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REVOLUTION FROM WITHIN: CONRAD'S NATURAL ANARCHISTS

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Since bombs are your means of expression, it would be really telling if one could throw a bomb into pure mathematics. (The Secret Agent, 33)

An unsigned article entitled 'European Explosions' published in *The Nation* in 1892 asked, 'Who is responsible for their [the anarchists'] existence? or are they simply an embodiment of *natural* depravity?' (*Nation*, 317; my italics). One of the fundamental debates about political loyalties concerns the origin of those loyalties. Are opponents of the dominant social order, anarchists and other revolutionaries, merely enacting an Oedipal rebellion against their fathers, now extended to society at large, or are they awakened to injustice by education and events? If leftists tend to emphasize the shaping power of the social context, of conversion experiences in the face of specific injustices, conservatives have sought refuge in psychological explanations.

Accordingly, authors sympathetic to anarchism — Zola in *Paris*, John Henry Mackay in *Die Anarchisten*, Frank Harris in *The Bomb* — attempt to represent both the hardships of the poor and the variety of political and strategic positions within anarchism, while those writers who oppose anarchism — Conrad, Henry James, Max Nordau — tend to elide these topics in favour of a psychological account of the anarchist subject. Taking issue with such accounts, Emma Goldman writes: 'Poor human nature, what horrible crimes have been committed in thy name! Every fool, from king to policeman, from the flatheaded parson to the visionless dabbler in science, presumes to speak authoritatively of human nature' (61-62).

The turn-of-the-century opposition between 'anarchy' and 'order' finds a personal, psychological locus in critical accounts of Joseph Conrad, a conservative who was sufficiently interested in anarchism to write two

short stories and a novel about it. Frederick Karl writes, 'It appears evident from Conrad's letters that [Cunninghame] Graham proved an educational experience for him; and that his own well-hidden anarchistic tendencies, his own sense of rage and chaos carefully buried beneath the skin, were allowed freer play because of Graham's presence. Put another way, Graham's insistence on forms of anarchy as part of the normal political scene struck a sympathetic note in Conrad, even as he consciously pursued order and shape' (395). On the other hand, Irving Howe insists that Conrad's hostility to anarchism stemmed from 'a projection of an unrevealed self, of the desolation a modern ego fears to find beneath its domesticated surface', in response to which Conrad felt 'an exorbitant need for personal order'.¹

Because Conrad emphasizes the psychological over the social, his work lacks what Howe calls 'access to the radical mind' (146); that is, he fails to consider either the anarchist critique of capitalism and the state or the existence of nonviolent, intelligent anarchists like Conrad's contemporary Peter Kropotkin. In *The Secret Agent* and two lesser known short stories, 'An Anarchist' and 'The Informer', Conrad attempts to define a 'natural' anarchist, a 'born anarchist', but he ultimately fails to distinguish the anarchist from the artist.

Both anarchists and conservatives represent the social order in aesthetic terms. The prominence of the figure of the collector in 'An Anarchist' and 'The Informer' is explicable in terms of the conservative correlation between social order and traditional aesthetic form. Conrad's 'exorbitant need for personal order' can be understood in the light of the collector's dialectic of order and disorder, which in turn is a version of the dialectic that Michael Bakunin postulates as anarchist: order and chaos, creation and destruction. The collector's obsession with order implicates him, as Walter Benjamin suggests, in chaos: 'Every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories' (Benjamin 1969, 60).

¹ The entire Howe quotation reads as follows: 'Conrad's conservatism, his hatred of the anarchists, his suppressed residue of nationalism, must now seem more equivocal than at first sight. The anarchism he attacks is a political movement ... but it is also something else, a projection of an unrevealed self, of the desolation a modern ego fears to find beneath its domesticated surface. Conrad is entirely serious in his warnings against social disorder, which he mistakes for a state of anarchy, but his seriousness is shaped, and then mis-shaped, by an exorbitant need for personal order' (146).

Like *The Secret Agent*, 'An Anarchist' and 'The Informer', written in the winter of 1905-06 (collected in *A Set of Six*), are attempts to discover the 'nature' of the anarchist. 'Anarchists in general were simply inconceivable to me mentally, morally, logically, sentimentally, and even physically' (97), announces the narrator of Conrad's 'The Informer'. In 'The Informer', Mr. X, who has a large income, represents himself as an anarchist, whereas in 'An Anarchist', the mechanic, who is poor, is an anarchist because others recognize him to be one, suggesting that one's financial means enable or prohibit political self-definition. The two stories in effect split the anarchist into bourgeois and worker, propagandist and gullible victim. In both stories, however, the identity of the anarchist is curiously undefined; neither anarchist has a proper name. Just as there are two versions of the anarchist in these stories, however, so are there two versions of the collector with whom the anarchist is compared or contrasted. In each case, the collector is ostensibly aligned with order. Both collector and anarchist are marginal figures in bourgeois society and both posit a critique, implicit in one case, explicit in the other, of that society. In keeping with the historical affinity between anarchists and aesthetes, one of these anarchist characters has a refined sensibility, directed towards fine food and the collection of rare antiques. In the stories and the novel Conrad tries to find a position outside of anarchism from which to mount a critique, but he fails to find a stable place uncontaminated by similarities to or sympathies with anarchist politics.

'An Anarchist' figures anarchism in or against discourses of advertising and collecting. Its major characters are the narrator (a butterfly-collector), Harry Gee (manager of a cattle estate), and a French mechanic (an ex-convict). The narrator is not anti-capitalist: 'Of course the capital of a country must be productively employed. I have nothing to say against the company' (135-36). But he deplores 'the modern system of advertising' which he understands as evidence of 'that form of mental degradation which is called gullibility' (136). Wryly, the narrator says that he has had to swallow the company's meat-extract product on occasion, but that he has never been able to swallow its advertisements, because 'whatever form of mental degradation I may (being but human) be suffering from, it is not the popular form' (136). He thus asserts his superiority to the mass of consumers who are susceptible to the manipulative discourse of advertising; his privileged position (leisure time, ability to travel) implies a high/low opposition that will be dismantled in the course of the story.

Advertising was a new presence in this era. In *Idylls of the Marketplace*, Regenia Gagnier mentions that 'the Royal Academy

continued to be ransacked by meat extract firms for portraits of healthy cows' (55). Lawrence Graver considers the references to advertising and butterfly-collecting in 'An Anarchist' to be 'jokes' (134), but advertising, gullibility, and collecting in both stories are intrinsic to Conrad's representation of anarchism. While advertising is the mode of representation that capitalism employs to promote consumption, anarchism, which opposes capitalism, also 'advertises' by pamphlets and oratory, known as 'propaganda by the word', and by its attentats, which its proponents call 'propaganda by the deed'. Assassinations would, in theory, cause the proletariat to realize its own potential power. Proponents of the tactic believed that 'ideas result from deeds, not the latter from the former, and the people will not be free when they are educated, but will be educated when they are free'.²

It is the estate manager, Harry Gee, who dubs the mechanic an anarchist ('*un citoyen anarchiste de Barcelone*' [139]). Gee is himself like a commercial with his 'wearisome repetition of descriptive phrases' (138), and as the sole representative of the meat extract company, he seems to possess its power to categorize and manipulate. Because of contemporary fears of anarchist violence, the truth value of the statement 'he is an anarchist' is less significant than its illocutionary force. But, while the mechanic is actually French, not Spanish, his politics are more ambiguous. Gee assumes that the man is an escaped convict because of his apparent flight from a boat; he assumes that he is an anarchist because he is a worker ('That's the class they come mostly from, isn't it? I hate the cowardly bomb-throwing brutes' [142]). In order to keep him on the estate — his skills are useful — Gee spreads the word that the man is an anarchist so that no one else will hire him.

The position of the narrator might seem to be in contrast with that of the mechanic, in that the narrator has the power to identify himself; yet in keeping with the doubling of narrator and anarchist, the narrator must also identify himself by means of Gee's tag: 'As a matter of fact, I am — "Ha, ha, ha!" — a desperate butterfly-slayer. Ha, ha, ha!' This was the tone in which Mr. Harry Gee, the manager of the cattle station, alluded to my pursuits' (137). When the narrator spends an evening with the mechanic, he hears his story, and in a surprising twist, it turns out that Gee's assessment has some truth to it.

The story the mechanic tells reveals that he is implicated in anarchist activity, but in an unusual way. On his twenty-fifth birthday he is invited

out to dinner by friends; afterwards, they invite two strangers to join them for drinks. These are, it is implied, anarchists in search of converts, and under their influence, as well as that of the alcohol, the mechanic finds himself standing on the table, proclaiming, '*Vive l'anarchie!* Death to the capitalists!' (147). The incident leads to his arrest, imprisonment, unemployment, and further implication in anarchism. The initial 'conversion' to anarchism is peculiar. The thought of social injustice leads directly to the espousal of a particular political position, although such thoughts are apparently quite new to the mechanic. Anarchism is here represented in a way reminiscent of political or sexual 'deviance', similar to McCarthy-era attitudes towards communism or conventional fears of homosexuality: spread by evil strangers, it quickly becomes a way of life. Alcohol and sympathy encourage the mechanic's true 'nature', his anarchic impulses, to surface.

Because the narrator, like an anarchist, is attempting to get outside of capitalism and the realm of the commodity, he is sympathetic to the mechanic. After hearing his story, however, he tries explicitly to distance himself from him by invoking his different 'nature':

On the whole, my idea is that he was much more of an anarchist than he confessed to me or to himself; and that, the special features of his case apart, he was very much like other anarchists. Warm heart and weak head — that is the word of the riddle; and it is a fact that the bitterest contradictions and the deadliest conflicts of the world are carried on in every individual breast capable of feeling and passion. (160-61)

'Warm heart and weak head' is a verbal formula, a cliché, reminiscent of a commercial jingle; the narrator pulls it out of his sleeve to reduce a politics to pop psychology, and the unacknowledged reductiveness suggests that the narrator participates in the gullibility that he criticizes. The dominance of heart over head is put forward to explain those 'gullible' people who are always already anarchists. Conrad implicitly aligns anarchists with consumers, who are susceptible to advertising; by contrast, the narrator of this story is a collector of butterflies, and thus a connoisseur, a specialist, someone who opposes capitalism not on political grounds, but because of its vulgarity. As a lepidopterist, he attempts to align himself with nature, against the commodity. Collectors distinguish themselves from consumers by what and how they collect: not mass-produced items but rarities, not because of advertising/ gullibility but because of knowledge/ mastery. All workers are pretty much alike; collectors seek and fetishize difference, variety, rarity. But like all binary

² Quoted Woodcock 329.

oppositions, this one involves a repression or denial of similarities between the two activities. The lepidopterist objectifies nature, fashions it, and puts it in a new, 'unnatural' order. Walter Benjamin writes, 'The decisive thing in collecting is that the object is freed from all original functions in order to join its fellows in the closest conceivable relationship'.³ The collector of rarities takes them out of circulation, and yet ensures their continued, although latent, exchange value. Collecting figures as a prominent activity in Henry James and here, in Conrad, as an ironized and failed defence against the market, the commodity, and the consumer.

Much as he might wish to distinguish himself from the gullible masses and from violent anarchists, the butterfly-collector's activity is not categorically different. Gee calls him 'a desperate butterfly-slayer' (137), suggesting an affinity between the supposed violence of stereotypical anarchist activity and the violence of the butterfly-collector, who can preserve ephemeral beauty only by killing it, taking it out of circulation, perhaps even contributing to its extinction. Despite his presumed interest in the preservation of nature, the collector thus participates in the larger violence of European civilization against nature (clearing forests, fur trading, etc.). Even so, he remarks that the B.O.S. company's 'statistics of slaughter and bloodshed [are] enough to make a Turk turn faint' (135), displacing the violence of his own culture onto that of another. Anarchism is set against these twin backgrounds of violence against nature; stereotypically associated with, and criticized for, its violence, it seems in this context less a deviation from European civilization than another expression of its destructive tendencies.

In 'The Informer', as in 'An Anarchist', Conrad sets the collector, as a proponent of order, against both anarchy and the commodity, but again the distinction breaks down. 'The Informer' foregrounds both collecting and a peculiar, modern, well-publicized product, in this case Stone's Dried Soup, 'a comestible article once rather prominently advertised in the dailies' (82); the anarchists use it to conceal blasting powder and 'inflammatory' literature. Here one of the characters is both a collector and a famous anarchist, an author of incendiary revolutionary pamphlets, 'the greatest destructive publicist that ever lived' (74); as a 'publicist', Mr. X is also a kind of advertising agent. He, in turn, is 'collected' by a friend of the narrator whose interest is in 'distinguished personal acquaintances' (73).

³ 'Es ist beim Sammeln das Entscheidende, dass der Gegenstand aus allen ursprünglichen Funktionen gelöst wird, um in die denkbar engste Beziehung zu seinesgleichen zu treten.' Benjamin 1982, 271.

Mr. X is distinguished-looking and well-dressed, a connoisseur of Chinese bronzes and porcelain, and the narrator believes he belongs to a noble family. This last trait is in keeping with a particular strain of both the fiction and history of anarchism which links aristocracy with anarchism. Mr. X's explicit hostility to the bourgeoisie suggests that he is an aesthete, a dandy, like Félix Fénéon, the prominent anarchist and art critic (Halperin 4).

The narrator reflects upon the uncanny similarities between himself and this 'terrible man', whom he compares to his own Chinese porcelains and bronzes, exquisite and unusual like them, 'a kind of rare monster' (76). But the narrator also recognizes his own resemblance to the anarchist-collector:

But then he was not of bronze. He was not even Chinese, which would have enabled one to contemplate him calmly across the gulf of racial difference. He was alive and European; he had the manner of good society, wore a coat and hat like mine, and had pretty near the same taste in cooking. It was too frightful to think of. (76)

Here the anarchist is not the Other of European high society, a worker, or a racial Other, but an alter ego, even a double, of the seemingly apolitical bourgeois. A 'gulf of racial difference' would serve to naturalize their different attitudes toward politics and society; its absence makes the similarity in their cultural practices 'frightful'. Both the anarchist collector and the bourgeois also share an interest in the 'exotic'; that they collect not butterflies but Chinese bronzes and porcelains suggests a mutual involvement in Orientalism, further indicative of their common European identity. If, in 'An Anarchist', Conrad seems to distinguish the anarchist and the bourgeois by occupation and class, linking them indirectly through their common proclivity to violence, here he explicitly insists on their similarities. But the narrator insists on the frightfulness, terribleness, monstrosity of the anarchist, who has written pamphlets that call for social revolution.

Mr. X shocks the narrator one evening by remarking, 'There's no amendment to be got out of mankind except by terror and violence' (77). The facade of his cultivated exterior lifts to reveal the stereotypical bloodthirsty anarchist; the two layers of his 'identity' seem antithetical to the narrator, who points to the apparent contradiction between his expensive tastes and his political views. In response, Mr. X explains that he derives his income from the bourgeoisie's purchase of his pamphlets. When the narrator professes himself puzzled by this, Mr. X responds with

a characterization of the bourgeoisie that becomes a leitmotif of the story: 'Its own life being all a matter of *pose and gesture*, it is unable to realize the power and the danger of a *real* movement and of words that have no sham meaning' (italics added, 78). Mr. X appeals to a Real or Truth that lies outside bourgeois artifice, the Real of anarchism and of revolutionary language.

The story that Mr. X proceeds to tell probably originates, like information for *The Secret Agent*, from Ford Madox Ford, Conrad's source of information on London anarchism (Ford 1931, 114). Ford's cousin, Olive Rossetti, joined the anarchists while still in her teens and published an anarchist journal called *The Torch* (mentioned by name at the very beginning of *The Secret Agent*); she worked with Max Nettlau, the prominent historian of anarchism, and she met Kropotkin (Ford 1931, 83-84; 111-12). Her book, *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, published under a pseudonym in 1903, recounts her original enthusiasm for, and gradual disillusionment with, the movement and her comrades. In Conrad's story Mr. X dubs her 'our young Lady Amateur of anarchism' (84), a description reminiscent of his earlier distinction between serious collectors (of brass, porcelain, etc.) and amateurs: 'Amateurism in this, that, and the other thing is a delightfully easy way of killing time, and feeding one's own vanity — the silly vanity of being abreast with the ideas of the day after to-morrow' (78). His young woman is an 'amateur' because she is still a member of her class, with its propensity for 'pose and gesture'. But perhaps she is also an amateur, in Conrad's view as well as Mr. X's, because she is a woman. Mr. X says:

I suppose she put on these appearances [of enthusiasm, of independence, of courageous thought] as she put on her picturesque dresses and for the same reason: to assert her individuality at any cost. You know, women would go to any length almost for such a purpose. ... She had acquired all the appropriate gestures of revolutionary convictions — the gestures of pity, of anger, of indignation against the anti-humanitarian vices of the social class to which she belonged herself. All this sat on her striking personality as well as her slightly original costumes. (81)

Thus, in a kind of slippage from class to gender, the propensity for 'pose and gestures' that is initially attributed to the bourgeoisie as a whole is now specifically attributed to bourgeois women. The bourgeois inability to inhabit a Real becomes a naturalized attraction of women to costumes and acting. But the young woman in the story is not the only character with theatrical attributes; there is also the title character, a police informer

named Sevrin, fanatically anti-anarchist, whom Mr. X frequently speaks of as wearing a 'mask' (94). Sevrin 'had fallen in love with the accomplished and innocent gestures of that girl. An actor in desperate earnest himself, he must have believed in the absolute value of conventional signs' (93). The theatrical metaphor goes oddly out of control in this description. The girl's gestures, previously part of her 'costume', become 'innocent', virtually natural. Sevrin becomes, contradictorily, 'an actor in desperate earnest', whose own acting prevents him from recognizing the gap between signifier and signified, gesture and feeling. Not a member of the bourgeoisie himself, presumably, he does not recognize her theatricality as convention; yet one would think an 'actor' would be the first to suspect an accomplished gesture. These references to acting imply by opposition a Real, just as Mr. X does earlier when he speaks of 'a real movement and ... words that have no sham meaning' (78). In his story, therefore, both anarchist fellow-travellers (women, bourgeois) and police informers are outside of that Real, yet the doubling of actor and actress causes Sevrin to 'unmask' himself: 'He was accustomed to arrange the last scene of his betrayals with a deep, subtle art which left his revolutionist reputation untouched' (93).

The collector who hears this story attempts to differentiate his temperament from that of an actor or an anarchist: 'I am a quiet and peaceable product of civilization, and know no passion other than the passion for collecting things which are rare, and must remain exquisite even if approaching to the monstrous' (76). And while this collector, like the lepidopterist in 'An Anarchist', may wish to dissociate himself from commodity fetishism and capitalist avarice, his chief purpose is ultimately less aesthetic than financial, as the following description suggests:

My treasures are disposed in three large rooms without carpets and curtains. There is no other furniture than the *étagères* and the glass cases whose contents shall be *worth a fortune to my heirs*. I allow no fires to be lighted, for fear of accidents, and a fire-proof door separates them from the rest of the house. (italics added, 74)

Inheritance was a social practice that anarchism explicitly opposed. According to Bakunin, equality of wealth and condition was impossible without the abolition of inheritance.⁴ Benjamin also thinks of collecting in association with inheritance, describing it as 'the soundest way to acquire

⁴ 'Bakunin argued that the right of inheritance underlay private property and the state, and that its abolition would lead to the downfall of each' (Thomas 310).

a collection' and observing, 'the most distinguished trait of a collection will always be its transmissibility' (Benjamin 1969, 66). In *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century*, he elaborates:

The interior is the retreat of art. The collector is a true inmate of the interior. He makes the transformation of things his business. To him falls the Sisyphean task of obliterating the commodity-like character of things through his ownership of them. But he merely confers connoisseur value on them, instead of intrinsic value. The collector dreams that he is not only in a distant or past world but also, at the same time, in a better one, in which, although men are unprovided with what they need as in the everyday world, things are free of the drudgery of being useful. (Benjamin 1986, 155)

Here the affinity between Conrad's bourgeois collector and the anarchist collector becomes clear: both are utopian and nostalgic, dreaming of a better world in which value is freed from both use and exchange. As the anarchist values the individual and the artisan, so does the collector value and fetishize craft, the trace of the individual artist on the object in which history as well as labour is congealed. And, in keeping with the anarchist insistence that 'anarchy is order', that the abolition of capitalism and the state would restore social harmony, the collection suggests an aesthetic model for social order.

In 'The Informer' Conrad begins to show an interest, developed more fully in *The Secret Agent*, in the psychology or 'nature' of another kind of anarchist: the fanatical bomber.⁵ Mr. X has a *bombe glacée* for dessert; more importantly, the prototype for the Professor of *The Secret Agent* appears, here also as a Professor obsessed with bombs: 'His was the true spirit of a revolutionist. Explosives were his faith, his hope, his weapon, and his shield' (88). Unlike the anarchist-collector, who is a writer of propaganda pamphlets, the Professor of *The Secret Agent*, whom Conrad calls 'the perfect anarchist', endorses propaganda by the deed: 'It is I who am the true propagandist'. Like Nikolai Apollonovich of Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*, who realizes that 'he himself was a bomb', the Professor always carries explosives on his person, ready to blow up himself and any policemen who attempt to arrest him. Conrad compares him, in his 'moments of dreadful and sane mistrust of mankind', to 'all men whose

⁵ There is also a brief reference to a failed bombing in 'An Anarchist'.

ambition aims at a direct grasp upon humanity — to *artists*, politicians, thinkers, reformers, or saints' [italics added] (82). He again, in a list Max Nordau might have made, inscribes an identity between the artist and the anarchist. But are these the only people who aim at 'a direct grasp upon humanity'? What about Conrad's earlier example — advertisers, corporations? In a curious circular logic, Conrad's attribution of 'sanity' to such 'mistrust' provides an excuse for his own distrust of humanity and thus of the anarchists he represents in this novel, even while he displaces this same mistrust onto one of those anarchists.

Although the psychology of the anarchist bomber is particularly important to Conrad, he evinces, like Andrei Bely in *Petersburg*, a fascination with the bomb itself. The similarity in the novelists' metaphors is not only apparent in Conrad's references to 'circles of cosmic chaos', but also in Mr. Vladimir's instructions to Verloc:

I am about to give you the philosophy of bomb throwing from my point of view ... The sensibilities of the class you are attacking are soon blunted. Property seems to them an indestructible thing. You can't count on their emotions either of pity or of fear for very long. A bomb outrage to have any influence on public opinion now must go beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely destructive. It must be that, and only that, beyond the faintest suspicion of any other object. You anarchists should make it clear that you are perfectly determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation. But how to get that appallingly absurd notion into the heads of the middle classes so that there should be no mistake? That's the question. By directing your blows at something outside the ordinary passions of humanity is the answer. Of course, there is art. A bomb in the National Gallery would make some noise. But it would not be serious enough. Art has never been their fetish. There would be some screaming, of course, but from whom? Artists — art critics and such like — people of no account. Nobody minds what they say. But there is learning — science. Any imbecile that has got an income believes in that ... The attack must have all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy. Since bombs are your means of expression, it would be really telling if one could throw a bomb into pure mathematics. (32-33)

Mr. Vladimir's 'philosophy of bomb-throwing' is more abstract than that of such famous anarchist bombers as Ravachol and Vaillant, who wished to avenge their comrades, provide a catalyst for revolution, or intimidate a complacent and complicit bourgeoisie, but its rationale is supremely anarchist — an assault on centralization, on assumed truths, and on the contemporary source of authority, science. Planned to discredit anarchists

and drive them out of England where they had found refuge, it requires the perfect target, one that seems an irrational choice and thus emphasizes the anarchists' desire for utter destruction.⁶ Art and science, as the highest achievements of civilization, valorized as representative of the greatest minds yet supposedly neutral politically, seem to him the appropriate targets, but whereas art appeals only to the elite, science is revered by all. Greenwich was established by an international conference in 1884 as the prime meridian (Kern 12). Stephen Kern points out that 'the assignment of the anarchist hero in *The Secret Agent* — to blow up the Greenwich Observatory — was a repudiation of the public world and the public time that made the coordination of public life possible' (Kern 191). The image at the end of the quotation above — 'throw a bomb into pure mathematics' — is a striking and peculiar combination of the material and the abstract, but perhaps what it suggests is that the bomb is always already an abstraction. A bomb thrown into pure mathematics would be a manifestation of Kant's 'mathematical sublime'. Mathematics, the ultimate codification of order, also threatens to become pure chaos, as in Stevie's endless drawing of circles. The circle, zero, or bomb, an abstraction suggesting both nothingness and a primary stage of order, explodes, spreading disorder. For Conrad, as for Bely, the bomb is metonymic of violent social transformation. It exposes the dangerous interdependence of irrationality and reason. The passage above is also not inaccurate about anarchism, in that Mr. Vladimir's phrase 'since bombs are your means of expression' invokes the nineteenth-century aesthetic notion of expression, the bomb as a form of speech. The anarchist Vaillant who had attempted to bomb the Chamber of Deputies said during his trial: 'It takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear ... Make no mistake; the explosion of my bomb is not only the cry of the rebel Vaillant, but the cry of an entire class' (quoted Goldman 96).

While the bomb is abstract and sublime in Mr. Vladimir's discourse, it is purely material in its gruesome effects, that is, the destruction of Stevie's body, the pieces of which must be scooped up with a shovel — as Conrad often reminds us. This is the aspect of the bomb that is omitted from the anarchist and fellow-traveller discourse. Conrad shows that the bomb has its own aesthetic dialectic, that of attraction and repulsion, the sublime and the ugly, and that these two are inseparable, even when one of them is repressed. On the one hand, there is a certain morbid fascination

⁶ Of this event, Ford Madox Ford wrote: 'I have seldom seen a crowd so great as that which attended the funeral of the poor idiot who blew himself to pieces in the attempt on the Greenwich Observatory' (Ford 1911, 136).

with the physical results of the bomb; on the other, an admiration for technical wizardry.

In *The Secret Agent* there are yet other 'natural' anarchists, Verloc, the title character, being not an anarchist but an *agent provocateur*. One is, as Eileen Sypher suggests in 'Anarchism and Gender', Winnie Verloc, repeatedly referred to after the death of her brother as 'a free woman'. A number of anarchist figures in *The Secret Agent* are based on historical figures like Johann Most and Bakunin, but, as several critics have pointed out, the ultimate anarchist of the novel is the would-be bomber Stevie, a 'delicate' retarded boy.⁷

Stevie's 'politics' are further indicative of Conrad's own political attitudes. The boy's extreme sympathy for suffering humans and animals is represented as a kind of pathology, a by-product of his intellectual and emotional simplicity, his state of arrested development. 'Bad world for poor people', Stevie observes (171). Afflicted with 'a morbid dread of pain', Stevie 'turns vicious' at tales or sights of suffering; his compassion is the flip side of his rage at injustice (169). Because Stevie is constitutionally unable to grasp the social forces that give rise to and perpetuate the poverty and suffering he witnesses, the novel implicitly dismisses oppressive social practices as evidence of the 'darkness' of human nature and the tragedy of life.

Ironically, Conrad's representation of Stevie bears a striking resemblance to Emma Goldman's representation of the violent anarchist. In her essay, 'The Psychology of Political Violence', she describes the perpetrators of such acts in terms of 'their supersensitiveness to the wrong and injustice surrounding them which compels them to pay the toll of our social crimes' (Goldman 80). She cites the traits ascribed to such figures, including 'a rare love of animals' and 'surpassing sweetness in all the ordinary relations of life' (Goldman 82), both applicable to Stevie. Two anarchist assassins, Santa Caserio and Angiolillo, were, according to Goldman, 'childlike' (98, 103) — Stevie's principal characteristic. Goldman sums up her essay with a rather confusing extended musical metaphor:

⁷ For Conrad's use of historical figures, see, for example, Seymour-Smith, 17. For Stevie as the ultimate anarchist, see, for example, Ray 129. The mechanic in 'An Anarchist' also has 'delicate features'.

High strung, like a violin string, they weep and moan for life, so relentless, so cruel, so terribly inhuman. In a desperate moment the string breaks. Untuned ears hears nothing but discord. But those who feel the agonized cry understand its harmony; they hear in it the fulfillment of the most compelling moment of human nature. (107-08)

Goldman's metaphor is typical of the anarchist reliance on an aesthetic discourse, but she remakes the usual terms. 'Harmony' here refers not to a state of utopia but to an act of violence. The violin is strung too tightly and hence will snap under the strain. But the sound it makes as it snaps is discordant to those listeners who, like people who don't appreciate Schönberg, can't decode the sound properly. The political avant-garde, like the musical avant-garde, comprehends the true 'nature' of that sound, that privileged moment.

Of course, for Conrad the trait of ready empathy is childlike in the most negative sense, while Goldman valorizes childlike sensitivity. Still, her reliance on psychology makes her assessment merely the inverse of Conrad's, with both concurring that a 'warm heart' (and by implication 'weak head') characterize those anarchists roused to violence by injustice. There was clearly some value for Goldman in making this defense, in arguing that, contrary to their reputation, anarchists were gentle and empathic, not psychopathically violent, and that their acts were in response to the far greater violence of the state.⁸ But it was perhaps a strategic error for Goldman to resort to a psychological discourse. In *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna*, Carl Schorske writes of 'the turn from Marx to Freud', in which 'the search for and understanding of the ills that plague mankind tended to be translated from the public and sociological domain to the private and psychological one' (Schorske xxiv). Goldman and Conrad are among those implicated in this shift, but while it is in the interest of a pessimistic, conservative politics to insist on a 'heart of darkness', Goldman's position would be better served by sociology than psychology. As an anarchist, however, she may have been attracted to psychology's emphasis on the individual. Conrad states his own position — an insistence on the explanatory power of the personal and psychological — aphoristically: 'The way of even the most justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds' (SA 81).

⁸In *Return to Yesterday*, Ford Madox Ford agrees, writing, 'The passion that inspired these paralyzers of a whole society [Paris in the 1890s] was probably nothing else but pity' (108).

Stevie's identity as anarchist is further inscribed by his peculiar habit, mentioned more than once, of 'drawing circles, circles, circles; innumerable 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' (SA 45). His affinity with chaos and confusion makes him a 'natural' anarchist; as circles are, like zeros, icons of the bomb, Stevie is also implicated in his own demise. Stevie is also a 'natural' anarchist in that he is, the character Ossipon remarks, a 'degenerate' of the sort described by Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau, who believed that anarchists had criminal tendencies similar to those of thieves and murderers.⁹ Martin Ray conjectures that Conrad drew Stevie's specific traits — drawing circles, stammering, tender-heartedness — from *Degeneration* (Ray, 130). Similarly, the Assistant Commissioner is 'a born detective' whose 'considerable gifts for the detection of incriminating truth' are 'natural' (SA 117). A detective is the inverse of an anarchist, one who finds order and meaning in a welter of details.

The Secret Agent puts forth more than one psychology of the anarchist, however. Speaking of Mr. Verloc's 'dislike of all kinds of recognized labour — a temperamental defect which he shared with a large proportion of revolutionary reformers' (SA 53) (Conrad is inclined to slippages that suggest he forgets Verloc is only *posing* as a revolutionary), the omniscient narrator characterizes 'social rebels' as follows:

For obviously one does not revolt against the advantages and opportunities of that [social] state, but against the price which must be paid for the same in the coin of accepted morality, selfrestraint, and toil. The majority of revolutionists are the enemies of discipline and fatigue mostly. There are *natures*, too, to whose sense of justice the price exacted looms up monstrously enormous, odious, oppressive, worrying,

⁹In *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, Olive Rossetti writes, 'There has been of late years a remarkable, and, on the whole, a very futile tendency among certain men of science to dissect and classify abnormal people and abnormal ideas, to discover that geniuses are mad, and that all manner of well-intentioned fanatics are born criminals. But there were elements in the Anarchist party which defied the science of the psychological analyst, so strangely and intricately were the most heterogeneous qualities blended in certain of their number - fanaticism, heroism, criminality, and not unfrequently a spicing of genius. The primary difference between the ordinary normal man and the fanatic - as between the normal man and the madman or the genius - is the totally different standpoint whence each views life. This it is which renders it impossible for the normal man really to understand or judge fanatics. He cannot grasp their motive, their point of view, and is therefore morally incapable of judging them' (187).

humiliating, extortionate, intolerable. Those are the fanatics. The remaining portion of social rebels is accounted for by vanity, the mother of all noble and vile illusions, the companion of *poets*, reformers, charlatans, prophets, and incendiaries (SA 53) [italics added]

As in 'An Anarchist,' Conrad here theorizes that social revolt arises from personal psychology and is an aspect of human nature, timeless rather than historical; thus, specific social conditions are irrelevant. Presumably injustice and cruelty are as much a constant as laziness and vanity, making any agitation for social reform pointless. The value that Conrad endorses, in opposition to political activism, is that of work; he once said of himself, 'I have been a sober worker all my life' (Karl, 13). The adjective 'sober' invokes by contrast the drunken French worker of 'An Anarchist,' who suddenly shouts, 'Vive l'anarchie!' The work ethic is usually associated with the bourgeoisie and Protestantism, but here it is again not social but psychological: 'the majority of revolutionaries are the enemies of discipline and fatigue, mostly.' In his memoirs, Ford Madox Ford recalls his first conversation with Conrad: 'Poor fellow! Work was at once his passion and his agony' (Ford 1931, 58). 'Work' was of course a Victorian watchword, not just a personal trait (Houghton). But even work does not finally distinguish Conrad from the violent anarchist. Just as both he and the propagandist Mr. X are writers, Conrad shares his dedication to work with the anarchist Professor, the solitary bomb-maker, who dismisses police and revolutionary activity as 'play' and 'forms of idleness at bottom identical,' and explains scornfully: 'But I don't play. I work fourteen hours a day, and go hungry sometimes' (SA 69-70).

Conrad does, of course, represent some social institutions in the novel — the police, the Secretary of State, the embassy personnel — but he does not, in the way that Lukács thought Balzac did, expose corruption and hypocrisy as constitutive of bourgeois society. The Professor's perception of a kinship between police and revolutionaries implies a critique, but it is a psychological critique: 'The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket' (SA 69). It is Winnie, the 'free woman,' who explains the social purpose of the police when she asks, 'Don't you know what the police are for, Stevie? They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have' (SA 173). The detective and the collector, like the novelist himself, attempt to align themselves with 'law and order' and to assign anarchists, like Stevie, to chaos and nature. But in psychological accounts, seeming opposites always contaminate each other. The terrorist and the policeman 'come from the same basket,' the poet and revolutionary are both ruled by 'vanity,' the

artist and the anarchist bomber are dedicated to work and desire 'a direct grasp upon humanity'. In the final analysis, even the anti-anarchist characters in these texts are secret sharers, implicated in anarchy, defending their fragile, elaborate order against the violence that anarchist and capitalist share.

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CROWDS, COLONIALISM, AND *LORD JIM*

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One of Conrad's reputations is as the great poet of isolation, and in this novel we are from the start invited (however ironically) to visualize Jim alone, standing apart from others, but in fact *Lord Jim* is a densely populated novel. On the *Patna*, the five white officers and their Malay crew have charge of some eight hundred passengers, pilgrims bound for Mecca. Jim gives his evidence before a crowded court, he works in a number of bustling seaports, and he ends up in Patusan, where, apart from Rajah Allang's people and Sherif Ali's men, Doramin in his town presides over sixty families with two hundred warriors, and there are countless more in the surrounding district. When Gentleman Brown arrives in Patusan he finds it, to his surprise, 'an immense place': it seems to swarm with thousands of angry men, and he and his thirteen desperadoes are outnumbered 'two hundred to one' (*Lord Jim* 360, 371). In the culture of Patusan almost all business is transacted in public. Jim arrives in Patusan, establishes his authority, and eventually dies, surrounded by people. In the novel's scenes of action (rather than scenes of narration) there is always an Asian crowd not far off.¹

People who know next to nothing else about Asia are aware at least that lots of people live in it. The western imagination of the orient has always been characterized, and tested, by large numbers — the fabulous treasures of the east, its vast distances, its epical disasters, and above all its enormous populations. Many of the most vivid or mythic moments of modern Asian history conjure images of great numbers of people — Hiroshima, the partition of India, the Cultural Revolution. The experience of the colonialist since Columbus has been an experience of being outnumbered, and Asia is in a sense doubly outnumbering for the

¹A point which has seemed sometimes too obvious to remark. The chapter on *Lord Jim* in Benita Parry's *Conrad and Imperialism*, for example, only once mentions Asian people.

colonialist encountering and seeking to master an almost unimaginably peopled continent. In this essay I will explore what one of Conrad's eastern novels, *Lord Jim*, has to say about crowds of Asian people. But I start with two quotations, one long and one short, to give the note.

The first quotation, perhaps inevitably, is from Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822), from the preamble to his account of his opium dreams with their astonishing oriental imagery:

I know not whether others share in my feelings on this point; but I have often thought that, if I were compelled to forego England, and to live in China, among Chinese manners and modes of life and scenery, I should go mad. The causes of my horror lie deep, and some of them must be common to others. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations It contributes much to these feelings that South-Eastern Asia is, and has been for thousands of years, the part of the earth most swarming with human life, the great *officina gentium*. Man is a weed in those regions. The vast empires, also, into which the enormous population of Asia has always been cast, give a further sublimity to the feelings associated with all oriental names or images. In China, over and above what it has in common with the rest of Southern Asia, I am terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, by the barrier of utter abhorrence placed between myself and *them*, by counter-sympathies deeper than I can analyse. I could sooner live with lunatics, with vermin, with crocodiles or snakes. (441-42)

The second, short, quotation comes from *Lord Jim*, from the equally fevered imagination of the alcoholic first engineer who, with Jim and the other Europeans, deserted the shipload of pilgrims on the *Patna*. 'I saw her go down,' he tells Marlow. 'She was full of reptiles' (51).

De Quincey was especially worried about China, with its notoriously swollen population — three hundred and thirty-three million inhabitants were claimed for the Chinese empire, though De Quincey bravely declared that he did not believe it could have more than a hundred million (Leask 228). But his anxiety is pan-Asian: here his orient, personified by a Malay, also has elements of Hindostan, the Euphrates and Egypt. Like most Europeans, John Barrell points out, De Quincey conceived of Asia beyond the Tigris as 'a place where people seemed to run into each other, to replicate each other, to compose one mass without divisions or features' (5). The east — like the East End — to his anxious imagination was not a place so much as a populace, undifferentiated, fluid and teeming. It was a crowd.

The Asian crowd is an essential part of the first impressions of all travellers who have set out to see the east and find their gaze returned. 'And then,' remembers one, 'I saw the men of the East — they were looking at me. The whole length of the jetty was full of people. I saw brown, bronze, yellow faces, the black eyes, the glitter, the colour of an Eastern crowd. And all these beings stared without a murmur, without a sigh, without a movement' ('Youth' 40). The crowd that here confronts Marlow in 'Youth' seems uncannily silent and immobile, but it belongs to an East which he immediately intuitively feels as being 'full of danger and promise'. And indeed for the west, the great eastern populations were — and are — seen as both a gigantic resource to be harnessed and a gigantic danger to be controlled. The oriental crowd was the focus of the most urgent anxiety of colonialism, an anxiety present in extreme form in De Quincey, but visible everywhere in colonialist writing, and not least in those adventure stories for boys that so frequently have a scene in which some plucky hero faces down, outwits or in some cases converts a hostile — often fanatical — crowd. (*Lord Jim* itself is an intertextual changeling to this genre.) The human space of colonial Asia was the theatre of a grotesque disproportion — perhaps gratifying, certainly alarming — between the subject peoples and their colonial masters. The anxiety of outnumbering is not hard to understand in the imperial circumstances. Around 1800, for example, the population of India was about one hundred and fifty million: a century later it was more than three hundred million, governed by a Civil Service with about a thousand administrative officers. The British of course commanded large and capable military forces, of Indian and British and (as Kipling reminds us) Irish troops. But from day to day colonial authority across the east, in the face of such gross disproportion of numbers, was not sustained by the use of military force, but by its own confidence, and that confidence of colonialism — the antidote to colonial anxiety, and prophylactic against colonial panic — was to be one of the features that most engaged Conrad in the story of *Lord Jim*.

A necessary confidence is also a leading theme in Kipling — it is related, causally, to his often deplored vulgarity — and it is worth looking at Kipling's representations of Asian numbers. In *Kim*, the Grand Trunk Road which is Kipling's epitome of India, and his version of pastoral, is described as 'a wonderful spectacle', a bustling crowd half a continent long, 'such a river of life as nowhere else exists in the world' (*Kim* 105). It is a crowd going about its business, but at the same time a companionable and even festive company, a community whose traffic and livelihood are supervised and guaranteed by a benign imperial police. The narrative