CHAPTER – 3

Identity Crisis: The Themes of Political Extremism, the Contrast between Eastern and Western Europe and human folly, cruelty, fears and betrayal in Joseph Conrad’s Later Novels: Under Western Eyes and The Secret Agent
In the chapter, I have selected Conrad’s two novels *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent*. Both novels are his later novels with similar themes and tell the story of a government agent masquerading as a revolutionist in order to betray the revolutionary group of which he is pretending to be a member. *Under Western Eyes* (1911) must be linked with *The Secret Agent* (1909) as both are bomb-scarred novels of revolution. In *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad expands his area of exposition from Democratic Europe to Communist Russia. Not that a particular political ‘ism’ interested him, it is the individual, living and suffering, under these patterns of society that concerned Conrad. His main thrust is on ‘the aspect, the character and the fate of the individual reaction of the Russian temperament to the pressure of tyrannical lawlessness. Conrad’s later works are marked by a distinct division of mankind into rival groups - good and bad-the former combined in the West and the latter in Russian society. In *The Secret Agent* Conrad was a conservative with little sympathy for extremist movement. But to approach the novel in that way is extremely misleading, and Conrad himself was the first to warn his readers against political interpretation of the novel. In *The Secret Agent* Conrad’s main thrust is on the relationship within lower-class family in modern society. It explores the possibilities of sentiment in such a representative family. And also it presents a world of developed nation. In the background is the great city of London and in the foreground is the tragic life of Verloc family.

**Under Western Eyes (1911):**

*Under Western Eyes* is one of the Conrad’s best novels; a vivid, eloquent and subtle study of political conflict, personal betrayal, guilt, atonement and identity crisis. It was originally planned as a short story; but as the project grew, the writing extended with painful difficulty from December 1907 to January 1910; and after
delivered the manuscript to his literary agent, Conrad suffered a physical and mental collapse. It was serialized in the *English Review* and simultaneously in the *North American Review* from December 1910 to October 1911. Between serial and volume publication there were further excisions, the final version being some 30,000 words shorter than the serial. It was published as a book in 1911. The novel had high praise from some of its reviewers. *The Pall Mall Gazette* praised its amazing truth and varied and masterly characterization. Richard Curle, friend of Joseph Conrad and early critic declared in the *Manchester Guardian* Conrad’s new work is a literary event of the first importance. The famous journal *The Morning Post* observed:

*Under Western Eyes* is written with that intensity of vision, that complete absorption in and by the subject and that astonishing mastery of the subtleties of language which have ever distinguished its author’s best work. ¹

Earlier critics stressed the political and international aspects of the book. A book review in *Westminster Gazette*, for instance, said that it was a brilliantly successful effort to make the Russian comprehensible to the Westerner. So it is and a perfectly poised work of art and the author’s finest achievement since *Lord Jim*.

The storyline of the novel *Under Western Eyes* is as follows:

It was published in 1911. The story is narrated by an elderly English teacher of languages in Geneva. He tells the story of the Russian student Razumov, using Razumov’s diary as well as his own observation.

Razumov, the illegitimate son of an aristocrat, is living without a family. His ambition is high academic success, the gaining of silver medal and perhaps even of a professorship. With dramatic effect and irony, Conrad shows Razumov climbing the stairs to his own room as he day-dreams of an announcement in the papers that he is at year’s silver medalist. This is but a shadow. When he enters his room a moment
later, he finds the murder Haldin, asking for his help. Razumov has found the involvement thrust upon him.

After agonizing uncertainty, Razumov betrays Victor Haldin to the Tsarist authorities. He is sent to Geneva by the revolutionaries, though in truth he is an agent of the police. In Geneva, he meets Haldin’s mother and sister. There the facts about Haldin’s death are brought to light. A coachman, Ziemiañitch, is blamed for this murder. Razumov falls in love with Haldin’s sister Miss. Nathalie. Ultimately his treachery is revealed and he remains uncomfortable to the end.

*Under Western Eyes* is the story of Razumov, the quietly studious illegitimate son of a Russian prince. He becomes implicated in a political assassination by Victor Haldin, a fellow undergraduate who has misinterpreted Razumov’s scholarly withdrawal for political silence, and who has assumed that Razumov is an anarchist. Razumov, being unable through circumstances over which he can exert no control to assist Haldin’s escape, reports him to the authorities who, after making the arrest, send Razumov as a political spy to Switzerland, that is to the very community of which Haldin’s mother and sister are members. Here he falls in love with the Haldin’s sister and he is unable to bear the falsehood of his position and betrays himself by confession.

One of a language teacher, narrates the story of Razumov:

It is based on a document; all I have brought to it is my knowledge of the Russian language, which is sufficient for what is attempted here. The document, of course, is something in the nature of a journal, a diary yet not exactly that in its actual form. ²

In the novel, we can see clearly that Conrad again treats the theme of exile, but here the spiritual exile of Razumov from his fellows is symbolized by the physical
exile with which his life is punctuated. We first meet him as an apparently orphaned student, through in fact that natural son of a Russian aristocrat. It is said:

Mr. Razumov was a tall, well-proportioned young man, quite unusually dark for a Russian from the Central Provinces. His good looks would have been unquestionable if it had not been for a peculiar lack of fineness in the feature (p.4).

Mr. Razumov is studying at St. Petersburg University in the third year in philosophy; he looked upon as a strong mature man. As the plot advances, he becomes exile from University, forced into an ethnic exile in Switzerland, and as a result of being in this way, bandied hither and thither, he becomes a victim of a breakdown in that moral perspicacity which had characterized his first actions as the centre of the novel. Hence, driven by love and lack of any moral support on which to rest, he betrays himself and becomes, as well we shall see, the victim of one of Conrad’s most masterly ironies at the hands of the Dame de Campagne.

*Under Western Eyes* is a work of art. First of all, Conrad is identified himself here with the professor of languages and secondly he wants to make it clear that this character should not obtrude into the novel. The professor is a character within the novel. Hence what goes on inside the framework of the novel is real to him. He is also Conrad, for whom the work of fictional art remains a similar reality. We can find support for this elsewhere where Conrad, still using the persona of the professor of languages, comments on the difficulty of using fiction to promote an entirely serious moral hypothesis:

Word as is well known, are the great foes of reality. I have been for many years a teacher of languages. It is an occupation which at length becomes fatal to whatever share of imagination, observation, and insight an ordinary person
may be heir to. To a teacher of languages there comes a time when the world is but a place of many words, and man appears a more talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot (p.01).

His is the narrator’s personal view of reality. He sees men as reduced virtually to the status of robots and he can report only what he hears and sees. Hence his own impressions, since they can report nothing more than what actually went on, will need analysis and interpretation, and this must come from the reader himself. The narrator will give us only the barest minimum and in so doing, will provide only the skeleton of the story. He wants us to realize that our emotions are not going to be manipulated. He is going to state the incidents and be amoral as to any conclusions. The decisions about good and bad, and about right and wrong are entirely our own. But Conrad does not pretend that he is creating a novel without outlook or without viewpoint, even discounting for the moment the moral one. For the professors are the ‘Western Eyes’ under which the mere indications of the Easterner aristocrats and anarchists alike, are scanned. It is said, “In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism” (p.82).

This embodies the whole of Conrad’s attitude towards Russia and summarizes his hatred of all that is Russian. A great Indian critic V.T. Giridhari says, *Under Western Eyes* expresses Conrad’s true and bitter feelings of hatred for Russia. He considered Russia responsible for the death of his parents and it always angered him to be compared, even in a remote way, with the greatest of the Russian writers.³

It gives us a precise national traits which will provide the stepping stones for the development of the novel. It begins with the reference to the sheer physical size of
the Russian nation in terms of people, and moves to voluntary suffering. In just the same way the novel begins with the tacit assertion that might is right and moves to voluntary self-inflicted martyrdom. Cynicism, it has been written, is the last refuge of the idealist. In Conrad’s analysis of the spirit of Russia it is not quite the last. The irony of the false existence, which Conrad claimed was the last of those who lived the life something else in store.

The professor provides the mode of narration by which Conrad, while insisting that we have complete freedom to make moral judgments on the characters of the novel in our own way, in fact shackles us, his readers, to an absolute single moral point of views. Conrad again uses his formula of birth, suffering and death. Razumov fully experiences all of these both physically and spiritually. In the beginning, he is not an uncommon type of character. He fits very simply indeed into Conrad’s universal picture of humanity as it was in 1911, “What all men are really after is some form, or perhaps only some formula, of peace. Certainly they are crying loud enough for it at the present day” (p.3). Given his lack of family circumstances, Razumov only wants to be left above to work out for himself a successful student career. The circumstance of Razumov despite his differentiates in his choice of action, because he lacks true and simple moral orientation, the end results in his action which is dissimilar. His career, as it interests us, runs through a series of separate influencing factors, but initially is his already mentioned, his need is the basic human one, though here accentuated by his being particularly sensitive and illegitimate. Having come into contact with Haldin’s personal anarchy, he chooses to betray to the government for purely selfish reasons and is thus compromised into becoming a secret agent. While in close contact with the anarchists, significantly on neutral territory in Switzerland, he suffers various heightened forms of exile; he has of course firstly been exiled from
University career by the government and as a result of this, he moves into an environment of greater anarchism than even that of the University. For he must as a part of his mission, join in the life of a group of supposedly active anarchists. Naturally enough he feels alienated from this micro-society membership which has been forced upon him. Finally he is forced by his own sister temperament and by falling in love with Haldin’s sister Natalia Haldina. It is said:

Her vice was deep, almost and yet caressing in its harshness, and yet caressing in its harshness. She had a dark complexion, with red lips and a full figure. She gave the impression of strong vitality. She directed upon me her grey eyes shaded by black eyelashes, and her attractive personality could be to a man capable of appreciating in a woman something else than the mere grace of femininity (p. 127).

This is a further, final exile for it not only betrays him, but also the trust that has been bestowed on him by the government, and so he becomes alienated spiritually as well as physically from his father, who symbolizes here the Russian authorities. So, briefly he begins as a voluntary exile from his fellow students in modern Oxford Parlance a ‘Grey Man’ joins the authorities by betraying his friend and finally is himself betrayed not just by the authorities but by his own actions and through the amorality of his outlook.

Let us think of Razumov. We must turn to his life at the university and to the figure of Haldin. Since the letter passes fleetingly through the novel, he need not detain us long. He worked not for his own comfort but motivated by deeply felt convictions. Nonetheless he gains some measure of both excitement and pleasure from the consequences of the bomb throwing. It is said:
No doubt he was looking forward to the consummation of his martyrdom. A man who resigns himself to kill need not go very far for resignation to die. Haldin slept perhaps more soundly than General T- whose task-weary work too was not done, and over whose head hung, the sword of revolutionary vengeance (p.86).

Conrad’s tone is very important here for beside the colloquial ring of weary work. We can appreciate why Conrad stresses the resignation in Haldin’s attitude. No man as sympathetic and intelligent as Haldin enjoys killing, but the firmness of his convictions, and the grounding of his moral position force him to do so. He is overcome by the fervor of his belief, ”Your brother believed in the power of a people’s will to achieve anything” (p.166).

Against the selfless positivism of this moral outlook, Razumov measures as well we shall see in due course, but poorly. Haldin offers us, in his fleeting appearances in the novel. The height of disinterested selflessness and provides an immediate contrast with the civil servants and aristocracy whose own appearances are alternated with Haldin’s to considerable effect.

One must of course appreciate that these members of the government are far more embroiled in the actual system of the state than over Haldin. In many ways, they are far less their own masters than he. It is however in their attitudes to Razumov that the difference appears most markedly. Haldin, it is true, has not been over considerate of Razumov’s personal safety. But then he has not been over-considerate of his own either. Furthermore, he is of the firm conviction that Razumov is a fellow conspirator, who would therefore be more than eager to help him. His sin, if such it is, one of mistaken judgment, not, as with the authorities, in the clear sighted manipulation of supposedly free acting persons.
Conrad shows the whole system of government as inappropriate to the needs of the people,

There was not the slightest prospect of anything of the kind. But was it not sin enough to live on Government salary while half Russia was dying of hunger? The Ministry of Finances! What a grotesque horror it is! What does the starving, ignorant person want with a Ministry of Finances? (p.187).

The moment Razumov turns informer, he is committed to lead the rest of his life as the tool of autocracy and the victim of General T’s hypocrisy, even while the General says to Razumov, “Nobody doubts the moral soundness of your action” (p. 47). He is assessing Razumov’s usefulness particularly as a pawn one of the secret agents of his spying. But this does not prevent the general from treating Razumov with the gravest suspicion and from initiating the course of events which results in his being sent to Switzerland by Mikulin and incidentally being exiled from the university where he had helped to become an eminent professor.

Switzerland provides Conrad with a magnificent setting for a group of anarchists who provided such a splendid contrast with Haldin. His behavior as we have seem was the result of disinterested conviction while there stemmed from comfort-seeking selfishness. Indeed they, together with Razumov, are searching largely for some measure of peace in their lives. Where the difference really lies is that Razumov has the honesty not to pretend that he is anything but what he actually is. Indeed his whole conduct is marked by the honest self scrutiny to which he subjects himself and which causes his downfall.

The anarchists whom Conrad has assembled for us in Switzerland are totally otherwise. Conrad writes:
The last thing I want to tell you is this: in a real revolution - not a simple dynastic change or a mere reform of institutions in a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues. The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane, and devoted nature; the unselfish and the intelligent may bring a movement - but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victim: the victims of disgust of disenchantment often to remorse (p.167-68).

So Razumov becomes the observer of such things there. But we would be wrong to assume that Conrad is showing us stereotypes. Indeed with typical irony, he shows us a group, ostensibly led by Peter Ivanovitch, the great feminist, where the women gain our sympathy very much more than the men. Indeed the whole character of Peter Ivanovitch, who worked out his philosophy of the great European powers while tempting the bogs of Siberia, is worthy of consideration.

Conrad is doing more than subjecting Ivanovitch to an ironic treatment here. The double-entendre in Ivanovitch’s anarchical necessity for women and Conrad’s narrator’s comment on their biological function in “There is nothing to be done without women” is only half the story. When it actually comes down to Ivanovitch’s motives, we can realize the shallowness, the utter shallowness of his moral conviction. He hopes for an assured and secure old age as the heir of Madame de S-a hope which, incidentally is not fulfilled, while towards a woman like Tekla, the ardent and misunderstood Dame de Compagnie in the Chateau Borel, his attitude both has been and still is one of absolute contempts.
Conrad is less harsh in his treatment of the women at the Chateau Borel. The ghoulish Madame de S ruled over them all with an air of decadent aristocracy. But she does not really concern us. Apart from Tekla about whom, more will be said shortly, we find our interests centering on Sophia Anlonovna. She alone of declared anarchists shows any concern for the human condition, and for the suffering individual. While still believing Razumov was Haldin’s political comrade, sympathizing over Haldin’s death. She says to Razumov,

Don’t I know how one feels after losing a comrade in the good fight? One’s ashamed being left. And I can remember so many. Never mind. They shall be avenged before long. And what is death? At any rate, it is not a shameful thing like some kinds of life. Razumov felt something stir in his breast, a sort of feeble and unpleasant tremor (p.325).

She is, of course, unwittingly, goading and tormenting Razumov while attempting to do the opposite for him just as her, “Crimson blouse being a flaring safety signal” (p.331), inverts the true nature of the real warning signal. Nonetheless, it is from her that the Professor of Languages learns the concluding chapters of Razumov’s story and it is from her too that Razumov gains forgiveness for the part he played in Haldin’s downfall.

Sophis Anolonve is perhaps too gentle for an anarchist, for her convictions pale beside those of Tekla, for whom Conrad reserves his greatest commendations. Tekla is the personification of straggling humanity, laboring on unthanked, or, worse still ignored, and it is she who, in blindness and ignorance, cares for Razumov through the last months of his life. She is the stereotype of the woman who must have a cause, caring for others or for the individual even if, as when we first meet her, the individual is a cat. Of course this is not to suggest that cats and people are the same to
Tekla. They might have been to Peter Ivanovitch, but then he is much less aware, despite his own personal sufferings of the needs of humanity than is Tekla. It is said:

Animals have their right; though, strictly speaking, I see no reason why they should not suffer as well as human beings. Do you? But of course they never suffer so much. That is impossible. Only, in their case it is more pitiful because they cannot make a revolution (p.184).

Tekla is clearly having more awareness of the depths of human nature than any other person in the novel. She is the greatest lively sacrifice of any of the characters in Under Western Eyes. She has never felt that she was very useful and yet the chief misery within her philosophy of life is that of having nothing to look forward to. Consequently she provides us with most interesting moral focus of any of the anarchists, and the one which Conrad most applauds.

Miss. Haldin’s influence on Razumov in Switzerland is different, although his relationship with her is as disastrous to him as is his contract with the anarchists. She tends to hold aloof from the secret conclaves at the Chateau Borel. It to Nathalie, then that we must have turns our attention. One could not do less justice to Conrad than by assuming that she is merely a technically convenient like between the Professor of Language and Razumov, inserted in order to make the narrative more natural by supplying the narrator with information which he could not otherwise be expected to posses. She does do this of course, but there is nothing nearly so clumsy in Conrad’s manipulation of this particular plot. Nathalie’s part is as integral as Tekla’s for it is she who finally heightens Razumov’s despair into self betrayal and she does this by the sweetness of her character which one would expect to achieve just the opposite effect. So she contrasts sharply with her mother’s views.
Miss Haldin stands outside her mother’s beliefs, both political and otherwise. Her life she leads on a purely personal level. Indeed it is refreshing to have come across someone in the novel who does this. Nonetheless, she is not an unthinking creature. Her life pivots on the characters of her mother and her brother, and the feeling that makes this so is of course reciprocated. Indeed it is through Haldin’s concern for his family’s welfare that his mother and sister are safely ensconced in Switzerland, and there is no doubt in the anti-Russian mind of his mother that his disappearance in the result of an autocratic coup. So when her fears are finally verified by a newspaper, and the effect on Nathalie, she becomes a virtual recluse. Nathalie however has the stamina as well as physical to cope with the situation. She seeks the truth, and in commenting as her brother’s death provides us unwittingly with analysis of Razumov, “He may have been betrayed by some false friend or simply by some cowardly creature” (p. 157).

Later her relationship with Razumov is gaining in warmth. She encouraged him because she wants to remain faithful to his departed spirit. Nathalie, virtually for her brother’s sake, allows Razumov to fall in love with her. But Razumov’s love has arisen from a reaction to the hatred he feels for very nearly everything and everyone connected with the name of Haldin. So Nathalie unwittingly averages her brother, for, as we know, it is Razumov’s love for her, and the hatred of deceiving her which accompanies it, that forces him into a confession. At first, as one might expect, Razumov is at considerable pains to avoid Haldin’s relatives. But this only serves to increase Nathalie’s sympathy for him and the justification of his conduct. On the one hand, Razumov through his hatred of Haldin’s having forced him to leave the university, regents the very presence of the Haldin’s while Nathalie suspects herself unworthy of association with her brother’s friend. She has realized, not knowing that
Razumov feels utterly hemmed in by his past, that he is ‘observing’ and ‘standing’ her but, in accordance with her nature, she believes that it is to see whether she is ‘worthy of his trust.’ Nathalie seems to us entirely unsuitable for a Mande Gonne type of activity, but this is not taken into account by the anarchists. She is the sister of the hero of the hour. To their eyes that is the first point in her favour. Secondly, of course, Peter Ivanovitch must have disciples. So much of their anarchical activity is an attempt at persuading Nathalie to join the group. It is to the end that they encouraged Razumov’s friendship with her. Razumov’s confession to her is in fact probably what saves her from a life of so called anarchy at Chateau Borel. The change in her is overwhelming and immediate. At first she is reduced to the same state as her mother’s view. There is simplicity in her reply to Razumov’s confession that makes us sympathetic the more with her suffering.

*Under Western Eyes* is the story of a single character Razumov. His role in the novel is of interest. Conrad shows sympathy to him. Razumov’s character is not nearly so difficult to understand as many critics would have us believe. On the simplest level, one can see that he falls in love because, having never experienced that sense of belonging which grows out of the privilege of living as a member of the family unit, he needs more than most of the love and security which his illegitimacy has always denied him and which his father has tried to replace at purely by financial aid, and secondly with political manipulation. His great misfortune and it is so great that it almost amounts to a sort of hubris on his part like that of so many of Conrad’s heroes is the misfortune of environment. But more than just this, it is the misfortune of personal circumstances in a hostile world, of personal circumstances in a hostile world, of personal alienation, everyone max of exile. Because of all this, his betrayal
is a betrayal of self brought about by his unfitness to cope with conditions in which his birth has forced him to live. Jacques Berthoud says,

At the glance the resemblances between Lord Jim and Under Western Eyes are more striking than between any two other works by Conrad. The two novels have a similar theme: the exploitation of the consequences of an act of betrayal, they have a similar form: an elderly narrator’s examination of the motives of a young protagonist over two periods and the locations.⁴

Not just his birth but its illegitimacy of it, combine to form his destiny. Everyone of his choices of action can be referred back to the isolation of his situation, where family circumstances would have conditioned him to react quite differently.

In dealing with Razumov the student, Conrad stresses that he is the child of Russia, rather than a specific father. Indeed this is clearly one of the dramatic and artistic functions of his bastardly within the framework of the novel. We are not allowed to puzzle at all over the person of his fault. Conrad comments with a certain amount of pride that no one in England could have forced into Razumov’s position. But as soon as one begins to look at the novel as a political preposition, one moves away from the true centre of the work of art while concentrates as the individual.

Razumov is Conrad’s hero, and as one would expect, there are several things to notice here. Razumov’s lack of real experience that is, his ignorance of the world, coupled to the fact that he has had little opportunity for establishing personal relationship and thus simply of getting to know about people, leads him to formulate distressingly naïve judgment in this particular situation. He comes down at once on the side of such a hopelessly vogue concept as ‘true courage’ without halting for one moment over the problem of definition. This is a very fair indication which Conrad and it gives us as to the nature of Razumov’s increased quandary, his lack of
background, isolation as it were drawn from him. Positive and unquestioning answer where there still remains a great deal of room for doubt. A lack of pondering does not amount to amorality on his part, but it is the nearest thing to it that morality of his part can ever come. Similarly this naivety engenders in him a mental attitude by which he is quite unable at this stage at any rate, to follow an action through to its conclusion. He is unable to see whole move ahead, or even to realize the implications of present action. So his immediate impulse is to go out to the assistance of Haldin.

Razumov’s weakness really lies in his morality; for his motivation not only comes entirely from self in his circumstances. He is not loyal to his father so much as running to his father, because the situation he got beyond his control and suiting himself. There is the true emotional turning point, the commencement of self awareness, and the beginning of his acknowledgement of his moral commitment. He is no longer, it seems quite so isolated, at any rate physically. But with that, he has lost his independence and as for his emotional cool moral circumstance. Razumov realizes the loss of his security; he longs once more to give vent to his hatred for Haldin to such an extent that it becomes transplanted into the physical desire to throttle him. His hatred is now more the result of his own guilty at having betrayed Haldin for this action is marked by no selfless idealism as was Haldin’s. Razumov lacked any awareness, let alone any conviction that he was morally bound to Haldin or to the government by amoral necessity. His action is rather more potent than it might make it seems, instead of acting whole heartedly on Ziemianiter and then to the police. Norman Page says,

There is a similarity between Razumov’s action and Jim’s jump from the pilgrim ship. They were both acts of cowardice committed in exceptional circumstance by unexpected people with average moral sensibility.⁵
Here again we see him lacking a true morally positive action either way, and through sheer failure properly to examine the situation, he compromises himself into a situation where he can be conscripted into becoming a secret agent and also significantly a double job.

In the novel Razumov can be seen as a hero. There is a multiplicity of experience in the novel which allows that just as in real life no two people will predictably act in the same way. Thus though all the characters trust Razumov, they trust him for different reasons. For example, Nathalie’s acceptance of him stems from the mention of him in her brother’s letters, while Tekla’ derives from the fact that he treated her an a equal human being, symbolizing for us his action of raising his hat to her. But the point really is that Conrad achieves a situation in which all his characters accept Razumov without straining the bounds of possibility. In just the same way, though each character and in this case, each reader has his own different moral views, the final judgment on Razumov will remain the same. Inmadar says,

Razmov sees figures of man who symbolize the animal and the devil in him.

Conrad images, through the black and red colors, the dangerous and the devilish position that Razumov is in.

His redemption has been achieved. He has been also to win back his self esteem and, whatever the physical loss involved was for himself more wholeness.

In the novel Under Western Eyes there are mainly three areas of communication and knowledge as scrutinized writing, speech and non-verbal communication. Not only does the novel attempt to answer that central question of Razumov’s ‘how can you tell truth. A question that relates primarily to the interpretation of message, particularly written ones, but it also concerns itself with an
allied if never –stated question, ‘how do we distinguish the real from the imagined?. Such a question is involved in the novel.

As the title mentions the eye both sees and is seen. It is the most delicate organ of sense that knows no guilt. Its search for knowledge cannot be hidden from others. In the novel, there is a description of the eye of almost every character. A watch man disliked Haldin’s ‘Ugly eyes.’ Zienianithc’s eye balls blinked all white in the light when he was found drunk by Razumov. General T has pale blue eyes. Peter Ivanovitch’s concealed eyes shielded from others by his sinister dark glasses. Madame de S. had artificial eyes. These references are clearly meant to indicate something about the characters concerned and can be considered in the light of a long tradition of attributing a moral significance to physical appearance. Because the eye is so intimately and necessarily related to communication and knowledge. So comments about a character’s eyes symbolically implicate both the objectivity or otherwise of their knowledge and the honesty or otherwise with which they communicate with other people.

Natalie’s trustful eyes are the eyes of Eve, innocent and thus unable to detect evil. They reveal her innocence and they see only innocence. But they also persuade Razumov, eventually to be innocent-to reveal his guilt to her. Razumov first meets the teacher of languages; he stares fixedly at him, but later, when his eyes meet those of the ‘worthy opponent’ Sophia Antonovna, he looked away from her. At the close of the novel when Razumov is preparing to lay Natalia about Zeimianiters’s responsibility for Haldin’s death, he is portrayed with his eyes firmly on the floor until the point at which he prepares to tell her the truth.
The novel ends with Razumov’s confession. Nathalie becomes a social worker in Central Russia, and Razumov returns to a small town in the South of Russia. He has not long to live and is both crippled and deaf but he is not unhappy. Some of the revolutionists even visit him occasionally because they respect him for having had the courage to declare himself openly to them without having come to share their political and intellectual convictions. So we find fears, betrayals, political extremism and identity crisis.
THE SECRET AGENT (1907):

*The Secret Agent* was originally a short story entitled ‘Verloc’, but the story expanded considerably in the process of composition. It was finished by early November 1907 and serialized in an American magazine *Ridgway’s: A Militant Weekly for God and Country*, from 6th October to 15th January 1907. The early version contained only six chapters. The first four of these remained as the first four of the definitive edition. The rest underwent extensive revision before being published in book form by Methuen publisher in London and Harper Brothers in New York in September 1907. Early in 1920 Conrad turned the novel into a play which was produced in London in November 1922. But it was a commercial failure and closed after ten performances.

The critical reception of the novel was generally favorable, and it was praised in such prestigious weeklies as *The Spectator, The Times Literary Supplement* and *The Nation*. *The Nation* had a review by Edward Garnett, who delighted Conrad by spotting ‘the significance of Winnie’s mother; the real heroine of the story as concealed in the trivial figure of Mr. Verloc’s mother-in-law’. A critic Arnold Bennett observed:

Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* is a sort of sensationalism sternly treated on the plane of realistic psychology. It is a short story written out to the length of a novel. Nothing but single episode told to the last drop. The Embassy scenes did not appear to me to be quite genuine, but rather a sincere effort to imagine events for which the author had nothing but psychological date of a general order. But the domestic existence of the spy, and the character of his wife- the ‘feel’ of their relations, very masterly indeed, also the invention of the idiot
brother-in-law for the doing of the crime. On the other hand, the contrivance of the mother-in-law’s departure, though the departure in itself was excellent, seemed clumsy; and the final scenes between the wife and the anarchist after her husband’s death rather missed fire in their wilderness; they fail, not in the concept but in execution. The book gives a disappointing effect of slightness.  

*The Secret Agent* shared in the general neglect of Conrad’s work during the generation after his death, though Edward Crankshaw suggested in his book that Conrad ‘achieved what may have been the greatest of all his purely technical feats.’ Its recognition as a masterpiece and one of the finest of all Conrad’s novels, came with the appearance of F.R. Lewis’s *The Greatest Tradition* in 1948, in which Conrad is awarded one of the five places in the pantheon of English fiction and this particular book is declared to be ‘one of the two unquestionable classics of the first order that he added to the English novel.

The storyline of the novel *The Secret Agent* is as follows:

In *The Secret Agent* Conrad continues his depiction of men in society. This time we are in a world of spying and counter-spying, of government departments and police action. There is a Secret Agent himself, Mr. Verloc. It is his boast that he has had his fingers on every ‘murdering plot of the last eleven years’. Chief Inspector, Heat of the English police admits that Verloc’s information very likely saved “ugly trouble”, on the day of an imperial visit to London. He is, in fact, a double agent working for both sides. Now with the coming of the new secretary in the Foreign Embassy which employs him, Mr. Verloc finds himself ordered to blow up Greenwich Observatory. His life as a ‘rather well-known hanger-on and emissary of the Revolutionary Red Committee’ it is not to be so easy in the future.
Mr. Verloc knows all about revolutionists. The professor is the only revolutionary we can admire. What we admire in the professor is his single-mindedness, his freedom from the selfish.

The novel is organized as a succession of sciences, each of which throws a light on revolutionary activity. When, for example the professor leaves Ossipon, he accidentally meets Chief Inspector Heat. It is a splendidly handled incident. The novel adopts throughout the method of inviting the reader to turn normal judgment upside down. It is a drama conditioned by, and throwing light on, ‘the game’ played exacted by ‘the game’ for his too-trusting spirit. The story of the novel has a sufficient scope for a Marxist interpretation also.

The main themes of *The Secret Agent* can easily be disengaged from the imagery. The images of darkness and sterility illustrate the theme of secrecy, identity-crisis and betrayal. Sir William Harcourt’s sentence, quoted in the Author’s Note, also applied to the characters of the novel: their idea of secrecy does indeed also consist in keeping themselves and others in the dark. The general sterility can only yield sterile or destructive relationships. Actually the line between secrecy and betrayal is very thin. Verloc’s connection with the Embassy had begun with an act of betrayal, since he had stolen for them the design of the new French field gun. He had eventually been betrayed by a woman who had got hold of his money and sold him to the police. His present concealment of the truth from his wife and fellow anarchists is another form of betrayal. The old story repeats itself when he is killed by the woman; he trusts most in the world. She goes away with his money, but he is in turn betrayed by the man whom she regards, with unquestioning trust, as her savior.

In *The Secret Agent* Conrad’s main thrust is on the relations within a lower class family in modern society. It also explores the possibility of sentiment in such a
representative family. Once again as in Nostromo, here is the vast world of human interaction; whereas Nostoromo dramatizes the history of events in an underdeveloped nation. The Secret Agent presented a world of developed nation. In the background there is the great city of London and in the foreground is the tragic life of Verloc’s family. Adolf Verloc is the owner of a little stationary shop in Soho. He has been sending information to a Foreign Embassy and has drawn a set of salary from them for his services. He combined this with the other secret activities; he also acts as an informer for the British Police and is a member of an anarchist organization. Because of his indolent temperament, however, he is not greatly disturbed by the contradictions implied by his triple allegiance. Winnie’s mother’s opinion is “Mr. Verloc was a very nice gentleman.”

Mr. Verloc is a protagonist, he woke up early and out in the morning, he left his shop normally in charge of his brother-in-law. His shop was small in London. The shop was a square box of a place, with the front gazed in small panes. In the daytime the door remained closed; in the evening it stood discreetly but suspiciously ajar.

The Secret Agent is ‘a single tale’ about a modern European city of London, where one seemed to have a definite identity of his own. Even individuals are struggling of their own security and survival and are the lost in the process. Throughout the novel, people treat each other as a means to an end, as articles of manipulation rather than as human entities. Conrad’s ironic treatment extends not only to one or a few characters but goes beyond them to cover all cross-currents of relationships between people and social institutions. Conrad takes us in an altogether different society, in the sense that the novel renders the different faces of squalor created by materialistic outlook.
Mr. Verloc is presented ironically in his three folded capacity of shopkeeper, a secret agent and the head of a family. He had been a lodger in the large decaying Belgravia house of Winnie’s mother, the widow of a licensed victualler. It is said,

Winnie Verloc was a young woman with a full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips. Her hair was very tidy. Steady-eyed like her husband, she preserved an air of unfathomable indifference behind the rampart of the counter (p. 8).

Winnie is a respectable wife with an air of unfathomable reserve. Her brother Stevic was a good fellow, he was dedicate and, in a frail way, good-looking, he had learned to read and write but notwithstanding, the unfavorable aspect of lower lip. But as errand-boy he did not turn out a great success. Winnie’s mother was,

A stout, wheezy woman, with a large brown face. She wore a black wig under a white cap. Her swollen legs rendered her inactive. She considered herself to be of French descent, which might have been true; and after a good many years of married life with a licensed Victualler of the more common sort, she provided for the years of widowhood by letting furnished apartments for gentlemen near Vauxhall Bridge Road in a square once of some splendor and still included in the district of Belgravia (p.8).

Mr. Verloc and his family lived happily. Mrs. Verloc asked about his business. It indicated that a family lived very happily and peacefully.

Initially, the story appeared to be of a lower class family without much expectation from life except a secure and reasonable living. The central motif of the novel is home, which every human being longs and works for. Family is an ancient and indispensable constituent of any civilized society. But ironically having achieved a particular level the society itself becomes instrumental in breaking down. Conrad in
his “Author’s Note” insists that *The Secret Agent* is “Mrs Verloc’s Story” (xii) though it derives its title from Verloc’s activities. Conrad’s insistence can be justified, perhaps, on the ground that his emphasis is directed on the lasting values of love and compassion as embodied in the person of Mrs. Verloc.

The assumption in *The Secret Agent* is that society weakened by economic rat-race and political cut-throatism has to be protected. He means that the individual must be preserved. The modern man, Conrad believed that, has become the victim of “a philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort” (p.15). Yet Conrad’s novels do basically deal with human efforts at solidarity and fraternity. Jeremy Hawthorn rightly observed:

The world of *The Secret Agent* is a world of ‘private individuals’ who have the appearance of self-sufficiency and independence, but who are related to one another in all sorts of concealed but crucial ways. It is this privacy that, in part at least, explains the insistent reversal of animate and inanimate qualities in the novel.  

Later, the story appeared to be of a political, identity crisis and military affair. Mr. Verloc is a secret agent. He is a British citizen of French extraction who began his connection with the people of Embassy. Mr. Valdmir, the first secretary of the representative of a foreign power in London-obviously Russia, though it is never named Mr. Vladimir is a real villain of the story and he is the ‘true agent’ when Mr. Verloc met Privy Councillor Wurmt, Chancelier d’Ambassade and reported his secret matters. Mr. Valdmir blaming to Mr. Verloc. It is said,

You wouldn’t deceive an idiot. They all are that by-the-by, but you seem to me simply impossible. So you began your connection with us by stealing the
French gun designs. And you got yourself cough. That must have been very disagreeable to our Government. You don’t seem to be very smart. (p.18)

But Mr. Verloc did not reply rashly. The Chancellier d’Ambassade, the first secretary complained of Verloc’s corpulence and laziness. He judged from refreshing his record, he has not done anything to earn his money for the last three years. He continued and said, “There is a proverb in the country which says prevention is better than cure” (p.20) the business of the agent is to provoke not to write and speak. They have no use for their voice, however, good it may be what they need is facts. Mr. Vladimir always criticized Mr. Verloc, “the Fellow was unexpectedly vulgar, heavy, and impudently unintelligent. He looked uncommonly like a master plumber come to present his bill” (p.21), but the first Secretary assigned some work to Mr. Verloc.

Mr. Verloc is a typical Conradian hero of the phase, self-centered seeking security and safety, lethargic and avaricious. He moved between two political worlds of anarchists on the one hand and is protected by police and foreign embassies on the other. But, personally, he is committed to neither. He is a ‘thoroughly domesticated person’ with not much of ‘spiritual mental or physical needs’ (p.8). He is content to find at home “the ease of his body and the peace of conscience together with Mr. Verloc’s wifely attentions and Mrs. Verloc’s mother’s differential regard” (p.8). A great critic Jocelyn Baines thinks that indolence is the sustaining of Verloc’s relationship without which they cannot live together and “with it they are able to live insulated from each other like two wires in an electric flex: the breaking of the insulation brings immediate disaster”.10

Mr. Vladimir believed in no establishment or any system or social institution. The idea of human bond through marriage and family is contemptible to him. Forming an “attachment is doing away with you usefulness” (p.24), opines Vladimir.
His story is that, “I suppose it’s merely a manner of speaking Anarchists don’t marry” (p.27). He believed royalty and religion are no more respected and church should be left alone, therefore no more needed by humanity. He tells Verloc that “The Sacrosanct fetish of today is science” (p.24). The greatest utility of science, Vladimir thinks, is in the convenience that it can extend to anarchists for the purpose of destruction. Without this the survival of society and emergence of a new order cannot be visualized. For Verloc such an ideology seems to be a suitable arrangement since it provides for his own livelihood and the well-being of his family. But he does not visualize the danger involved.

Conrad comments that the anarchists had no regular work and depended on women for their subsistence. At Verloc’s home his anarchist friends are gathered in the little parlor behind his shop. The other people are Karl Yundt, the ancient terrorist, Michaelis, the ticket-of-leave apostle, Comrade Alexander Ossipon-nicknamed the Doctor, ex-medical student without a degree; afterwards wandering lecturer to working-men’s association upon the socialistic aspects of hygiene; author of a popular quasi-medical study. Each expresses his own view on the political situation. Michaelis who had plenty of time for meditation in the fifteen years spent in prison, foresees the end of capitalism; Karl Yundt, who has the talent of an actor on platform but never raised a finger against the social edifice tells many stories of injustice and oppression in which events his hatred of society and denounces its ‘cannibalistic’ economic conditions. Ossipon says, “without emotion there is no action” (p.35). Mr. Verloc remains silent still unnerved by his recent interview at the Embassy and he is aware that he had lost his security. He does his best to conceal his irritation, when his anarchist friends had left. He reflects that they are a ‘lazy lot’ but he also envies them because they are not threatened by Mr. Vladimir, and have
women to fall back upon instead of a whole household to provide. Mr. Verloc cannot speak to the anarchists because he is betraying them.

Mr. Verloc’s family set-up seemed to work well all its members. Verloc has no children but Mrs. Verloc’s maternal affections find their object in her half-witted brother Stevie. Winnie’s father was bitter that he had produced a retarded son. He hated his son and could not have loved Winnie for protection. Her mother’s excessively sentimental love for Stevie prevents her from loving her daughter. Winnie, the non-recipient of filial compassion grows up to play almost the role of a surrogate mother to Stevie. Her personal happiness is absorbed in that role.

Since Winnie is a surrogate mother, she cannot think of being a daughter, sister or wife. Her relationship with Stevie, however redeeming it may be as a personal level, has a devastating impact on her marriage. Generally considered Stevie is a rival figure in Winnie’s marriage since Winnie prefers her brother above her husband. Her protective love for Stevie reveals a deeper sense of human bond. Deprived of filial love, Winnie knew its value and desire Stevie to have it at all costs. So marrying Verloc, she sought a father for her adopted son. Winnie had married Mr. Verloc. Young days she had a romance with a butcher’s son. All this does not mean that *The Secret Agent* is a very simple story of a woman’s determination to protect the future of her own siblings. Like other stories of Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, too, is a complex story of woe, longing, suffering and identity crisis.

Conrad’s concept of the novel as the ‘history of human experience’ is contained in one word- suffering. Suffering in Conrad’s novels involves the fate of an individual attempting desperately to wrest a life of peace and contentment in a world of discontent and disharmony. Verloc attempts to maintain at least a semblance of peace. Mr. Verloc, in truth, as respectably married man gives to maintain himself and
his wife in comfort and security of home. We even approved of the moral insulation
that has kept this couple contended in their decent marital domestic fold. The ease
loving middle-class Verloc gets involved in a dangerous situation. Verloc has in his
own way a fidelity to the idea of social stability, mainly of course, because of his
lethargic temperament. He is out to disclose the plans of anarchists.

Restaurants were generally the place of discussion for anarchists. Comrade
Ossipon sat reading a newspaper. A newspaper reported about the attempted bomb
outrage against the Greenwich Observatory:

Bomb in Greenwich Park. There isn’t much so far. Half past eleven. Foggy
morning. Effects of explosion felt as far as Romney Road and Park Place.
Enormous hole in the ground under a tree filled with smashed roots and
broken branches. All round fragments of man’s body blown to pieces. That’s
all. The rest’s mere newspaper gup (pp. 47-48).

Ossipon is eager to get more information about it. He collected information
about it from professor. Richard Curle said: “The Professor was a very different type-
he was dangerous.” Indeed he assumed that since he makes all the explosives for the
anarchists his companion must have supplied the stuff, and perhaps even knows the
name of the man who was blown up in Greenwich Park that very morning. Ossipon
finally asks professor ‘whether he remembered the man who came for the bomb’. The professor answered straight away that his customer was Verloc. The news comes
as a shock to Ossipon, who does not so much disclose the death of his fellow
anarchist as shudder at the possible consequences of his inconsiderate act if his
identity comes to be revealed. Stevie died in the bomb blast.

The Secret Agent presented two contrasting worlds. First is the world of
Verloc, a quiet of domestic. It is a finely knit together by mutual acceptance of
relationships with Mrs. Verloc at the centre. Another world is the world of anarchy represented by Vladmir. The first world consists of domestic expectations and emotional dependence in a family relationship. In spite of the seeming indifference of the Verloc’s relationship there is an element of intimacy and concern that worked as a catalyst. The following dialogue between husband and wife showed the point effectively: Mrs. Verloc, expressed her surprise at seeing him up yet:

‘I don’t feel very well,’ he muttered, passing, his hands over his moist brow

‘Giddiness?’

‘Yes, Not at all well.’

‘You’ll catch cold standing there,’ she observed.

Mr. Verloc made an effort, finished undressing and got into bed. Mr. Verloc, on her back, and staring at the ceiling, made a remark, ‘Taking very small today; ‘did you turn off the gas downstairs?” yes, I did (p.40).

Conrad described an interdependence and mutual indispensability of Winnie-Verloc bond.

Stevie is the most centre moving relationship in the novel. Verloc and others are related to Stevie in a complex vortex of emotions and sentiments. For the quiet looking and submissive Winnie, the main sources of sustenance is her brother and not her husband. She had quietly ignored her feelings for the butcher’s son, mainly because she thought Verloc could provid the security of home to her brother and mother Winnie thinks of Verloc and Stevie as ‘father and son.’ Winnie’s mother could never see why Winnie had ever married Verloc. But Winnie on her part had come to have satisfactory arrangements with Verloc. To Winnie marriage is a matter of
convenience, and not at all born out of affection, and warmth of love. She is a dutiful wife. Richard Curle observed:

In certain respects Winnie Verloc was a simple woman. Her education had been scanty, she knew nothing and cared nothing about the world at large and her life was guided by emotions and principles, she took for granted and never thought of questioning.¹²

Verloc’s attitude too is equally doctrinaire. Both have taken each other for granted. It seemed to be a loveless family life but it worked all right of course in her brooding moments. Winnie is not without regrets.

Conrad described a typical family set-up in a modern society. Like every other relationship, the relationship of husband-wife too has its own limitations. When Winnie realizes the extent of her husband’s involvement in Stevie’s death, the very foundations of her being seemed to give a way right from her early days. Winnie expressed her negative attitude, “He had been the master of a house, the husband of a woman and murderer of her Stevie” (p.167). Stevie’s death forever she feels betrayed and free from the bonds of marriage with Verloc. In a single stroke, the two support of her existence, trust and love.

Winnie Verloc is a woman of Conrad whose devotion is wasted in the face of ideals or ideas cherished by their men. For instance, Winnie feels completely, alienated after the death of her brother. Stevie is a major source of familial tension. His death affects Winnie adversely. Verloc too, cannot escape the devastating impact of Stevie’s death. While Winnie feels alienated, Verloc lost all communication with his wife. The growing hostility between Winnie and Verloc has been variously interpreted. Winnie's mental condition had the merit of simplicity; but it was not
sound. It was governed too much by a fixed idea. Mentally she is imbalanced. She hates him,

Every nook and cranny of her brain was filled with the thought that this man, with whom she lived without disaste for seven years, had taken the ‘poor boy’ away from her in order to kill him- the man to whom she had grown accustomed in body and mind; the man whom she had trusted, took the boy away to kill him! In its form, in its substance, in its effect, which was universal, altering even the aspect of inanimate things, it was a thought to sit still and marvel at forever and ever (p.157).

Winnie plunges her domestic knife into Verloc and kills him. At the movement Winnie resembles Stevie, but soon that resemblance disappeared. I think it was a very significant charge because here Stevie and Winnie have become one soul and two bodies.

The end of all relationship between Winnie and her husband Verloc, is for an eternal search for warmth of love and security; in spite of all the hurts and humiliations. Conrad suggested life forfeiture is not within an easy range of human courage. In the vast world human associations Winnie finds that she has no obligations any more and feels free. But she did not know what to do with her newly acquired freedom. At the movement Winnie thought suicide but the life-instinct gets the better of her fear and she begins to weave a highly subjective system of morality and private code of conduct. It is very interesting to observe that Winnie does not renounce her hopes in life despite the gory tragedy. She has recently come out of absolutely free now; she requests Ossipon help to escape from there. He showed pity; Ossipon is a man, for given to survive. He agreed to help her. Ossipon has no genuine
commitment. Winnie must find someone to devote herself, and she blamed Mr. Verloc and defended herself as a good wife,

He seemed good-natured, he was freehanded, he had money, he never said anything. Seven years—seven years a good wife to him, the kind, the good the generous, the—And he love me Oh, yes. He loved me till I sometimes wished myself—seven years. Seven years a wife to him. And do you know what he was that dear friend of yours? Do you know what he was? He was a devil! (p.173).

The situation is different. Now she is in a dilemma and she was thinking to escape from crime. Her life is meaningless without a companion. She can devote to others. She begged him she is feared of law and order. She pleaded piteously, ‘Don’t let them hang me, Tom! Take me out of the country. I’ll work for you. I’ll slave for you. I’ll love you. I’ve no one in the world…. Who would look at me if you don’t!... I won’t ask you to marry me” (p. 181). When Ossipon deserts her, she kills herself since she has no one to work for. She is the best example for the feminine devotion transforming into a rational value. However, Winnie’s death canceled out this possibility. But the irony here is that this possibility is frustrated not because of any inherent limitation of the feminine soul but because of the limits of relationships in a male-dominated world. Winnie’s life has been a compromise between her loyalty towards her family and an effort to satisfy her feminine instincts.

In modern novels, especially Conrad’s novels, the individual is the ultimate source of hopes and optimism against the frenzy and madness of a dehumanizing materialistic society. An extremely lucid example of such individuals are Stevie in The Secret Agent, Wait in The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’, Mr. Whirr in Typhoon and Razumov in Under Western Eyes. Mr. Stevie is a half-witted brother of Mrs. Verloc
seemed to be the only fully human and sane character in the society with a strong sense of pity and compassion for every type of suffering.

Stevie is not aware of social injustice and that he is prepared to anything to eradicate it. That is why Mr. Verloc has no difficulty in arousing the boy’s compassion and is persuading him that the blowing up of the Greenwich Observatory is a ‘humanitarian act.’ Stevie, in his own way, knew that love can be an effective substitute for all inhuman and violent ways of man in society. While Verloc’s anarchist friends pretend to adopt postures of social responsibilities, Stevie showed a genuine social conscience and true sympathy for the poor and the oppressed. His concerns are larger than the London society can contain. He helped his sister in her household duties. He services Verloc with blind loyalty and spends his spare time drawing circles with compass, pencil and a piece of paper. He has equal sympathy for the humans as well as the animals. When Stevie entreats the cab-driver, not to whip the horse, we have an insight into the ‘lunatic’s’ sanity contrasted to the insanity of London society permeated with politics and anarchic squalor. Stevie’s sympathy for the horse is a commentary on man’s inhuman and cruel ways. His sympathy for the cab-driver on the other hand, is a sad comment on a society. It is said: “Stevie knew what it was to be beaten. He knew it from experience. It was a bad world Bad! Bad! ‘Bad world for poor people!” (p.109). The cab driver is aware of the world’s hostility to the individual and longing for a peaceful family life. Stevie feels so strongly for their suffering that he has a desire to take them into a band of compassion.

Stevie is a man of a good soul. He is a compassionate soul but that does not necessarily mean that he is capable of understanding the world. Winnie alone is the person who can understand this particular dilemma of Stevie. She knows that Stevie is upset by the bad world because he did not understand it. The painful irony of it all is
that Stevie’s compassion derives from his madness. Conrad seemed to suggest that in
an insane world, the only merit of sanity is the compassion of a mad man. Stevie is
the compassion of a mad man. Stevie is an embodiment of simplicity and positive
morality. But the society in which he lived was complex and tends to eliminate
simplicity. The simple ones are not allowed to exist. It is in the portrayal of Stevie that
Conrad does some serious thinking on madness and castigates the madness of the
world in general.

The identity crisis begins with the first hint of expectations being falsified in
the opening scene at the German Embassy. There, Privy Councillor Wurmt,
Chancellier d’Ambassade questioned the vigilance of the English Police, but the
vigilance turns out to be embarrassingly greater. Later in the same scene, Vladmir
announces that ‘England must be brought into line’ with the continent in the way she
deals with revolutionaries in the end of his action. Chief Inspector Heat was a kind
man, an excellent husband, a devoted father; and the public and departmental
confidence he enjoyed acting favorable upon an amiable nature, disposed him to feel
friendly towards the successive Assistant Commissioner. He hoped to use the
explosion of the bomb to justify the imprisonment of Michaelis. Inspector Heat
suspected: “I mean apart from the fact that the two men under suspicion - your’s
certain there were two of them came last from a railway station within three miles of
the village where Michaelis is living now!” (p.77). But the Assistance Commissioner
rejected it and said, “Michaelis was writing night and day a shaky, slanting hand that
Autobiography of Prisoner, which was to be like a Book of Revelation in the history
of mankind” (p. 75).
The domestic set-up of Verloc is a humble and small scale affair. Yet it makes itself left in embassies and offices of state. While in turn the feelings thus aroused there are destined in the Brettstreet house may ultimately annoy Mr. Verloc and finally lead to his turning against Winnie’s mother’s mentally deficient son, heroically contrives to retire to an Alma haven. Her act is rid in unforeseen consequences. It leads first to Mr. Verloc’s taking more notice of Stevie and that blows Stevie up, and send to Winnie’s sewing the address of the house under Stevie’s coat collar, an act which identified him as the blown-up man. Mrs. Verloc did another thing to help Stevie. She joined with her daughter in impressing him as to measureless ‘goodness’ of Mr. Verloc. Thus impressed they thought he would be more docile in Mr. Verloc’s presence and hence more acceptable. It was through Stevie’s blindly loyal belief in this “goodness” that he let himself be persuaded to carry the bomb and so met his death. The Assistant Commissioner of Police hoped that the Greenwich explosion might become a cause célèbre and show up the inequalities of foreign embassies and immediately, with Verloc’s efforts to pacify Winnie over Stevie’s death serves instead to enrage her into committing murder. And lastly there is Ossipon, as well as affecting to be a revolutionary, the gigolo of a steady succession of mature woman not without means. He expected Winnie Verloc, widow of a man obviously possessed of means to take her place in the succession. Finding her a murderess and haunted by the horror of her end, he puts off women altogether and takes to drink instead.

Christopher Cooper observes: “The Secret Agent divides into four different spheres of activity: the police, the Foreign Embassy, the Verloc’s home and finally the anarchists group which meets there.”¹³ Verloc as opposed to the family group is the rival world of anarchists and police. Then two constituents of the second group seems apparently, to represent different ideologies but ultimately both come from the
same basket as professor puts it. The professor is opposed to any conventional morality and social order as advocated by revolutionists like Ossipon and his friends. His value cannot be expressed in terms of the truth of lived relations because he denied the legitimacy of all relations. His views strike one as brilliant but offer only a fragmentary insight.

Conrad says that Karly Yundt, Michaelis and Ossipon are not the hard-core crime-fringed revolutionists. Despite all revolutionary jargon Conrad insists, they are essentially the men with human impulse. All their aspiration to change the society and mould it in conformity with individual ideologies, inspire a sense of pity and deserve our sympathy. All three of them, sometime or other have had some relationship with women, which may not be love but which at least is expression of their need for human warmth and intimacy. They all depend upon the goodwill of their respective women. Ossipon lived as the girl’s bank balance, Yundt is nursed by his farmer lover and Michaelis lived by the good block of his patroness.

A Greenwich explosion brought a lot of trouble between Mr. Verloc and Winnie. It is said, Mr. Verloc

had never expected to have to face it on account of death, whose catastrophic character cannot be argued away by sophisticated reasoning or persuasive eloquence. He never meant Stevie to perish with such abrupt violence.(p.145)

He had never meant Stevie to die in the explosion. He had counted on the boy’s blind devotion to follow his instruction to the letter and to keep silent afterwards, but he had never foreseen that he would stumble on a root five minutes after being left alone. Neither had he foreseen that Winnie would sew Stevie’s address inside his overcoat.
Verloc was sitting alone in the parlor and his mind was assimilated by gloomy thoughts. He reflects Stevie’s complete disintegration. His wife has not moved from the kitchen. She sits in Stevie’s place, her back turned to the door, her head on her folded arms. He was talking about nightmare. But there is no good reply from her. No doubt at all there is strong evidence that Verloc has murdered Stevie. Mr. Verloc took him away; she had seen him and watched him without rising hand. Then after he had murdered the boy he came home to her, just come home like any other man would come home to his wife.

Conrad said Mr. Verloc’s mental condition had the merit of simplicity; but it was not sound. It was governed too much by a fixed idea, Mr. Winnie’s brain filled with the negative thought about Mr. Verlic. Her thoughts are no longer disconnected and a mad determination appears on her face. She goes to her husband when he called her wooingly to her couch; she acted as she was still a loyal woman bound to him by an unbroken contact. Her right hand skimmed slightly the end of the table and she had passed on towards the sofa. The carving knife had vanished without the slightest sound from the side of the dish, a carving knife on her way and plants it into Verloc’s breast before he has time to utter a word. There is a tragic end of protagonist.

Conrad pictured a man-made society—the dark and sinister world of London—where everything dazzles by its sad meaninglessness, where helpless human beings struggle like trapped animals and are crushed under the burden of civilization. It is a world in which science has failed to relate itself to human emotions; an individual has failed to be honest in their relationships. It is said:

The novel brings out the failure of modern science and technology to solve the problems of man’s life in the world—the city to achieve the idea of a human
community. Man’s reason is unable to cope effectively with a confused world.\textsuperscript{14}

Conrad insistently suggested that human beings will have to develop effective communication with each other and for that feelings are simply enough. We need a strong base for moral conduct that can raise us above our immediate needs.
Works Cited


12. ibid. P.120
