Western Eyes, there is preponderance of pauses and
unfinished sentences within the discourse of power, the effect of which is
to allow the hearer of the discourse to interpret or complete it in terms of
their own obsessions and fears, whilst denying them the formal structure or
occasion by which they can properly engage with or resist that discourse.
Thus Razumov is made to seem as if he accuses and "suspects" himself as his
need to be understood is distorted into a readiness to be possessed by the
power he assumes that Mikulin represents: a possession which is signaled by
his completion of Mikulin's sentence. Mikulin presents "official" orders as
"requests", he "utters" meaningless "broken sentences" from a position of
"authority" to make them seem meaningful, and like the narrator of the
novel, the old Teacher of Languages, he denies the "official form" of his
discourse in order to reveal all the more clearly the contextual "authority"
which lies behind it. His is a form of repressive discourse which reduces
the individual's freedom by reducing the possibility of a rational appraisal

of either the "authority" he embodies but denies, or of the things he
actually says. Razumov, as a result, is unable to decide upon the
communicational mode of the messages he receives and is driven into a
subjection to the powerful threat he fears or imagines to lie behind
Mikulin's "insinuated" words.

Conrad is presenting us here with a very particualar example of
the breakdown of identity which the fear of the loss of a "voice", of one's
ability to use words to understand the world, would bring. Hence as the
interview continues Razumov becomes increasingly prey to his imagination,
increasingly isolated, and his control over his own voice correspondingly
diminishes. I quote at some length to show the development of this:

> Razumov shrugged his shoulders and stared. "What a tirade!" he
>
> thought. The silence and immobility of Councillor Mikulin
>
> impressed him. The bearded bureaucrat sat at his post, mysteriously
>
> self-possessed like an idol with dim, unreadable eyes. Razumov's
>
> voice changed involuntarily.
>
> "If you were to ask me where is the necessity for my hate
>
> for such as Haldin, I would answer you-- there is nothing
>
> sentimental in it. I did not hate him because he had
>
> committed the crime of murder. Abhorrance is not hate. I
>
> hated him simply because I am sane. It is in that character
>
> that he outraged me. His death ..."
>
> Razumov could feel his voice growing thick in his throat.
>
> The dimness of Councillor Mikulin's eyes seemed to spread
>
> all over his face and made it indistinct to Razumov's sight.

He tried to disregard these phenomena.

"Indeed," he persued, pronouncing each word carefully, "what is his death to me? If he were lying here on the floor I could walk over his breast ... The fellow is a mere phantom ..." Razumov's voice died out very much against his will. Mikulin behind the table did not allow himself the slightest movement. The silence lasted for some little time before Razumov could go on again.

... [my ellipsis]

"... upon my word, we Russians are a drunken lot. Intoxication of some sort we must have: to get ourselves wild with sorrow or maudlin with resignation; to lie inert like a log or set fire to the house. What is a sober man to do, I should like to know ..."

... [my ellipsis]

Councillor Mikulin raised his hand and passed it down his face deliberately.

"That's ... of course," he said in an undertone.

The quiet gravity of that gesture made Razumov pause. It was unexpected, too. What did it mean? It had an alarming aloofness. Razumov remembered his intention of making him show his hand.

"I have said all this to Prince K--," he began with assumed indifference, but lost it on seeing Councillor Mikulin's slow nod of assent. "You know it? You've heard ... Then why should I be called here to be told of Haldin's execution? Did you want

to confront me with his silence now that the man is dead? What

is his silence to me? This is incomprehensible. You want in

some way to shake my moral balance." (p.84-85) (all ellipsis

is Conrad's unless otherwise indicated in the passage).

Like the schizophrenic, Razumov is reduced to assuming that behind every

sign or statement that Mikulin makes there is a concealed sign or statement:

that behind his artlessness lies an art. The free-indirect discourse in this

sequence is written from Razumov's perspective and Conrad uses it to suggest

Razumov's gradual surrender to Mikulin's unspoken authority, as his

psychological state-- his fear and loss of self-identity-- comes to dictate

his perception until he sees Mikulin as "self-possessed like an idol": a

symbol of "mysterious" power and control. Indeed that very "immobility" and

"dimness" of Mikulin, "indistinct to Razumov's sight", almost becomes

another manifestation of that Russian "sacred inertia" on behalf of which

Razumov sent Haldin to his death.

To "shake" Razumov's "moral balance" is, of course, precisely

Mikulin's intention here, since this interview is the means by which he is

recruited into that "moral anarchism" which serves the tsarist state.

Mikulin's strategy, then, is to destabilize Razumov's grasp upon the meaning

and form of the language of "authority" by rendering it literally

meaningless or silent, whilst simultaneously using the implicit context of a

power relationship to re-inforce his need to make sense of it. Razumov, who

is "as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea" (p.13) and

therefore needs to be "understood" and to receive the sanction of an

external authority to legitimize his existence, is thus driven to hang on to

Mikulin's every word and so to seek such understanding in terms which are no more than the meaningless and conventional cover for a brute assertion of power. Razumov, in fact, is left struggling, not with the substance, but with the mere illusion or linguistic "shadow" of power. He is the victim of the tactics of an alienating and "autistic" [37] power which uses solipsistic language to anarchistically smash the means of connection between individuals and thereby leave them isolated and powerless. Thus the old Teacher's ironic reflection upon the Russian skill with words, which is such that "one cannot defend oneself from the suspicion that they really understand what they say" (p.8), is borne out by Mikulin's use of meaningless words and "broken sentences" which take their resonance, not from their referents, but from the assumed power in their context. Communication between individuals is impossible and leads merely to alienation, Conrad is obviously saying, when formally unacknowledged or disguised power obtains between them.

Thus Mikulin's denial of the "official form" of the interview, disguising its "official" context, denies Razumov entry into dialogue with power and alienates him, not just from itself, but even from the understanding of his own position. Conrad's own essentially anarchistic analysis and rejection of power, that we have seen developed in The Secret Agent, here leads to the perception that the most "ferocious" exercise of "authority" is based, not just on the overt threat of authoritarian brute force, but on the undermining of the individual's very power to act against it by obscuring the formal status of authoritarian discourse: by disabling the hearer's-- or indeed the reader's-- efforts to make the proper

distinctions between various modes of communication and hence to act or think meaningfully at all. And yet, as I have said, Razumov's difficulty in decoding what General T. and Mikulin mean is also another version of what we, as the readers of Conrad's novel, experience at the old Teacher's disclaiming of "authority": we do not know exactly what he means, we are forced to question the formal status of his statements, and we are forced to look beyond his words for our understanding of the author he represents. We, in a sense, are thus the victims of Conrad's anarchistic unmasking of the conventional language of fiction.

But, of course, what Conrad is doing with these anarchistic d nial techniques is not asserting but ultimately destroying his own "authority" within a fictional world, by revealing and making us aware of the part that our own culturally and conventionally constructed contextual assumptions, our submission to literary "authority", plays in the impact of fiction. In art, as opposed to in life, awareness of context leads, not to the obscuring, but to the clarification of the form and status of discourse; and, by that clarification, Conrad effectively destroys the "Western" or "English" reader's expectations as a passive receiver of literary "spectacles": books whose meaning and impact, while they appear to reside in the literal and surface meaning of the words which compose them, is actually a product of the "literary" and "fictional" context in which we encounter them. In Conrad's novel, on the contrary, we must be actively and consciously involved in the process of understanding: we too must look beyond the apparent form of what we read, beyond the assumptions of power and "authority" the words bring with them, to an appreciation of the art

which is displayed and of the truth which it reveals. Ultimately, then, we are brought to a rejection of all conventional or social power; and the agent of this is, as I have said, the old Teacher's paradoxical undermining of his own narrative position in passages where he shows an excessive concern for versimilitude and realism, and is obviously speaking directly for Conrad himself:

> In the conduct of an invented story there are, no doubt, certain proprieties to be observed for the sake of clearness and effect. A man of imagination, however inexperienced in the art of narrative, has his instinct to guide him in the choice of words, and in the development of the action. A grain of talent excuses many mistakes. But this is not a work of the imagination; I have no talent; my excuse for this undertaking lies not in its art but in its artlessness. Aware of my limitations and strong in the sincerity of my purpose, I would not try (were I able) to invent anything. I push my scruples so far that I would not even invent a transition. (p.88).

This is at once a version of Conrad's artistic credo and an ironic joke, in the sense that it is the old Teacher who invents a huge transition on Conrad's behalf. Behind his artlessness is clearly revealed Conrad's art. This, of course, alerts us to the artificiality of the narrative stance and thereby makes us conscious of the type of communication this is: a metaphorical communication in images whose fictional status and form carries its own justification and value as art, with no need for any "realistic" translation into authoritative statements about the empirical world. There

can be, therefore, no confusion in the reader's mind as to how to receive this and no illusion of reference or alienating "authority". "I am not a young man in a novel," (p.158) exclaims Razumov at one point. At another the old Teacher comments, following Razumov's thoughts, "It was only on the stage that the unusual was outwardly acknowledged" (p.49). The effect of such details further emphasises the purely formal nature of the "truths" presented by the words of this novel: words which, ultimately, we do not try to look beyond because we are constantly reminded that they have reference and resonance only within the context of the novelistic fiction itself (and unlike the "real life" Razumov who is forced to look through the political fictions of his society to see the very "real" possibility that "he could be beaten with whips as a practical measure either of investigation or of punishment." (p.25)).

It is in this sense that the old Teacher of languages, in his constant confessions of an inability to understand the Russians, gives voice to the central concern of Under Western Eyes: how does one know, unless one uses conventional and recognizable rules, what actually lies behind the words one employs or what assumptions and "authority" they bring with them? Here, of course, the old teacher's "Englishness" is extremely important to Conrad. In the world of the novel, England or the "West" generally could be said to imaginatively represent societies which possess conventional and identifiable rules for assigning truth to statements, and when the old teacher pursues truth in his reflections it is truth in this conventional sense: a conception or understanding of the world which is composed of or defined by conventional rules, without necessarily involving the notion of

the existence of an absolute and binding "truth". Thus his ironic detachment

from words and his highly disingenuous protestations of incomprehension at

the "illogicality" and "arbitrariness" (p.8) of Russian speech, is his way

of propounding his opposition to all revolutionary political language: to

that anarchistic abandonment of conventional logical rules and language in

the hope of expressing some higher poetic resolution or truth beyond

conventional construction. On the other hand, the "formlessness" of Russian

society and its lack of any such rules leads, as we see again and again in

the novel, to an almost schizophrenic uncertainty as to the status of the

words the characters use or hear, and to a compensatory blind ideological

bonding to the surface meaning of words: a bonding which gives an

unconscious expression to the nihilistic and lawless forces that lie

disguised within the "Russian" context of its usage. Thus most of the

characters become, in a sense, the "slave" of a phrase-- or "falsehood"--

which they believe expresses some definite and personal commitment but

which, tragically, actually expresses their submission to and acquiescence

in violence and tyranny. Thus Razumov submits first to the myth of

autocracy, the idea of "a man-- strong and one", in order to destroy his

personal commitment to his fellow man. And after he has "embraced the might

of falsehood" (p.302) he is "haunted" by Haldin's description of his sister:

> "... Of you he said that you had trustful eyes. And why I
>
> have not been able to forget that phrase I don't know. It
>
> meant that there is in you no guile, no deception, no
>
> falsehood, no suspicion-- nothing in your heart that could
>
> give you a conception of a living, acting, speaking lie, if

ever it came your way. That you are a predestined victim ...

Ha! what a devilish suggestion!" (p.293).

In contrast to the overpowering "dimness" of Mikulin's eyes and to the

ironic "Western Eyes" of the old teacher, Natalia has "trustful eyes" which

do not try to look beyond the things she sees or the words she hears.

Razumov is tempted and fascinated by this phrase because it suggests, in the

midst of his "falsehood" and paranoid ironic detachment from the meaning of

words, the possibility of exercising precisely those "occult and

irre ponsible powers" that Conrad himself had to renounce in the writing of

his fiction: that contextual and conventional authority that the writer

holds over the guileless and unsuspecting reader of his fiction (fiction

which is, from a literal point of view, also a "living, acting, speaking

lie,").

It is in her direct and literal reception of words, her trust

and defencelesness, that Natalia is, from an author's perspective, the

"perfect reader" of fiction and the perfect temptation to the exercise of

power. But, of course, that defencelessness also articluates the

antagonistic side of her perfection for both Razumov and Conrad: it also

suggests the posibility of a direct and open form of communication which is

free of power and hence free of the mystification and alienation that words

used within the context of power bring with them. This is why her "trustful

eyes" are so important to Razumov and why she becomes his salvation:

"Suddenly you stood before me! You alone in all the world

to whom I must confess. You fascinated me-- you freed me

from the blindness of anger and hate-- the truth shining in

you drew the truth out of me. Now I have done it; and as I

write here I am in the depths of anguish, but there is air

to breathe at last-- air! ... In giving Victor Haldin up, it

was myself, after all whom I have betrayed most basely. You

must believe what I say now, you can't refuse to believe this.

Most basely. It is through you that I came to feel this so

deeply. After all, it is they and not I who have the right on

their side!-- theirs is the strength of invisible powers."(p.303).

Razumov's recognition that he no longer possesses the "strength of invisible

powers" is based upon his renunciation of all power language through his

"confession": it is the rejection of all the repressive and alienating

implications which lie behind or beyond the actual words one uses. Thus the

language of the "confession" aspires towards simple literalness, rejects all

abstractions, and like Conrad's own work it attempts to "address directly

the reader he had in mind" (p.300). It is an aspiration to a free and equal

form of communication between individuals which brings "solidarity" and thus

resolves alienation.

Natalia Haldin is, then, the first reader and the perfect reader

of that "confession". Her reaction to it, "My eyes are open at last and my

hands are free now" (p.315), is testimony to the liberating and saving power

of direct individual communication. For she also is saved by it from bondage

to a phrase against which she was "defenceless":

"I would take liberty from any hand as a hungry man would

snatch at a piece of bread. The true progress must begin

after. And for that the right men shall be found. They are

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already amongst us. One comes upon them in their obscurity,

unknown, preparing themselves. ..."

She spread out the letter she had kept in her hand all the time,

and looking down at it--

"Yes! One comes upon such men!" she repeated, and then read

out the words, "Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences." (p.117)

This phrase from her brother's letter, "Unstained, lofty, and solitary

existences", has exactly the same "sovereign ... power" (p.300) over her

imagination that unacknowledged, and hence "lying", fictions possess over

the minds of all readers. It gives verbal form, and hence "authority", to

the fiction of idealistic "progress" and empowers her imagination to "see"

through "obscurity": in an inversion of fiction's proper moral and

intellectual purpose, it thus gives her knowledge of the "unknown".

Thus the conversations between Natalia and the old Teacher,

which are interspersed throughout the novel, form the core of its explicit

ideological debate between "Russia" and the "West" and between the

antagonistic *ways of using and understanding language* which those places

imaginatively represent. Obviously, she represents that "Russian"

imagination and idealism which is a product of, as Conrad puts it in his

"Author's Preface", the "moral and emotional reactions of the Russian

temperament to the pressure of tyrannical lawlessness" (p.6) ; and he stands

for a "Western" rational scepticism which is itself the product of the

"ironic consciousness" which arises from a highly conventionalized and

formalistic "English" social understanding. Conrad's final point, his offer

of a solution to the problem of alienation that these representations

articulate, is that there is and can be no solution in terms of social or political thought. For Conrad, on the contrary, there is no ultimate truth and no final resolution of human isolation outside of that direct, equal and free form of communication that can occur in art alone: in that "recognition" and "solidarity" which it is the purpose of the artist's "good service" to construct. Ultimately, then, all crude divisions of social and political perspective are surpassed in *Under Western Eyes* and the Natalia who makes her last appearance in the novel is changed: having read Razumov's "confession", his renunciation of power in a "living, still" manuscript "wrapped up in my veil" (p.315), and thus come to a knowledge of the "might of falsehood", her response to the world is more tragic and more complex. She represents the result of a Conradian tragic awareness: a "resignation ... open-eyed and informed by love" [38]:

> She bowed her head in assent, and hesitated for a moment.
>
> "I must own to you that I shall never give up looking forward to the day when all discord shall be silenced. Try to imagine its dawn! The tempest of blows and execrations is over; all is still; the new sun is rising, and the weary men united at last, taking count in their conscience of the ended contest, feel saddened by their victory, because so many ideas have perished for the triumph of one, so many beliefs have abandoned them without support. They feel alone on the earth and gather close together. Yes, there must be many bitter hours! But at last the anguish of hearts shall be extinguished in love."
>
> And on this last word of her wisdom, a word so sweet,

so bitter, so cruel sometimes, I said good-bye to Natalia

Haldin. It is hard to think I shall never look any more into

the trustful eyes of that girl-- wedded to an invincible

belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a

heavenly flower from the soil of men's earth, soaked in

blood, torn by struggles, watered with tears." (p.316).

This, one of the most beautiful and poignant passages in Conrad, re-iterates

that "irreconcilable antagonism" between human hope and human reality which,

as we have seen, so pre occupied Conrad. The author, he insisted in "Books",

"in his dealings with mankind ... should be capable of giving a tender

recognition to their obscure virtues. I would not have him impatient with

their small failings and scornful of their errors." [39]. Natalia, who

recognizes the same values and realities, is thus the perfect counterpart to

Conrad's conception of the perfect "author".

<div align="center">*</div>

Notes:

1. <u>Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays</u> (London: Dent, 1928), p.133. Written in

   1904, this piece remained unpublished until 1928 when it was included in

   "Last Essays." All further page references to essays and articles in this

   collection are to this edition (hereafter,<u>LE</u>).

2. <u>Notes on Life and Letters</u> (London: Dent, 1921), p.8-9. This article

   appeared first in "The Speaker", but was collected in the above volume.

All further page references are to this edition (hereafter, NLL). As I

have said in the chapter, Conrad repudiated this piece in a letter to

Edward Garnett of 20-7-1905. Interestingly he wrote, "I am rather ashamed

of the silly thing I had to send to The Speaker, tho' I think that to say

it contains all my philosophy of life is a severe hit ... I wasn't even

aware that I had one."

[Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad ed. F.R.Karl and L.Davies,

   (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Vol.3. p.273

   (Hereafter,CL)].

3. For example see "A Familiar Preface": "It seems to me that in one, at

   least, authoritative quarter of criticism I am suspected of a certain

   unemotional, grim acceptance of facts; of what the French would call

   secheresse du coeur." A Personal Record (London: Dent, 1912) p.12. All

   further page references are to this edition (hereafter PR).

4. The Nigger Of The "Narcissus" (London: Dent, 1897), p.5. All further page

   references are to this edition.

5. Heart of Darkness (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.80.

6. NLL, p.126.

7. NLL, p.30.

8. LE, p. 132.

9. PR, p. 17-18.

10. The relevance of these questions and issues to the very personal problems

and conflicts that Conrad confronted as a result of his nationality

cannnot be ignored here. As a Pole, Conrad was the citizen of an

oppressed nation: a fate which is, perhaps, bad enough; but Conrad had to

contend with the extra guilt of apparently abandoning his national and,

particularly, his family traditions to become a writer in England.

It is in connection with this that the guidance of Conrad by his uncle,

Thaddeus Bobrowski, is most interesting. Apparently Conrad, in his

youthful idealism, was like many Poles initially attracted to Pan-Slavism

but this was a tendency checked by his Uncle's sober analysis in letters

like the following of 23-9-1881:

What you write about the hopes we attach to Pan-Slavism is very fine

and quite plausible, but in practice it involves great difficulties.

You do not pay enough attention to the effect of numerical strength

on world opinion. A more important nation which relies on Pan-Slavism

and publicly professes a disinterestedness it does not have, secretly

counts on its size to ensure its hegemony. You are making the same

mistake in attributing qualities to us which are not really ours. By

Pan-Slavism Russia understands only the Russification of all other

nations and their conversion to the Orthodox Church. She maintains

she is a country of eighty million inhabitants (which is not true)

and that our more highly developed culture and longer historical

existence represent the culture and life of only one single class

claiming to represent the nation (which is true to a certain extent)

and that it is *she,* Russia, who will really develop popular

culture.

This is interesting, not only because it expresses many of the attitudes

to Russia that Conrad himself built into <u>Under Western Eyes</u>, but because

that novel reproduces Bobrowski's central opposition here between the

Western "developed" and "historical" cultures, which Poland represents,

and that aggressive and "mystic" formlessness, represented by what he

goes on to call the "non-existent", "true Slav-Oriental culture" of

Russia. It is clear which of these types of culture Conrad himself veered

towards under the influence of his uncle, but his difficulties were not

allayed by the fact that he had to express his commitment in terms of

becoming a writer within a language and culture which was not Polish.

Indeed, as his uncle goes on argue in the same letter, the conditions for

the existence of a Polish "National Novelist" were simply not present in

a Russian dominated Poland:

... we more than anyone else, like the pariahs we are, deprived of

political life, and of all right to national development, must

preserve and defend our individuality today until a turn in historical

events, brought about by the efforts of our own minds, produces the

deeds that will restore our true existence as a nation.

[Cited by G.Jean-Aubry in <u>The Sea Dreamer</u> (London: George, Allen and

Unwin, 1957), p.93].

Novels are the type of "deeds" which construct a "nation" and Conrad's

novels, whilst not integrally English, are not integrally Polish either.

As Razumov tragically reflects: "... I am independent-- and therefore

perdition is my lot." (p.303).

For an extended treatment of these issues, beyond my scope and

knowledge, see Keith Carabine's essay "Conrad, Apollo Korzeniowski, and

Dostoyevsky". [_Conradiana_, Autumn, 1992].

11. _PR_ p.15.

12. _PR_ p.17.

13. _PR_ p.13.

14. _CL_ Vol.IV. p.490.

15. Letter to R.B.Cunningham-Graham, declining an invitation to speak at a

socialist rally, 8-2-1899. _CL_ Vol.2, p.30.

16. _Under Western Eyes_ (London: Methuen, 1911), p.4. All page references in

the text are to this edition,

17. The actual terms of this poem, entitled "To my son born in the 85th year

of Muscovite oppression, a song for the day of his christening", place

Conrad in the position of a political and spiritual orphan:

Be a Pole!... ... tell yourself

You are without land, without love,

without country, without people,

while Poland-- your Mother is in her grave ...

[Cited by Keith Carabine, "Conrad, Apollo Korzeniowski, and

Dostoyevsky", p.4. _Conradiana_, Autumn, 1992].

18. _Reflections On Violence_ (Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p.50.

19. Cited by Keith Carabine, _"The Figure behind the Veil": Conrad and

Razumov", from _Joseph Conrad's_ _Under Western Eyes: Beginnings, Revisions,_

Final Forms ed. David R. Smith (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1991),

p.15. (hereafter, _Carabine_).

20. _Carabine_, p.3-4.

21. _Situationist International Anthology_ edited and translated by Ken Knabb

(Berkeley, California: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981). p.121.

22. _NLL_ pp.13-14.

23. In _Leviathan_ (1651), Hobbes argues that it is language which saves man

from the "nasty, brutish and short" existence laid down by "natural"

law:

... the most noble and profitable invention of all ... [is] that of

SPEECH, consisting of *names* or *appellations*, and their connexion;

whereby men register their thoughts; recall them when they are past;

and also declare them one to another for mutual utility and

conversation; without which, there had been among men, neither

commonwealth, nor society, nor contract, nor peace, no more than

amongst lions, bears, or wolves.

[*Leviathan* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1935), p.18].

24. *PR* p.15.

25. *The Secret Agent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984). p.80. All page
    references in the text are to this edition.

26. From "Federalism, Socialism, and Anti-Theologism", 1867. Quoted by
    P.Berman in *Quotations from the Anarchists* (London: Praeger, 1972) p.55.
    (hereafter, *Berman*)

27. From "Protestation of the Alliance", 1871. *Berman*, p.36.

28. *NLL* p.8-9.

29. Natalia's purpose as a "pivot", and almost a form of discipline for
    Conrad, has been described by keith Carabine in "Construing "Secrets"
    and "Diabolism" in *Under Western Eyes*: A Response to Kermode". He
    argues that:

... through successive revisions, Conrad strove to use her as "a

pivot for the action to turn on", and thereby assured that she "does

not move" and is reduced to a "peg". His decision to shear Natalia's

"possibilities" was a "self-imposed limitation", designed to prevent

"novel-writing" becoming "a mere debauch of the imagination". (p.34).

30. Nigger of the "Narcissus" , as above, p.4.

31. Letter to Cunningham-Graham of 14 January, 1898. CL II. p.17.

32. Berman, p.34.

33. PR p.15.

34. The notion of "Mystification" arises, of course, directly out of a

concern for freedom: as a way of explaining our non-attainment of

that condition. Repressive forms of discourse attack a person's

freedom by undermining their ability to understand what is said to

them and consequently their ability to perform a rational appraisal

of the person or institution which addresses them. The very possibility

of rational and effective action is thereby destroyed.

"Mystification" is typically experienced by revolutionary political

groups in a conservative society: by groups who discover that, although

the public will often agree with their core ideas and values, they will

also fail to see how the world can be changed by those ideas and hence
fail to support them when action must be taken.

35. The "double bind" hypthosis was first formulated in 1956, by Bateson,
Jackson, Haley, and Weakland. It rejected explanations of schizophrenia
as genetically based or caused by infant trauma, and attempted to explain
it in terms of a pattern of communication between parent and child which
results in the child being unable to formally decide between
communicational modes. For the authors, the schizophrenic can be seen as
possessing weakness in three related areas of the ego function:

   a) He has difficulty in assigning the correct communicational mode to
      the messages he receives from other persons.

   b) He has difficulty in assigning the correct communicational mode
      to those messages which he himself utters or emits non-verbally.

   c) He has difficulty in assigning the correct communicational mode
      to his own thoughts, sensations, and perceptions.

      [G.Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind (London: Intertext, 1972)
      p.205].

Razumov's extreme isolation in his "family quarrel" can be seen as a
version of this dilemma, brought on by the repressive discourse employed
by his divided "parantage": the Russian nation as represented by the
"authorities" of autocracy and revolution.

36. Conrad could easily have encountered this idea of the distorting effects
of power on communication between individuals in even a cursory read,

or slight knowledge, of Bakunin. Bakunin's language is full of the imagery of master and servant, teacher and student, which he saw as the fundamental power relationship which shapes the modern political state. Consider this for example, from "The Bear of Berne and the Bear of St.Petersburg", in which he discusses the necessary isolation of the powerful, no matter how socially constructive their ideas are:

Whatever their democratic sentiments and their intentions may be, viewing society from the high position in which they find themselves, they cannot consider this society in any other way but in that in which a schoolmaster views his pupils. And there can be no equality between schoolmaster and pupils. [Berman, p.39].

37. Again I have borrowed the term "autistic" from Sanguinetti's diagnosis of the institutions of power, in advanced commodity capitalism, as suffering from a "schizophrenic psychopathology" (see chapter four).

38. PR, p.18.

39. NLL, p.9.

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