

## Images in *The Secret Agent*

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### <Abstract>

Conrad usually uses controlling imagery which controls both the plot and the theme and reveals psychological aspects of characters. He employed the image of 'rust' to symbolize the psychological decay, that is, moral corruption, and the physical decay, paralysis, of Verloc, who is one of the main characters in *The Secret Agent*. On the other hand, the image of 'firework' stands for Stevie's volcanic and vigorous but innocent personality as well as his violent death. The description of London, the setting of the story, also contains such demonic images as, jungle, monster, eating-house, streets, stones, and brick buildings waiting for demolition which represent its lurking cannibalism and its paralyzing atmosphere. All these images are closely associated with the attempt of bombing attack on the Greenwich Observatory which is a symptomatic accident of moral nihilism. The symbolic use of the images, in perfect accord with the author's ironic treatment, enhance the aesthetic effect of the whole story.

### *The Secret Agent*에 나타난 이미지

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### <요 약>

Conrad은 작품의 構成, 主題를 統御하고, 作中人物들의 性格을 나타내는 視覺的 이미지를 흔히 사용했다. 그는 作品 *The Secret Agent*에서 主要 登場人物의 하나인 Verloc의 心理的 腐敗 즉 道德性的 타락과, 肉體的인 腐敗 즉 感覺痲痺現象을 나타내기 위해 '녹(rust)'이라는 이미지를 導入하였다. 반면 '꽃불(firework)'은 Stevie의 爆發的이고 生氣있는 그러나 淸純한 性格과, 그의 慘酷한 죽음을 나타내고 있다. 이 작품의 背景인 London의 묘사에서도 밀립, 괴물, 食堂(eating-house), 거리, 돌, 쓰러져가는 벽돌건물 등을 통해, 潛在的인 食人風習(Cannibalism)과, 痲醉的인 분위기를 암시하고 있다. 이 모든 이미지들은 道德的 타락의 症候의 事件이라 할 수 있는 Greenwich 天文台 爆破 企圖와 긴밀한 關聯 下에서 사용되고 있다. 또한 이러한 이미지들이 對照的으로, 그리고 象徵的으로 사용되어 作家의 아이러니한 手法과 완벽한 調和를 이룸으로써, 作品全體의 美的 效果를 높이고 있다.

### I. Introduction

In the preface to *The Nigger of The Narcissus* Conrad defined art as 'a single-minded

attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspects,'<sup>(1)</sup> He stressed the importance of forms, colors, light, shadows, and matters,

(1) Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of The Narcissus*(Oxford Uni. Press, 1959), p.3.

in finding the truth of the visible universe. He further stated that his task which he was trying to achieve was 'by the power of the written words to make you hear, to make you feel, and, above all, to make you *see*.'<sup>(2)</sup> To put his artistic theory into practice he employed abundant visual images in his works. He tried to give them symbolic meanings by using a so-called 'controlling image' which both controls the plot and the theme, and reveals psychological aspects of characters.

I chose *The Secret Agent* to testify it, for I considered it one of the books where visual images were successfully used.

*The Secret Agent* consists of various contrasts between images, characters, and episodes. For instance, the episode of police affairs and that of Verloc's domestic affairs, contrastingly interwoven, constitute the whole story.

Mr Verloc, one of the main characters, forms a striking contrast to Stevie. His psychology and fate are represented by the image of 'rust', in contrast with 'firework' which stands for Stevie. The description of London, the setting of the story, also contains two contrasting kinds of images; jungle and monster for cannibalism; streets and brick-buildings for paralysis of the civilized society. The co-existence of these contradictory values and elements makes it difficult to find a unifying theme, so that many critics suggest as many different themes for the work. If I take some of them as examples, they are as follows; moral isolation, moral degradation, conservatism, non-communication, futility of the Anarchist movement and so forth.

In this paper I'm going to select some basic images in *The Secret Agent*, and disclose their symbolic meanings and their significant association with character, theme, and their contribution to the structural device of the story.

I will try to avoid mentioning images in his other works, if possible, for it would be confusing and meaningless to enlist so many unrelated images, considering that Conrad's use of imagery is not static, but mobile, as Dowden asserts, 'one should not assume that they [images] are used always in the same manner or that his symbols are constant'.<sup>(3)</sup>

## II. Images in *The Secret Agent*

As is often the case, at the outset of the work, Conrad introduces images which foreshadow the events, the theme, and the general atmosphere of the work. The following excerpt is the description of the scene where the author fixes his ironic eyes on Adolf Verloc, who is presumably the protagonist.

(1) ...And a peculiarly London sun—against which nothing could be said except that it looked blood-shot glorified all this by its stare. It hung at a moderate elevation above Hyde Park Corner with an air of punctual and benign vigilance. (2) ...The very pavement under Mr Verloc's feet had an old tinge of gold in that diffused light, in which neither wall, nor tree, nor beast, nor man cast a shadow. (3) ...Mr Verloc was going westward through a town without shadows in an atmosphere of powdered old gold. There were red, coppery gleams on the roofs of houses, on the corners of walls, on the panels of carriages, on the very coats of horses, and on the broad back of Mr Verloc's overcoat, where they produced a dull effect of rustiness. But Mr Verloc was not in the least conscious of having got rusty.<sup>(4)</sup>

In each numbered sentences there exist images which are closely related to events, theme, or character. In (1), the image of 'blood-shot' suggests the blood-stained bomb explosion in the Park Place. (2) describes the jungle in the modern city and the cannibalistic heritage from the primitive. 'Old-gold' connotes the unchanging feature of its savagery. (3) suggests the psychology of Verloc who walks

(2) *Ibid.*, p.6.

(3) Wilfred S Dowden, *The Imagined Style* (Vanderbilt Uni. Press, Nashville 1970) p.114.

(4) Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (Penguin, 1971) p.19.

along the London street like a ghost, without being aware of what he is doing. For convenience's sake, I will deal with (3) first and go to (1) and (2) respectively.

### 1. Rust: Verloc

In *The Imaged Style* Dowden explains 'rusty' in (3), as follows:

Even though he is unaware of the fact, the trusted Secret Agent (whose activities were formerly so useful that he was identified by a symbol rather than by name), has become useless. ... The Anarchists, of whom Verloc is representative, do not provide a serious threat to the great social system which they conspire.<sup>(5)</sup>

The interpretation above has some validity as well as some faults. The impotency of the Anarchist movement may be one of the themes of the work, but it is not assured that Verloc is representative of the Anarchists. Though he calls himself 'an Anarchist', and he is in intimate terms with them, he, in effect, behaves as a secret agent who sells information about Anarchist activities to the Foreign Embassy and to Heat. His attempt to explode the first meridian is made, not by the anarchistic cause, but by the threatening instigation of Vladimir in the Embassy. Next, Dowden is right when he asserts that the image of 'rust' symbolizes Verloc's becoming useless for the Embassy. But he fails to see the combination of the image with his psychological aspects and moral nihilism. It is an ironic image that symbolizes Verloc's psychological decay, that is, his moral corruption and his physical decay, paralysis. It is ironic because he is completely in the dark about his own decay. *Rogel's Thesaurus* offers such semantic features of 'rusty' as, 'dirty, decay, sluggish, and sulky.'<sup>(6)</sup>

From the outset Verloc is presented as a sluggish and dull person, with an air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade

bed. He usually goes out at night and returns early in the morning. His laziness is such that 'He was in a manner devoted to it with a sort of fanaticism, or perhaps, rather with a fanatical inertness.' (p.20) The paradoxical comment of 'a fanatical inertness' shows the author's ironic attitude to Verloc. In short, Verloc is caricatured as a fat pig for his indolence, in harmony with his corpulent physical feature.

The dark and sordid surroundings of his abode and his business imply his immoral personality. He sells photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls, non-descript packages in wrappers like patent medicines, and other wares of disreputable rubbish, in the dim shop hidden in the sordid street seldom touched by the sun. 'He selected this peculiar line of business by an instinctive leaning towards shady transactions, where money is picked up easily'. (p.52)

The author himself points out Verloc's moral nihilism in the text. 'There is about him the air common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the baser fear of mankind; the air of moral nihilism' (p.21). His moral nihilism can be found in his preposterous attitude to life. He is a secret agent, which is his real occupation, who is destined to work in the dark. But he is afraid of darkness. He dislikes to put out the lamp-light before he goes to bed, in fear of darkness and sleeplessness that will follow. He, as it were, does not have the courage to face the reality that threatens him. In addition to that, his laziness and egoism prevent him from understanding or communicating successfully with other person. The absurdity of his life style is clearly shown in his insulated marriage life with Winnie, his wife. They exchange some words, but there can't be found any real communication or

(5) Dowden, op.cit., p.114.

(6) Peter Mark Rogel, *Rogel's Thesaurus* (Avenel Books, New York 1976) p.626.

understanding between them, each preoccupied with his or her own thought and interest. He doesn't so much as notice his wife's murderous intention until the carving knife is planted in his breast, without any resistance on its way. Verloc, of course, is not wholly responsible for the non-communication, for Winnie lives on the philosophy that things does not stand much to look into. Her only concern is her brother's safe life in the future, which forces her to marry Verloc who is lazy, fat, and much older than her, but well-off and generous enough to tolerate her dependents, Stevie and her mother. His absurdity is also seen in his self-imposed mission of social protection

All the people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury. They had to be protected; and their horses; their carriages; houses, servants, ... the whole social order favourable to their hygienic idleness had to be protected against the shallow enviousness of unhygienic labors. (p.20)

However, because of his unhygienic idleness, which is paradoxically excluded from the objects of his social protection, and his philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort, he would not make an effort to raise a hand even if there were any sign of a menaced social order. Furthermore, he unconsciously attempts to destroy the society by trying to blow up the Greenwich Observatory at the instigation of Vladimir. As a result, he kills a member of his family whom he should really protect.

Verloc's moral degradation runs parallel with the paralytic symptom of his body. He is usually silent, sulky, incapable of getting angry, and, as the author puts it, 'mysteriously good'. His feelings are habitually manifested by the agitation of his limbs. After coming back from the Embassy, 'the cause of the general lassitude he felt while climbing the stairs being purely mental, he became alarmed by its inexplicable character'. (p.52). This functional disorder

alludes to the decay of his mental faculties. He lets Stevie carry the bomb to the Observatory, but Stevie stumbles within five minutes of being left to himself. 'And Mr Verloc is morally shaken to pieces'. (p.187)

... the knocking down of a wall was not the aim of Mr Vladimir's means, but the production of a moral effect. With much trouble and distress on Mr Verloc's part the effect might be said to have been produced. (p.192)

Yes, the effect has been produced on Mr Verloc's part. Verloc exploded his own morality into pieces together with the sudden disintegration of Stevie's body. He smothered his smoldering inner-self by killing Stevie. He had exploited innocent Stevie's docility and fidelity.

After the accident Verloc behaves like an insane man, but still struggling to maintain his appearance, dignity, and prestige. He is now described as a beast, a monster, and a cannibal. His deteriorating paralysis reaches its extreme and he appears to be an automation.

Mr Verloc obeyed woodenly, stony-eyed, and like an automation whose face had been painted red. And this resemblance to a mechanical figure went so far that he had an automation's absurd air of being aware of the machinery inside of him. (p.62)

Again he is caricatured as a doll with a red face, decorated with the images of wood and stone. He does not show any feeling of compunction, shame or responsibility. He is only obsessed with the disgusting memory of Vladimir. He utters, "I have been mad for a month or more, but I am not now. It's all over." This utterance is obviously intended to indicate the nightmarish threat of Vladimir and his suffering for his domestic happiness. But his egoism and paralysis forbid him to observe the change in Winnie's heart and even on her face. He still thinks that he is loved by that woman. 'In this affair of the heart Mr Verloc had been always carefully generous, yet always with no other idea than of being loved for himself. Upon this matter his ethical

notions being in agreement with his vanity, he was completely incorrigible.' (p.93) To the woman almost mad with grief for her brother's death, his remark sounds mad, for in an abnormal situation, the normal state of mind would be abnormal. As he chose the word 'pilgrimage' for Verloc's homecoming from the Embassy charged with the secret mission of Greenwich explosion, the author puts again a religious term, 'heretic immobility' to describe the sitting posture of Verloc who has just returned from the Park Place after killing a boy. The second act of murder (Winnie's murder of Verloc) curtains down with a dark and grotesque scene where Mr Verloc's hat, a symbol of his appearance and dignity, is placed with rim upward beside its owner who is completely destroyed psychologically and physically.

It seemed an extraordinary thing, an ominous object, a sign. Black and rim upward, it lay on the floor before the couch as if prepared to receive the contributions of pence from people who would come presently to behold Mr Verloc in the fullness of domestic ease reposing on a sofa.

Again it is ironical that he should acquire his domestic ease after his death, for he unintentionally killed his brother-in-law in the cause of his domestic happiness and was consequently murdered by his wife.

## 2. Firework: Stevie

Verloc and Stevie form a sharp contrast in that Verloc stands on the side of persecutors and Stevie on the side of a victim. But a more significant difference ought to be sought in their psychological aspects and fates. In Verloc's case they are symbolized by the image of 'rust', as is previously discussed; on the other hand, Stevie is symbolized by 'firework'. These two images have some common features. Firstly, their reddish colors are associated with those of the peculiar London sun and blood-shot, which suggest their involvement in the bomb

explosion. Next, they are two different kinds of oxidation; the one is slow, the other, sudden. The oxidation has the meaning of 'being victimized' by the social and political intrigue in the context. In a sense Verloc is also a victim.

The contrast lies in their figures of death. Verloc's death is a slow and continuing process of decay from the inner, as iron gets rusty. On the contrary, Stevie's is volcanic and meteorlike as a firework shot in the air disappears instantly. Fire also has the meaning of resurrection. He revives, not by the power of a religious miracle, but for his vengeance through his sister. The extraordinary resemblance of her face to Stevie's while she is letting go the knife deep into the heart of her husband testifies his revival. The importance of Stevie's role is given after his death. That also contrasts to Verloc's case. For its (Stevie's importance) purpose, the author operates time-shifts in chapter 8. Whether Conrad was conscious of it or not, the contrast and balance between images and characters enhance the aesthetic effect of the plot, the cohesive whole of them.

The death of Stevie is imaged into a firework by the power of Winnie's fancy.

Greenwich park. A park!. That's where the boy was killed. A park—smashed branches, torn leaves, gravel, bits of brotherly flesh and bone, all spouting up together in the manner of a *firework*. (p.210)

Mrs Verloc closed her eyes desperately, throwing upon that vision the night of her eyelids, where after a rainlike fall of a mangled limbs the decapitated head of Stevie lingered suspended alone, and fading out slowly like the last star of *pyrotechnic display*. (p.211)

Like his characteristic death, his personality is also volcanic, vigorous, pure and innocent. Stevie is a half-witted idiot. He is apt to forget mere facts, such as name and address. But he has a faithful memory of sensations. His sensitivity is high in reverse proportion to the degree of his mental deficiency. 'Unlike his

sister, who puts her trust in face value, he wishes to go to the bottom of the matter.' (p.144) 'So the paradox is stressed by the fact that the novel's only character whose sight is wholly unclouded is a congenital simpleton.'<sup>(7)</sup> This revealing comment reminds the readers of the short-sightedness of Verloc clouded with egoism, vanity and sluggishness. The circles which Stevie now and then draws with his might and mind are the expression of his desire to grasp the reality of the chaotic universe by the power of intuition.

... and thus disclosed the innocent Stevie, seated very good and quiet at a deal table, drawing circles, concentric, eccentric; a coruscating whirl of circles that by their tangled multitude of repeated curves, uniformity of form, and confusion of intersecting lines suggested a rendering of cosmic chaos, the symbolism of a mad art attempting the inconceivable (p.45)

Verloc is not in the least conscious that his inner morality is being degraded, (as the phrase goes, 'Verloc was not in the least conscious of having got rusty'), while on the other hand, Stevie is 'supremely wise in knowing his own powerlessness' (p.140), though not wise enough to restrain his passions.

At the age of fourteen, Stevie is employed as an office-boy in a company of his late father's friend. One day he suddenly lets off in quick succession fireworks such as a set of fierce rockets, angry catherine wheels, and loudly exploding squibs, causing an awful panic to spread through the whole building. Later on Winnie discovers that two other office boys in the building worked upon his feelings by tales of injustice and oppression till they wrought his compassion to the pitch of that frenzy. This 'altruistic exploit' (p. 17) tells of the volcanic nature of his character lurking behind his pity on suffering people. Stevie's

pity and sympathy are directed to the suffering animal in general including mankind. In chapter 8 on his mother's last cab-drive Stevie gets extremely excited at the sight of the cab-driver beating the poor horse. 'For the tenderness to all pain and all misery, his desire to make the horse happy and the cabman happy, reaches the point of a bizarre longing to take them to bed with him. '(p.139) This symbolic longing reveals that his pity on sufferers has some connection with the sensational memory of his childhood experience. For whenever he was beaten by his father, Winnie took him to bed to soothe his excitement. Later, Stevie hears of the wretchedness of the driver's life. He ejaculates, "Poor! Poor!. Bad world for poor people!" He tries to contain all his sense of indignation and horror at that sort of wretchedness in those little words.

His pity and anger are soon led to his inward pain.

Somebody, he felt, to be punished for it—punished with great severity. Being no sceptic, but a moral character, he was in a manner at the mercy of his righteous passions(p.143)

This is the description of a holy man who desires to be expiated for the sin of people. Berthoud rightly refers to Stevie as a holy idiot.

As Conrad conceived him, Stevie is a variant of the traditional 'holy idiot': a figure defined by the fact that its holiness and idiocy are interdependent,<sup>(8)</sup>

It is interesting to notice that Conrad made an error in writing 'Stephen'<sup>(9)</sup> instead of 'Stevie' on page 55. Whether he did it by mistake or deliberately is not verifiable. However, it is probable that there happened some confusion between the names of Stevie and Stephen in his mind. Then it might be

(7) Jacques Berthoud, *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase* (Cambridge Uni. Press, 1978) p.138.

(8) *Ibid.*, p.141.

(9) Stephen is the first Christian martyr. He was selected to help the twelve Apostles but was stoned to death by the people who were slandered by the Jews. (Acts 7: 60)

conjectured that the author had intention of drawing Stevie as a kind of holy character. Another interesting scene backs up the conjecture.

'Mustn's wheep', queried the other in a thoughtful whisper, and immediately whipped. He did this, not because his soul was cruel and his heart evil, but because he had to earn his fare. And for a time the walls of *St. Stephen* with its towers and pinnacles, contemplated in immobility and silence a cab that jingled. (p.132)

There can be added another source of the name given by Mayer.

The fact that Conrad's uncle Stefan was murdered in the course of the Polish Resurrection of 1863 confers an element of logic upon Conrad's borrowing his name for Winnie Verloc's brother Stevie, who like his namesake, meets a violent death in an atmosphere of revolutionary activity.<sup>(10)</sup>

Three of them are victims; Stephen, of the religious cause; Stefan, of the revolutionary cause; and Stevie, of the political game. (Game is one of the important semantic features of firework.)

In brief, firework has the meaning of volcanic, vigorous, meteorlike, and game, which stand for Stevie's character and his tragic end. Stevie's innocent mind and pity on poor people, associated with his expiatory suffering, sublimate the image to a holy fire.

### 3. Monster: London

Being in perfect accord with characters and the main theme, London, the setting of the story, rises to the level of symbol. Two different kinds of images are usually found in its description in general; streets, walls, brick buildings representing the inorganic nature of the civilized modern city; jungle, forest, monster, and restaurants (eating-house) representing primitive savagery, that is, cannibalism.

Conrad produced the image of 'monster' in

his earlier book, *Heart of Darkness*.

And further west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

"And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places on the earth."<sup>(11)</sup>

He puts down a similar remark in the *Author's Note* for *The Secret Agent*:

Then the vision of an enormous town presented itself, of a monstrous town more populous than some continents in its man-made might as if indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles; a devourer of the world light.

In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad attempts to disclose a civilized man's evil heritage which he encounters in the depth of a primitive jungle. But in *The Secret Agent* he tries to reveal it in the modern city of London. Though they are different in their stages where the actions of the stories happen, they are on the same line in that they are directed to the same problem of inner morality.

The inorganic nature of London can be observed in the phrase of 'the enormity of cold, black, wet, muddy, inhospitable atmosphere, accumulation of black slates and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly...' (p.54) Its lukewarm and unemotional atmosphere renders its residents benumbed and paralyzed, leading them to psychological corruption. This long-term process of decay is alluded to by 'the low brick houses, their dusty windows, the sightless, moribund look of incurable decay—empty shells awaiting demolition'. (p.74) The Assistant Commissioner clearly sees the immorality of the atmosphere without being involved in it. "His descent into the street was like the descent into a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off." (p.121) In the immoral atmosphere of the Italian Restaurant he feels that he gradually loses his identity. His

(10) Bernard C Mayer, *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography* (Princeton Uni. Press, New York 1957) pp. 192-3.

(11) Joseph Conrad, *Heart Of Darkness*, (Dell Publishing Co. New York 1964) p.29.

detachment, given by his familiarity with the risk and excitement of open-air sport in the jungle of a foreign country, enables him to find himself in the attracting power of the convention or the stagnant conservatism of London. While waiting for his change in the restaurant, he sees himself in the sheet of glass and is struck by his foreign appearance. That is the very moment that he realizes his own position in the society where he is situated. His foreign appearance is comparable with Verloc's 'domesticated one'. Verloc's domestication can mean that he has already sunk to the bottom of the dark and rigid convention, becoming blind, senseless and heartless. The Assistant Commissioner who flits around the dark corners like a queer foreign fish, resembles the authorial figure, for Conrad, in the Author's Note, confesses: 'For the surroundings... 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...'

Again, the image of jungle is brought into by Winnie. After being informed of her brother's death, the abode of her married life appears to her 'as lonely and unsafe as though it were situated in the midst of a forest'. (p.165) Winnie who refuses to look into the matter is forced to see the danger and the threat of the situation she is in. She becomes a tragic heroine the moment she looks into the truth of the matter.

'Jungle' is a recurring image used with similar meanings. Thomas Moser and Dowden explain the meaning of the jungle used in *An Outcast Of The Island* as follows;

The jungle stands for 'truth', for an amazing 'reality'. Yet the jungle also means the 'lurking' death, profound darkness' and 'evil' which belongs to the prehistoric life of man, our heritage,<sup>(12)</sup>

(12) Thomas Moser, *Joseph Conrad: Achievement & Decline* (Harvard Uni. Press, 1957) p.80.

(13) Dowden, op.cit., p.24.

(14) Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Dent & Sons Ltd, London, 1975) p.255.

We are obviously intended to Willem's downfall in terms of darkness, but the related images of water, decaying jungle vegetation and the like symbolize moral degradation.<sup>(13)</sup>

These ideas are integrated into cannibalism in *The Secret Agent*. Conrad's concern about cannibalism can be traced back to his childhood. In *A Personal Record* Conrad writes the story about his Great uncle, Nicholas B. While retreating from Russia in the Napoleon army, Nicholas 'had eaten a dog, because of hunger.' 'The childish horror of the deed clings absurdly to the grizzly man.'<sup>(14)</sup> This horrible story told by his grandmother must have impressed on his young mind, as Mayer also asserts.

Half-witted but sensitive Stevie feels the horror of cannibalism most strongly. Stevie, once, is extremely agitated by the Terrorist's metaphorical expression of blood and flesh.

"Can't you smell and hear from thick hide of the people burn and sizzle?" ... "Do you know how I would call the nature of the present economic conditions? I would call it cannibalistic ... They are nourishing their greed on the quivering flesh and warm blood of the people" (p.50)

What Stevie fears really happens on his own body. Stevie thinks that his home is the only and most safe place in the jungle. But he is not aware that the monsters who will guide him to death live with him at his nearest hand.

The police constable's report to Chief Inspector Heat can be taken another example of moral paralysis. "I picked up the legs first, one after another. He was that scattered that you didn't know where to begin." ... "I don't think I missed a single piece as big as a postage stamp.. Then the image of a cannibal and a modern devourer of meat are overlapped on Heat who peers at the collection of the scattered flesh and bones on the table.



... a heap of rags, scorched and blood-stained, half concealing what might have been an accumulation of raw material for a cannibal feast. (p.77)

... what may be called the by-products of a butcher's shop with a view to an inexpensive Sunday dinner. (p.78)

Stevie's death results from the collaboration of three persons; Vladimir, Professor and Verloc. They and other people including the Anarchists can be said to be the real monsters of the jungle as Paul Wiley claims;

Conrad's catastrophic vision turns the Victorian London not only into a jungle but also into a slimy aquarium, the breeding place of monsters. (16)

Verloc seems to be the representative of them, for the author tries to establish the effect of cannibalism through his demeanour after the murder.

After returning from the bomb explosion, Verloc feels terribly empty physically. He sits at table and devours the meat as a cannibal does.

The piece of roast beef, laid out in the likeness of funeral baked meats for Stevie's obsequies offered itself largely to his notice. And Mr Verloc again partook. He partook ravenously, without restraint and decency, cutting thick slices with the sharp knife and swallowing them without bread. (p.205)

He ascribes the accident to Vladimir, which is right in some respects. He thinks that he is generous enough to bear the restlessness of Winnie. 'His generosity was not infinite, because he was a human being—and not a monster, as Mrs Verloc believed him to be.' (p.208) His condescending generosity, reversely, coats a stronger color on his monstrous picture in this situation. Then Winnie kills Verloc.

Into that plunging blow, delivered over the side of the coat, Mrs Verloc had put all the inheritance of her immemorial and obscure descent, the simple ferocity of the age of caverns and the unbalanced nervous fury of the age of bar-rooms. (p.212)

Here we meet one more monster situated in

an ambivalent environment of caverns and bar-rooms. After all these, we come back to the dark and sinister scene presented at the outset.

It was not actually raining, but each lamp had a rusty little halo of mist. The van and horses were gone, and in the black street the curtained window of the carter's eating-house made a square patch of sordid blood-red light glowing faintly very near the level of the pavement. (p.217)

### III. Conclusion

The Greenwich explosion is an symptomatic accident of moral corruption. The first sign of it can be read in Vladimir's nonsensical motive and insane logic for attacking upon the first meridian. The second sign of moral corruption can be observed in the brutality and cruelty of the means which Professor offers. Professor argues that all the people in the world should be swept away except himself, and that the history of the world should start again. He always carries explosives in his pocket and is willing to offer them to whoever wants them to destroy the society. Violence is the other expression of cannibalism. It is spoken in images of blood and flesh, jungle, monster, bomb and so on. They belong to demonic imagery, according to Nothrop Frye's classification, whereas firework belongs to apocalyptic imagery. The third sign, the exploitation of the docility and fidelity of an innocent boy, is already discussed in Verloc's section.

In *The Secret Agent* morality seems to be, not an individual problem, but a basic problem of the civilized men in general. Its degradation is closely associated with the immoral atmosphere of the modern society which contains the paralytic conservatism and lurking cannibalism.

Not only Stevie but also Verloc is a victim of its ill atmosphere, though, so far, he is

(15) Paul L Wiley, *Conrad's Measure of Man* (Gordian Press, 1970) p.107.

presented as a central figure of moral nihilism. Moreover, Verloc is the central character of the author's ironic victims. That may be one of the reason why the readers does not have any special hatred for Verloc in spite of his scornful conducts. It means that the whole ironic treatment of the tale, inspiring indignation and underlying pity and contempt serves to maintain the author's detachment from the squalor and sordidness.

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