Kaczynski, Conrad, and terrorism

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"1907 Conrad Novel May Have Inspired Unabomb Suspect"
Front-page headline, *The Washington Post*, July 9,1996

> I confess that in my eyes the story [*The Secret Agent*] is a fairly successful (and sincere) piece of ironic treatment applied to a special subject—a sensational subject if one likes to call it so. And it is based on the inside knowledge of a certain event in the history of active anarchism. But otherwise it is *purely a work of imagination*. It has no social or philosophical intention. It is, I humbly hope, not devoid of artistic value. It may even have some moral significance. (Emphasis by Conrad in original) Joseph Conrad, Letter to Algernon Methuen. November 7, 1906.[1]

It is not common for canonical literary works, published nearly ninety years earlier, to be mentioned in front-page headlines about suspected terrorists. But the novel in question, *The Secret Agent*, is not exactly a typical canonical work; and Theodore J. Kaczynski, also known as the Unabomber and "FC" as he signed his letters to the media, is not a typical terrorist. A Harvard graduate with a Ph.D. in Mathematics from the University of Michigan who was briefly an Assistant Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, Kaczynski is a far more proficient bomb-maker than Martial Bourdin, who destroyed himself in the 1894 Greenwich explosion that was the starting point for Conrad's novel. Between 1978 and 1995 his home-made bombs injured twenty-three people and killed three persons— Hugh Scrutton, a Sacramento computer store owner, Thomas Mosser, a New Jersey advertising executive, and Gilbert Murray, an official of the California Forestry Association. Kaczynski tried and failed to blow up an airliner in 1979, and he caused a major panic with a "prank" threat to destroy an airliner in June of 1995. During that same summer he also manipulated the news media so that *The Washington Post*, with the cooperation of the *New York Times*, published his 35,000-word Manifesto attacking technology, science, and "Industrial Society," first on the Post's own pages and then on the internet. There the Manifesto came to the attention of David Kaczynski who notified the FBI that certain ideas in "Industrial Society" were disturbingly similar to statements in letters he had received from his brother who was living in a 10x12 cabin in Montana—until the FBI arrested him in April, 1996. Indicted for murder and threatened with a possible death penalty and a prolonged trial in which he might have been portrayed as a delusional paranoid schizophrenic, Kaczynski demonstrated such a formidable talent for disrupting the American legal system by quarreling with his lawyers and attempting to commit suicide, that the *New York Times* called his trial a "travesty" and a "legal farce"; and the Justice Department accepted a plea bargain in which Kaczynski pleaded guilty and avoided

[1] Serge Kovaleski, "1907 Conrad Novel May Have Inspired Unabomb Suspect," *Washington Post*, 9 My, 1996, Al, A6. Subsequent references are given as Kovaleski. Also see Terry Teachout, "Mad Loner Builds Perfect Bomb," *New York Times*, 13 My 1996. Joseph Conrad, Collected Letters, 5 vols. Frederick Karl and Laurence Davies, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983–1996), 3, 371. Subsequent references to this source are cited with volume and page numbers as CL.

the death penalty by accepting life imprisonment without the possibility of parole or appeal.[2]

As Kaczynski's Manifesto and letters to the media reveal, he was neither a conventional terrorist with an extreme but relatively specific political agenda, nor a ' 'mad loner' ' with a grudge against particular persons or institutions. Instead, he was a well-read autodidact with substantial intellectual pretensions and a grandiose melange of ideas and plans for a revolution that would destroy "Industrial Society" so that humanity would return to its "primitive," pretechnological condition. Much of his thinking seems to have been derived from a medley of sources such as pop psychology (his theories about the "power process"), radical individualism (his attacks on "leftism"), and romantic or Luddite neo-primitivism (his diatribes against technology). However, mixed in with these ideas in the two-hundred-and-thirty-two paragraphs of his Manifesto, there were statements similar enough to the beliefs and attitudes of two characters in The *Secret Agent*—the diplomat Vladimir and the bomb-making Professor whom Conrad called the "perfect anarchist"—that FBI agents had begun reading *The Secret Agent* carefully even before Kaczynski was identified as a suspect, and the agency had consulted a number of Conrad scholars in the hopes of discovering more about the Unabomber's mentality and identity (Kovaleski A6). After Kaczynski was arrested, members of his family revealed that his parents had Conrad's collected works in their home, that Kaczynski himself had told them in a 1984 letter from Montana that he was "reading Conrad's novels for about the dozenth time," and FBI agents revealed that Kaczynski may have used "Conrad" or "Konrad" as his alias three times when he stayed at a hotel in Sacramento, where he presumably mailed his bombs (Kovaleski A6). Journalists also noted a number of other similarities between the Unabomber's biography and Conrad's anarchist Professor: particularly that Kaczynski had abandoned his academic career at the University of California in Berkeley in much the same way that the Professor had "abandoned chemistry"— though Kaczynski's reason was different. According to his family, he "feared engineers would use what he taught them to destroy the environment."[3] So that readers all over the world could further compare the Unabomber's attitudes and ideas with those of the characters in Secret Agent, *The Washington Post* put the entire 1984 Penguin edition of the novel on its internet site.

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[2] "The Unabomber Travesty," *New York Times*, 10 January 1998, Editorial. For details of Kaczynski's confession and plea bargain, see William Booth, "Kaczynski Pleads Guilty to Mail Bombings," *Washington Post*, 23 January 1998.

[3] Kovaleski A6. Conrad's Professor ends his career as a chemist because he believes he has been treated "with revolting injustice" at the technical institute and later the laboratory where he was employed. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (1907; reprint, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), 75. Subsequent references to this source are given parenthetically in the text. Like Kaczynski, the Professor works "absolutely alone" (70). However, the Professor does unbend enough to share an occasional beer with Ossipon at the Silenius, but there is no indication that Kaczynski indulged himself in even that limited form of sociability.

At the very least this encounter between a late-twentieth-century terrorist and an early-twentieth-century modernist author could be considered an extreme example of intertextual and Conradian irony. How else could one explain how a self-professed revolutionary and anarchist like Kaczynski could have been "inspired" by an author who had spoken so scornfully of revolutions in his "Familiar Preface" to A Personal Record and had depicted revolutionaries and anarchists so harshly in novels like Nostromo, Under Western Eyes, and *The Secret Agent*. Surely the "moral significance" Conrad spoke of in his letter to Methuen had been achieved in an extraordinarily ironic and counterproductive way if Kaczynski's terrorist acts had been the result of his taking seriously the anarchist Professor's rage against "the condemned social order," or if he believed Vladimir's cynical jibes against science as "the sacrosanct fetish of today" justified sending bombs to scientists or planting them in the parking lots of computer stores. On the other hand, though Conrad himself might have been disturbed by such ironies, it is possible that he would not have been especially surprised by these American applications of his characters' ideas. After all, in the novel the Professor himself declares that the American "character is essentially anarchistic. Fertile ground for us, the States—very good ground," he tells Ossipon, and in his 1920 "Author's Note," Conrad said he had considered it a "very high compliment" when a "visitor from America informed me that all sorts of revolutionary refugees in New York would have it that the book was written by somebody who knew a lot about them."[4]

It can be argued that though a few passages in Conrad's novel may give insights into Kaczynski's thinking, the deeper significance of his alleged reading (or mis-reading) of *The Secret Agent* lies in the contrast between his Manifesto and Conrad's novel: that Kaczynski's over-all perspective was the antithesis of the modernist, heavily ironic perspective that informs Conrad's novel, the main elements of the novelist's viewpoint of society, and the ways in which Conrad used his narrative to represent characters like the Professor and Vladimir and the consequences of their ideas. Considered in that context, the juxtaposition of Kaczynski's words and acts with Conrad's novels creates a discursive encounter between viewpoints so radically different from one another that it can be considered an equivalent of the fictional encounter between Vladimir and the Assistant Commissioner in Chapter 10 of *The Secret Agent* when the forces of English pragmatism and "Asian" autocracy and despotism confront one another and each challenges the other's political vision and ideas about how governments should respond to terrorism.

Though there may be significant similarities between the contents of Kaczynski's Manifesto and what some characters in ... Secret Agent say, the discursive forms of the two texts are extremely dissimilar. Because of its "sustained irony," the editors of the 1989 Cambridge edition have written, "*The Secret Agent* may well be the modem

[4] Secret Agent, 71,31,72, xiv. According to Jacques Berthoud, Conrad derived his characterization of the Professor from his readings of American anarchist pamphlets such as The Alarm. Berthoud, "*The Secret Agent*," in The Cambridge Companion to Conrad, J. H. Stape, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 103.

novel,... Like 'Heart of Darkness,' it has become a touchstone of modem memory."[5] In contrast, Kaczynski's Manifesto can be considered a late-twentieth-century version of a pre-modem, very unironic discursive genre now known as the American jeremiad: enraged warnings against depravity and furious assaults upon opposing viewpoints that have been expressed in both religious and secular terms since the mid-seventeenth century. Considered as a form of discourse, this species of jeremiad has been discovered lurking within a wide—sometimes an excessively wide—range of diatribes and warnings produced by American writers, thinkers, and speakers starting with the Puritans and continuing until the present time. Perry Miller, the most scrupulously historical of the jeremiad's analysts, considered it exemplified in a large number of angry seventeenth-century sermons in which New England ministers, starting in the 1640s, had prophesied dire calamities as they castigated their parishioners for lacking the zealous faith of earlier generations of covenanted church members. By the 1680s, Miller said, the decline of New England's morals had become almost the only "theme for discourse [among Puritan preachers], and the pulpits rang week after week with lengthening jeremiads" attacking a "staggering index of criminality: worldliness, fornication, uncleanness, drunkenness, hypocrisy, ... Sabbath-breaking and cockfighting." "I suppose that in the whole literature of the world, including the satirists of imperial Rome," Miller concluded in Errand Into The Wilderness, "there is hardly such another uninhibited and unrelenting documentation of a people's descent into corruption."[6]

Sacvan Berkovitch interpreted the American jeremiad more liberally and thematically—and also less historically—by expanding the term to include additional expressions of American patriotism or protest, "full of rage and faith," alleging that there was an "American mission" or "Way" that was in danger of being betrayed by the nation's leaders or citizens. In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, Berkovitch claimed, the Puritan Jeremiahs' rhetorical strategies warning against declension had been adapted first to religious revivalism and then to more secular and temporal goals by ministers, politicians, and writers who had used the strategies of the jeremiad to convert sinners or to convince citizens that America had a national destiny that was unique and exceptional.[7] More recently Norbert Elliot and John Opie have used the term more broadly and loosely than Berkovitch did by applying it to writings by Romantics, transcendentalists, ecologists and conservationists who have claimed that Americans should have a special "mission" and a "mighty destiny"

[5] *The Secret Agent*, Bruce Harkness and S. W. Reid, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xxiii. Subsequent references to this source are to SA 1989.

[6] Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 472. Errand Into the Wilderness (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 8.

[7] Sacvan Berkovitch, The American Jeremiad (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 11.

to preserve and manage the wilderness and be inspired by it instead of strip-mining and clear-logging it.[8]

When the Biblical sources of the term jeremiad are taken into account, an application of this discursive genre should include Miller's seventeenth-century Puritan ministers, Jonathan Edwards' fire-and-brimstone conversion sermons, and some of the assorted political diatribes Berkovitch includes— especially those made during times of national crises such as the Revolutionary, Civil, and Cold Wars. However, the jeremiad as a genre probably should not include the Romantics, transcendentalists, and most of the ecologists and environmentalists that Elliot and Opie cite. For a careful reading of the Book of Jeremiah will reveal that the main feature of a true jeremiad is rage and anger, sometimes accompanied by lamentations, against a nation or society that has sinned against a furious Yahweh who will punish His people with a long list of afflictions and disasters culminating in a final, apocalyptic calamity.

Like a good many other twentieth-century extremist political diatribes, Kaczynski's Manifesto represents a secularized version of this discursive genre. Virtually all of America's problems, he asserts, can be blamed on science and technology and the control that they have attained over humanity and "WILD nature"; and therefore the nation needs a catastrophic "revolution" against science, comparable to those that occurred earlier in France and Russia, to regain its "freedom."[9] Thus, speaking very much like Conrad's "perfect anarchist" in his conversation with Ossipon in Chapter 4 of *The Secret Agent* (71, 73), Kaczynski advocates destruction for its own sake: "We have no illusions about the feasibility of creating a new, ideal form of society," he wrote; "Our goal is only to destroy the existing form of society" ("Industrial Society" 25811182). Like the Professor, Kaczynski hopes to achieve this objective by initiating a cycle of violence that would destroy not only existing institutions but the morality and ideology upon which they are based. "Industrial society" is so corrupt and insidious, he claims, that "[i]t would be better to dump the whole stinking system and take the consequences," even if those consequences include "a period of chaos," and therefore revolutionaries "must work to heighten the social stresses within the system so as to increase the likelihood that it will break down... if and when industrial society breaks down, its remnants will be smashed beyond repair — The factories should be destroyed, technical books burned, etc." ("Industrial Society" 257,250–51 Us 179,165,166). Similarly, the Professor explains to Ossipon that nothing would please him more than if the police began

[8] Norbert Elliot and John Opie, "Tracking the Elusive Jeremiad: The Rhetorical Character of American Environmental Discourse," in The Symbolic Earth. James G. Cantrill, Christine L. Oravec, eds. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 14.

[9] "FC" [Theodore Kaczynski], "Industrial Society and Its Future" (The "Unabomber Manifesto"), *Washington Post*, 19 September 1995. Reprinted on the internet and as "Appendix 3," in John Douglas and Mark Olshaker, Unabomber: On the Trail of America's Most-Wanted Serial Killer (New York: Pocket Books, 1996), 257–581 Us 181–83. In this reference and subsequent references to the Manifesto, it will be cited as "Industrial Society" with page references and paragraph enumerations from Douglas and Olshaker.

"shooting us down in broad daylight with the approval of the public. Half our battle would be won then: the disintegration of the old morality would have set in ... what's wanted is a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life" (73).

Though the rhetorical strategies incorporated into a particular jeremiad may seem sophisticated, the genre's fundamental narrative structure and its dramatis personae are relatively simple when analyzed from a literary perspective. The dramatis personae includes a collective entity that is usually a nation (but may also be a community, a congregation, or humanity in general) that has begun to suffer from assorted calamities and disasters. It also includes an agent, an angry Yahweh figure in religious jeremiads, who causes these disasters, including ones whose origins may seem obscure or inexplicable. Third, there is a Jeremiah, a prophet who interprets the disasters and issues exhortations and warnings. The jeremiad narrative starts with the assumption that once in the past a covenanted or ideal relationship existed between this nation and its Yahweh figure (or, in Kaczynski's case, between America and its "WILD nature"); that covenant has been broken; the nation or society has begun to suffer from the disasters it deserves; and therefore, the Jeremiah exultantly warns, the guilty are certain to be punished with greater calamities if they refuse to do what is demanded to restore the original covenant or ideal relationship. However, if the Jeremiah's commands are obeyed, then the nation or society may be rewarded with blessings, such as salvation or freedom from the evil effects of the industrial revolution. Within that narrative framework, Jeremiahs have a definite, discursive identity. Suffused with rage and certainty, they exhibit a radical egoism that often crosses the line into megalomania and melodrama as they rage at national or societal iniquities, demonize their detractors, and lament their society's decline. To speak, as Elliot and Opie do, of Emerson's "The American Scholar" as being a "gentle jeremiad"[10] is a contradiction in terms, for Jeremiahs do not discourse in a "gentle" manner. Instead they use narrative and rhetoric to justify their anger as they recite their erring nation's failings and seek to justify their authority as prophets of imminent doom or redemption.[11] Therefore, analyzed from a critical perspective such as Mikhail Bakhtin's, the jeremiad represents an extreme example of monoglossia, a closed discursive system that recognizes the validity of no other viewpoints than its own. Like the epic, tragic, and lyric creators of what Bakhtin

[10] Elliot and Opie, 21.

[11] Unlike modernist forms of social and historical analysis that are "secular, relativistic, and therefore open to a consideration of radically different systems of thought and action," says Berkovitch, the jeremiad's rhetoric is based on a form of symbolic analysis that "confines us to the alternatives generated by the symbol itself [e.g., "America," "technology," "nature"]. It may suggest unexpected meanings, but only within a fixed, bipolar system," and therefore "the search for meaning is at once endless and self-enclosed." 177–78. Thus the jeremiad as a genre is pre-modem and anti-modem not only because it originated in the seventeenth century, but also because it is so opposed to the relativism and open-endedness characteristic of modernist forms of discourse. See Elliot and Opie 10, 13, 14. In addition, considered as political discourse the jeremiad has some kinship with what Richard Hofstadter has described as the "paranoid style" in American history and culture. See his The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays (New York: Knopf, 1965), 3–65, 72–75.

called "direct word[s]" in his The Dialogic Imagination, the Jeremiah perceives his own language "as the sole and fully adequate tool for realizing the word's direct, objectivized meaning," and thus he transforms language into an "absolute dogma... within the narrow framework of a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia."[12] What was notable about Kaczynski is that he tried to be both a Jeremiah and a Yahweh. In the latter role, as an agent of destruction, he caused calamities and tried to induce crises by attempting to blow up an airliner and by sending parcel bombs to "punish" persons he considered the "power-holding elite of industrial society," such as scientists and executives in fields like advertising and public relations ("Industrial Society" 260 H 190). But at the same time that he was building and sending some of his deadliest bombs in 1995, he was also typing drafts of his Manifesto in which he tried to represent himself as a Jeremiah by writing what he thought was a "sober essay" about the dangers of technology in which he mimicked the strategies of academics and op-ed writers by documenting his charges with copious footnotes and by trying to give plausible reasons for his attitudes.[13] What characterized Kaczynski in both of these roles, however, was, to use Bakhtin's terminology, his absolute dogmatism, his insistence that "industrial society" was so intrinsically evil that whatever he did to attack it—either by sending bombs to his victims or by writing a turgid, 35,000 word essay—was justified.

Conrad's vision of history and his uses of narrative in his fictions are, needless to say, profoundly different from those in jeremiads. In the great series of political novels he published between 1899 and 1911— Darkness, Nostromo, *The Secret Agent*, and Under Western Eyes—one of the major leitmotifs is that of a character with a grand idea, plan, or mission. This character—Kurtz, Charles Gould, Vladimir, Victor Haldin—initiates the action of the novel by acting upon that idea; he states it eloquently and powerfully; he persuades or coerces others to help him realize it; and, in the process of doing this, he causes a series of unintended disasters that destroy either himself or many of the people associated with him. For the Jeremiah, it is a nation's or society's divergence or declension from a grand idea, plan, or covenant that causes calamity. In Conrad's narratives, on the other hand, it is having such a grand plan or idea and trying to achieve its goals that leads to disasters: chaos and barbarism in Heart of Darkness; the civil war in Sulaco in Nostromo; Stevie's death, Verloc's murder, and Winnie's suicide

[12] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 61. In our application of Bakhtin's terminology, monoglossia and its opposite, heteroglossia or polyphony, are not absolute terms but opposite ends of a spectrum in which some texts (like jeremiads) are near or at the monoglossia end of the scale whereas novels by writers like Conrad and Joyce exemplify a high degree of heteroglossia.

[13] "Industrial Society," 222 f 96. Though Kaczynski tried to present his attacks on modem, industrial society in a reasonable, "sober" way in parts of his Manifesto, he also rather ingenuously implied in his comments on "Strategy" that this approach was needed as a tactic to attract "people who are more intelligent, thoughtful and rational. The object should be to create a core of people who will be opposed to the industrial system on a rational, thought-out basis, with full appreciation of the problems and ambiguities involved ... " Ibid., 259 f 187.

in *The Secret Agent*; Razumov's betrayal of Haldin and his own mutilation in Under Western Eyes.

The ironic implications of this process are epitomized especially well in Nostromo. Near the beginning of the novel, when Charles Gould first decides to try to make the San Tomd silver mine productive, he emphasizes that he accepts the ideology and methods of multinational capitalism (a.k.a. "the material interests") for altruistic reasons because, "What is wanted here [in Costaguana]," he tells his fiancee, "is law, good faith, order, security. Any one can declaim about these things, but I pin my faith to material interests ... That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards. That's your ray of hope." A little more than four hundred pages, an insurrection and a civil war, and many deaths later, Dr. Monygham declares that, "There is no peace and no rest in the development of material interests. They have their law, and their justice, but it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman."[14] Narrative, in fictions like Nostromo and Heart of Darkness, becomes a means of exposing the fallacies of egoists like Kurtz and Charles Gould by revealing the ironic political and historical consequences that occur when they try to realize their grand plans to bring justice and stability to Costaguana or civilization to the middle of Africa. By using irony and narrative to deflate the pretensions of characters like Kurtz and Gould, Conrad creates the kind of polyphonic, multivocal, modernist fictional world described by Bakhtin in which dogmatism is impossible, because "[i]rony has penetrated all [the] languages of modem times ... Irony is everywhere—from the minimal and imperceptible to the loud, which borders on laughter. Modem man does not proclaim; he speaks. That is, he speaks with reservations."[15]

The Secret Agent, however, is a special case since it is, even for Conrad, a conspicuously and self-consciously ironic text. Besides his letter to Algernon Methuen, quoted earlier, he also spoke of its "ironic intention" and its "consistent irony" in letters to J. B. Pinker,[16] and he told R. B. Cunninghame-Grahame that the novel was "a sustained

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[14] Joseph Conrad, Nostromo (1904; reprint, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1925), 84,511. Also see Emilia Gould's "prophetic vision" of the "San Tome mountain hanging over the Campo, over the whole land, feared, hated, wealthy; more soulless than any tyrant." Ibid., 522.

[15] Mikhail Bakhtin, "From Notes Made in 1970–71," Speech Genres & Other Late Essays, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vem McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 132. See also Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination, 276, 291–92.

[16] CL 3,326. Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters, G. Jean Aubery, ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1927), 2:233. In 1912, he told Marguerite Poradowska he believed that he had "succeeded... in treating an essentially melodramatic subject by means of irony." (CL 5, 76) In his comments on *The Secret Agent*, Conrad also ironically denigrated certain aspects of the novel itself, including his treatment of the anarchists. In the same letter to Poradowska, he said that "anarchy and the anarchists scarcely concern me; I know almost nothing of the doctrine and nothing of at all of the men. It is all made up." Ibid. For an analysis of why Conrad was so evasive and ironical about the novel, see Berthoud, "*The Secret Agent*," 101–03. Critical commentary on the subject of irony in *The Secret Agent* is, of

effort in ironical treatment of a melodramatic subject—which was my technical intention" (CL 3,491). In his 1920 "Author's Note" he also implied that he had needed to use an "ironic method" to deal with *The Secret Agent*'s subject matter, because that method had been "formulated with deliberation and in the earnest belief that ironic treatment alone would enable me to say all that I felt I would have to say in scorn as well as in pity" (xiii). Irony takes many forms and serves a variety of functions in Conrad's fictions, but in *The Secret Agent* in particular we believe it often serves to transform the anger he felt toward certain of its subjects—Russia and anarchism—from melodramatic rage into a narrative that would be, as he emphasized to Methuen, " work of imagination" that would have an "artistic value" and "some moral significance" (CL 3,371). When the novel is considered from this perspective, it is significant that the sinister plot to blow up Greenwich Observatory is instigated by a wily and cynical foreign diplomat with a distinctly Russian name, Vladimir, whose embassy is located in Chesham Square (14) when the actual Russian embassy was located in Chesham Place.[17]

For the reasons that Conrad's biographers have described, particularly the deaths of his parents, Russia was a subject that did not arouse his temperate or "artistic" feelings.[18] Indeed, on the subject of Russia and its government, Conrad both understood and shared the visceral feelings of a Jeremiah all too well. He could be ironically condescending, sarcastic, or even darkly humorous in his comments on egoists' grand plans and the disasters that resulted when those plans were held by the French (Napoleon in A Personal Record), the English (several of the characters in *The Secret Agent*), imperialists and multinational capitalists (Kurtz in Heart of Darkness and Gould and Holyrod in Nostromo), or even by South American revolutionaries (again, Nostromo). But it was Russia's pretensions to national greatness and its proclamations of having an imperial mission that caused him, at least once in his career, actually to write a jeremiad. During the winter and spring of 1905 he began writing a journalistic essay about Russia's role in European politics, its recent political turmoil, and its disastrous defeats in its war with Japan. Eventually entitled, "Autocracy and War," and pub-

course, very extensive. See, for example, Paul Armstrong, "The Politics of Irony in Reading Conrad," *Conradiana* 26 (1994): 85–101. Malcolm Bradbury, The Modern World: Ten Great Writers (London: Seeker & Warburg, 1988), 88–99. E. M. W. Tillyard, "*The Secret Agent* Reconsidered," in Conrad: A Collection of Critical Essays, Marvin Mudrich, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966), 103–10. Anthony Winner, Culture and Irony: Studies in Joseph Conrad*s Major Novels (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 70–91.

[17] SA1989,417.

[18] As Jeffrey Mayer has succinctly summarized the reasons for Conrad's hatred of Russia, that nation "had enslaved his country, forbidden his language, confiscated his inheritance, treated him as a convict, killed his parents, and forced him into exile." Joseph Conrad: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1991), 29. For a vivid example of Conrad's feelings on the subject of Russia, see his angry letter (CL 4,488–89) to Edward Garnett regarding the latter's review of Under Western Eyes. Garnett's review is reprinted in Norman Sherry, ed. Conrad: The Critical Reception (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 233–35.

lished by Fortnightly Review, it is a twenty-one-page diatribe which almost exceeds Kaczynski's rage against "Industrial Society" in its extended venom. Russia, Conrad wrote, was a "dreaded and strange apparition, bristling with bayonets, armed with chains, hung over with holy images," a "ravenous ghoul," a "blind Djinn," an "Old Man of the Sea" facing

> us with its old stupidity, with its strange mystical arrogance ... she [Russia] is and has been simply the negation of everything worth living for. She is not an empty void, she is a yawning chasm open between East and West; a bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration toward personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge, every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience.[19]

In fact, Conrad's diatribe was even more negative than most jeremiads, since they usually claim that at least some time in the past the erring nation had a connection with the divine or the ideal and then betrayed it, whereas Conrad repeatedly quoted Bismark's contemptuous dismissal, "La Russie, c'est le niant, " and claimed that Russia had always been a "***neant***," a "nothingness," that could only die or be destroyed, since it could not be changed into anything better. As a final stroke of erudite but heavy-handed sarcasm, Conrad wanted The Fortnightly to introduce his article with a well-known phrase from Tacitus' Annals, "sine ira et studio," ("without anger or bias"),[20] but the editors deleted it, perhaps because they considered it too sarcastic.

After "Autocracy and War" was accepted for publication by The Fortnightly in early May of 1905, however, Conrad seems to have been embarrassed by his own angry vehemence, since he described the article, in a letter to Galsworthy, as "my worthless rhetoric" and implied that the time he had spent writing and revising it had been largely wasted (CL 3,239). "Autocracy and War" was published in July, 1905, and approximately seven months after that Conrad began writing "Verloc," the short story that gradually evolved into *The Secret Agent*. That novel, as Thomas Mann perceived, is plainly "an anti-Russian story," and it is probable that some of Conrad's angry contempt for Russia and its government was responsible for his choice of a distinctly Russian name, Vladimir, for the novel's main provocateur. In case contemporary readers might have missed the implications of Conrad's hints about Vladimir's nationality, Edward Garnett—commenting on the diplomat's scheme to

[19] Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War," Notes on Life and Letters (1921; reprint, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1925), 89,100.

[20] "Autocracy and War," 94. CL 3,272. The Bolshevik Revolution, needless to say, did not reduce Conrad's animus, and he resurrected his rage against Russia fifteen years later in his 1920 "Author's Note" to Under Western Eyes where he claimed that the "ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality... basing itself upon complete moral anarchism" had only provoked "the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand... the tiger cannot change his stripes nor the leopard his spots." Under Western Eyes (1911; reprint, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1925), x.

blow up Greenwich Observatory—explained in his review of the novel that "though the average Englishman may murmur, like Judge Brack in Hedda Gabler, 'such things don't happen,' we may guess that M. Vladimir is fresh from contact with the Petersburg secret police."[21]

In addition, at the same time that Conrad was working on "Verloc" and *The Secret Agent*, the winter and spring of 1905–1906, he was also writing his two very unsympathetic and crudely ironic short stories about anarchism, "An Anarchist" and "The Informer." In the former story, the main, title character has no understanding of anarchist ideas or any deep political convictions of his own. A gullible young French mechanic, his life is ruined when he gets drunk in a cafe and a pair of anarchists "eloquently" incite him into shouting, "Vive I'anarchie!" and starting a fight. Given a maximum sentence because he shouted "seditious" slogans, the mechanic is blacklisted by employers when he leaves prison and becomes the pawn of a gang of anarchists who recruit him to participate in a botched bank robbery. Sentenced to a penal colony for that crime, the mechanic manages to escape in a boat in which, thanks to an outlandish coincidence, he is accompanied by two of his anarchist comrades. Drawing a hidden pistol, he sadistically forces them to row until they are collapsing with thirst and exhaustion, then shoots one of them without warning and forces the other to shout "Vive I'anarchie!" just before he murders him too. "Mr. X," the main character of "The Informer" is, if anything, even more unsympathetic than the anarchists in the previous story. A cold, callous aesthete, he writes scathing revolutionary pamphlets that his "well-fed" bourgeois readers buy because they find them titillating. At the same time he is also a clandestine "inspirer of secret societies" and "desperate conspiracies"—yet he remains at large because he is considered only a "publicist." Unable to understand how an individual, who has the "exquisite" tastes of a very cultivated upper-middle-class or aristocratic European, can also be a dangerous extremist, the story's bourgeois narrator can only conclude that X is a "monster," who can casually remark, "There's no amendment to be got out of mankind except by terror and violence," at the same time that he had "the manner[s] 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."[22]

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[21] Thomas Mann, Past Masters and Other Papers, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1933), 235. Edward Garnett (emphasis in original by Garnett), "The Novel of the Week," in Conrad: *The Secret Agent*: A Casebook, Ian Watt, ed. (London: Macmillan, 1973), 41. The other diplomats associated with Vladimir's embassy have German names, but that might be explained by the fact that many of Russia's bureaucrats were of German descent or by Conrad's claims in "Autocracy and War" (112–14) that Germany had manipulated Russia during the late nineteenth century and might become a dominant partner in an alliance of the two countries. By making the embassy's diplomats a mixture of Germans and Russians, Conrad could express his anxieties about two nations he considered threats to English and "European" values. In a letter to Ada Galsworthy, he referred to "Autocracy and War" as his "piece of prophecy both as to Russia and Germany." CL 3,294.

[22] Conrad, "An Informer," A Set of Six (1908; reprint, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1924), 74,77,76. For an overview of Conrad's opinions of anarchists and anarchism, see Jennifer Shaddock, "Hanging a Dog: The Politics of Naming in 'An Anarchist,"' *Conradiana* 26 (1994), 56–69.

As these negative characterizations of anarchists, and some of the phrases Conrad applied to anarchist ideas and actions in his 1920 "Author's Note" to *The Secret Agent*— 'brazen cheat," "blood-stained inanity" (ix, x)— suggest, he despised anarchism almost as much as the Russian government. Therefore, when he began expanding "Verloc" into *The Secret Agent*, he was writing about a "sensational subject," the Greenwich bombing, in relation to two of his personal, political bites noires, Russia and anarchism. However, unlike Conrad the angry journalist who might write what he called "worthless rhetoric" for The Fortnightly, Conrad the novelist had a different approach to such subjects: the "ironic treatment" or "method" that he alluded to in his letters to his correspondents and his "Author's Note" to the novel itself. Through that form of "treatment," he apparently planned that he could speak of the novel's melodramatic events and subjects in a mixture of "underlying pity and contempt" as well as expressing "inspiring indignation" and "scorn" ("Author's Note," viii, xiii). Instead of raging like an angry Jeremiah, as he had done in "Autocracy and War," Conrad depicted Verloc, Vladimir, and the other characters in the novel through a variety of ironic strategies. These strategies are implicitly opposed to the mentality and the rhetorical tactics of the jeremiad, and therefore if the speculations of the FBI's investigators and The Washington .Post's journalists are correct, and Kaczynski was "inspired" by Conrad's novel, then he must be considered a very wrong-headed or inept reader if he thought that novel justified what Vladimir might have called his "philosophy of bomb throwing" (32).

What is present in *The Secret Agent* that is conspicuously lacking in "Autocracy and War" and Conrad's two short stories about anarchism is a certain tone of narrative voice that is so consistent and so recognizable that we would describe it as being Conrad's narrative persona in that novel: a sophisticated, worldly voice that describes the novel's characters, surroundings, limitations, and blunders with a condescending, civilized, relentless and detached superiority—though sometimes it also lashes out in scornful anger and scathing contempt.[23] This voice, the medium and vocalization of Conrad's "ironic method," establishes its presence in the novel in the opening pages when it mockingly juxtaposes pornography, political radicalism, the protection of society, and domesticity by describing the window of Verloc's shop as containing "photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls ... [and] a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like The Torch, The Gong—rousing titles... "; and then it adds that in this shop "Mr. Verloc carried on his business of a seller of

[23] Daniel Schwarz has claimed that Conrad's narrator is so important in *The Secret Agent* that he is the "major character" in the novel, and "his action is to attack a world he despises. The satire in *The Secret Agent* depends upon the immense ironic distance between a civilised voice that justifiably conceives of himself as representing sanity, rationality, and morality; and the personae of London who are for the most part caught in a maelstrom of violence and irrationality beyond their control." Emphasis in original. Schwarz, *Conrad: Almayer's Folly to Under Western Eyes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 157–58. However, Schwarz does not sufficiently recognize the range of tones, besides angry contempt, that characterize Conrad's narrative persona. During the description of Verloc's walk through London to the embassy in Chapter 2, for example, the tone is that of condescending but amused irony.

shady wares, exercised his vocation of a protector of society, and cultivated his domestic virtues" (3,5).

As described by this voice, all of the characters in *The Secret Agent* are treated ironically. An additional degree of irony is produced when some of these characters comment ironically upon one another—but this irony is often double-edged, since the characters who do this are sometimes no better than the targets of their sneers. Winnie, her mother, Stevie, and sometimes Verloc are portrayed with pathetic irony by Conrad as he depicts how their security and what the Assistant Commissioner calls the "domestic drama" (222) of their lives are turned into a series of disasters by Verloc's inept efforts to comply with Vladimir's plan. The "revolutionary" Toodles, Sir Ethelred, the Assistant Commissioner, and Chief Inspector Heat are depicted with varying degrees of moderate and/or comic irony. The "sham" anarchists who meet in Verloc's parlor in Chapter 3 and often Verloc himself are dismissed with contemptuous sarcasm as Conrad's narrative persona ridicules the discrepancy between their revolutionary doctrines and their parasitic dependence on a society they claim they want to demolish. Karl Yundt, a decrepit revolutionary propagandist, for example, wants to inspire a band of nihilists or terrorists who would be "absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers" (42). But as Verloc realizes later Yundt himself is scarcely a threat to society, since he is so frail that he has to be nursed by a "blear-eyed old woman, a woman he had years ago enticed away from a friend, and afterwards had tried more than once to shake off into the gutter. Jolly lucky for Yundt that she had persisted in coming up time after time" (52). And of course Verloc himself is able to be a member of the Central Red Committee and still maintain his "fanatic inertness," because of the funds he receives from Vladimir's embassy's "secret list fund." As portrayed by Conrad, characters like the Verlocs deserve to be pitied for the meanness and squalor of their "tasteless" lives "without grace or charm, and almost without decency" (174,298); and they deserve some sympathy because those lives are destroyed by forces more powerful and malevolent than their own. Nevertheless, because the Verlocs' inertia and indolence (mental in Winnie's case, physical in Verloc's) contribute to that meanness and their own destruction, they also deserve to be seen with scorn as well as sympathy; and the ironic detachment of Conrad's narrative persona enable him to combine and mix those attitudes as he narrates their downfalls.

Since Vladimir and the Professor represent ideologies that Conrad despised with special vehemence, it is notable that they are the targets of an especially wide range of ironies. It is also notable that though they occupy opposite ends of the political spectrum they are by far the two most dangerous and destructive characters in the novel: Vladimir because he is willing to order "outrages" to achieve his goals and the Professor because he will give his explosives to any radical who asks for them, and because he has made himself into a walking bomb who will detonate himself if the police try to interfere with his "sinister freedom" (81).

Vladimir, in his public, social role as a "favourite in the very highest society" (24) and an honorary member of the elite Explorer's Club, conceals his destructiveness beneath his pose as a suave, cosmopolitan "European" who has "a drawing-room reputation as an agreeable and entertaining man" (19). In the privacy of his own embassy, however, he sneers at England's "imbecile bourgeoisie" and plots "outrages" so that Parliament will pass repressive legislation to imprison or extradite political radicals. This ironic discrepancy between Vladimir's social self and his actual personality is reflected in his language. In his interview with Verloc, he speaks French, Latin, and colloquial "English without the trace of a foreign accent." But when he is angered by Verloc, or frightened by the Assistant Commissioner, Vladimir's civilized veneer cracks as he speaks in an "amazingly guttural intonation [that is] not only utterly un-English, but absolutely un-European" (24). Morally as well as verbally Vladimir's suaveness is only a veneer. Midway in his explanations of why he is demanding that Verloc bomb the Observatory, he announces, '"I am a civilized man. I would never dream of directing you to organize a mere butchery" (33). Yet, as Fleishman points out, underneath his civilized exterior Vladimir is just as irrational as the terrorists and revolutionaries he considers his enemies. He uses the same style of speech that they do when he casts "scornful aspersions on the sanity... of the English as a whole and of its middle class in particular" or uses phrases like "the middle classes are stupid." And it is Vladimir, Fleishman says, who "knows better than anyone [else] the essential terror of nihilism and the moral significance of his scheme" when he tells Verloc, "what is one to say to an act of destructive ferocity so absurd as to be incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable; in fact, mad? Madness alone is truly terrifying... "[24]

Conrad's most extended irony at Vladimir's expense is the discrepancy he creates between the diplomat's intellectual pretensions and his actual ignorance about certain crucial subjects. As he delivers his ideas about terrorism and radical politics "from on high with scorn and condescension," says the narrative persona, Vladimir displayed

> at the same time an amount of ignorance as to the real aims, thoughts, and methods of the revolutionary world which filled the silent Mr. Verloc with inward consternation. He confounded causes with effects ... the most distinguished propagandists with impulsive bomb throwers; assumed organization where in the nature of things it could not exist... Once Mr. Verloc had opened his mouth for a protest, but the raising of a shapely, large white hand arrested him — He listened in a stillness of dread which resembled the immobility of profound attention. (29–30)

As Vladimir's lecture continues, Verloc is too appalled to protest, but his mute reactions are a refrain of ironic responses to the diplomat and his "philosophy of bomb

[24] Secret Agent, 33. Avrom Fleishman, Conrad's Politics (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), 195. Also see Jacques Berthoud, Conrad. The Major Phase (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 134–35.

throwing" (32): "Mr. Verloc cleared his throat, but his heart failed him, and he said nothing ... "(30); "Mr. Verloc said nothing. He was afraid to open his lips lest a groan should escape him" (31). Verloc even thinks that what Vladimir has told him is an "elaborate joke," but he is too cowed to disobey his orders (34). Later the Assistant Commissioner also dismisses the diplomat's "performance" as being a "ferocious joke"—but as the reader discovers, it is a "joke" that eventually causes the deaths of three people. In Vladimir's case the novel's irony functions as a means of defense as well as an expression of contempt. He may be dangerous because of his ability to perpetrate "an act of destructive ferocity," but he is also a fool whose plans should have been resisted as being nothing more than a "ferocious joke" by Verloc—whose final judgment of his employer is that he is a "Hyperborean swine" (212).

Unlike Vladimir who conceals his destructiveness beneath a suave exterior, the Professor discreetly flaunts how dangerous he is so that the police will not dare to arrest him, and he boasts that his willingness to kill himself is a mark of his "[f]orce of personality" and his "character" (67)—that are, he believes, much superior to that of the rest of humanity. Like the "sham" anarchists who meet in Verioc's parlor, the Professor is described as a physical grotesque. But whereas the infirmities of the other revolutionaries— Michaelis' obesity, Yundt's gouty swellings—ironically reveal how really ineffectual they are, Conrad's descriptions of the Professor's dwarfish, "miserable and undersized" physique function as an ironic counterpoint to his lethal capabilities, his nihilistic philosophy, and his immense self-confidence. The police, the Professor claims, are restrained by "all sorts of conventions. They depend on life, which... is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and conventions ... open to attack at every point; whereas I depend on death, which knows no restraint, and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident" (68).

In his letter to Cunninghame Graham about *The Secret Agent*, Conrad spoke of the "perfect anarchist" with a certain amount of grudging respect. "As regards the Professor," he wrote, "I did not intend to make him despicable. He is incorruptible at any rate. In making him say 'madness and despair— give me that for a lever and I will move the world' [309] I wanted to give him a note of perfect sincerity. At the worst he is a megalomaniac of an extreme type. And every extremist is respectable" (CL 3, 491). In the novel itself, however, though Conrad allows the Professor to rant brief jeremiads against mediocrity and in favor of exterminating "the weak, the flabby, the silly, [and] the cowardly" (309,303), he also uses irony to deflate the "perfect" anarchist's pretensions. In his encounters with Ossipon and Inspector Heat, for example, the Professor speaks with extreme arrogance and self-confidence, but Conrad's narrative persona then enters this character's mind to reveal his secret doubts that, because of the sheer plenitude of humanity, he may never be able to destroy the society he hates, no matter how many bombs he makes, because its inhabitants are so "mighty... in numbers. They swarmed numerous like locusts, industrious like ants, thoughtless like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed, impervious to sentiment, to logic, to terror ... Impervious to fear! Often when walking out abroad ... he had

such moments of dreadful and sane mistrust of mankind. What if nothing could move them?" (82).

In addition, Conrad also deflates both the Professor's quasi-Nietzschean philosophy and his hatred of "the condemned social order" (71) through an ironic analysis of how they were produced by the Professor's own dismal life experiences and frustrations rather than based upon autonomous judgments about society and its failures. With the exception of Winnie Verloc, the Professor is the only character in the novel who has a relatively full biography, and much of that biography is as unimpressive as his "stunted" physique. He has become a terrorist, Conrad implies, because he had inherited the sectarian fanaticism of his father (a "dark enthusiast... [who] had been an itinerant and rousing preacher") and secularized it so that "once the science of colleges had replaced thoroughly the faith of conventicles, this moral attitude translated itself into a frenzied puritanism of ambition" (80–81). When those ambitions had been frustrated, first at a technical institute and then in the laboratory of a dye manufacturer, because the Professor had believed himself capable of becoming a great success by sheer genius and hard work, he had become so embittered that he had retreated to a drab room in Islington— "respectable, and poor with that poverty suggesting the starvation of every human need except mere bread"—where he builds his bombs and tries to invent a "really intelligent detonator" (302,67). "The way of even the most the most justified revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds," says Conrad's narrative persona. "... By exercising his agency with ruthless defiance he procured for himself the appearances of power and personal prestige. That was undeniable to his vengeful bitterness. It pacified its unrest; and in their own way the most ardent of revolutionaries are perhaps doing no more but seeking for peace in common with the rest of mankind— the peace of soothed vanity, of satisfied appetites, or perhaps of appeased conscience" (81). The Professor's nihilism, his arrogance, and even his passionate eagerness "for self-destruction" (to apply the language of Conrad's "Author's Note" [ix]), all function as compensations, the novel implies, for a number of drastic human, personal inadequacies.[25]

As in the case of Vladimir, it can be argued that Conrad's ironic treatment of the Professor functions in a defensive way in two respects. First, it gave him the detachment he needed to deal with his own angry, personal responses to his novel's subjects so that he could present them in a manner that would have, as he told Algernon Methuen, "artistic value"; and, secondly, it enabled him to deflate the ideas and ideologies, which he despised, of characters like the Professor and Vladimir so that readers would not take them seriously. However, as Anthony Winner has pointed out, there also are moments in *The Secret Agent* when "the scenes and images press beyond the protection irony can offer,"[26] moments when Conrad temporarily suspends his "ironic method" to

[25] For a similar analysis of Conrad's characterization of the Professor, see Frederick Karl, Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979), 598.

[26] Winner, 71.

speak more directly about how atrocious certain events in the novel are. In particular, he describes the imagined or real consequences of the Professor's bomb-making skills several times in vivid, graphic, unironic epiphanies of pain and violence. During the conversation between Ossipon and the Professor in the Silenus beer hall, for example, the former realizes what would happen to that hall if the Professor should press the bulb in his pocket and detonate his flask of explosives, and as he does so Ossipon "imagined the over-lighted place turned into a dreadful black hole belching horrible fumes choked with ghastly rubbish of smashed brickwork and mutilated corpses. He had such a distinct perception of ruin and death that he shuddered again" (67). In the next chapter, Chief Inspector Heat has an even more vivid epiphany of what Stevie might have suffered when he looks at the shattered corpse, decides that "[t]he man, whoever he was, had died instantaneously; and yet it seemed impossible to believe that a human body could have reached that state of disintegration without passing through the pangs of inconceivable agony... he evolved a horrible notion that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye" (87–88). Though Conrad returns to his "ironic method" and sarcasms after these passages, he does so only after he has forced readers to realize that terrorism like the Professor's and ideas like Vladimir's can have truly horrendous consequences.

Despite the immense discursive differences that exist between Conrad's ironic fictions and Kaczynski's jeremiad/Manifesto, there is one aspect of the over-all Unabomber narrative in which significant parallels do exist. Kaczynski, in his role of Jeremiah, might have been incapable of producing an ironic, modernist discourse, but he could and did become the target of that kind of discourse after April, 1996. For after his arrest many Americans, both on the internet and in the mainstream media, reacted to him with ironies that were in some respects rather similar to Conrad's "ironic method"— though most of these reactions were substantially less eloquent than Conrad's comments on the Professor, Vladimir, and the other characters in *The Secret Agent*. During the months after the publication of his Manifesto in 1995, the Unabomber had attained a certain degree of deference and popularity. Because of his rage against technology and "industrial society," he could be considered a social critic articulating anxieties and hostilities that have been expressed by many American writers and thinkers and in many texts ranging from Mark Twain's Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court to Robert Bly's anti-Vietnam-War poems and Edward Abbey's The Monkey Wrench Gang, to cite only a few examples. In addition, the Unabomber's ability to elude the FBI for years and to coerce and manipulate the media made him seem like a romantic, defiant outlaw as well as a terrorist: a late-twentieth-century John Dillinger or Humphrey Bogart-style gangster perhaps—a pose that has had widespread appeal in American culture because it is often identified with individualism.

The capture of the actual Theodore Kaczynski, however, rapidly transformed the Unabomber from a kind of cult hero, a fearful yet respected figure, to one who was the subject of an immense amount of irony and even ridicule. A year before his arrest, Kaczynski had complained in one of his letters to The *New York Times* because the FBI

had sought to portray his bombings as "the work of an isolated nut."[27] That was almost entirely how he was described as more and more details of his arrest, his biography, and his so-called "life-style" became known. No longer able to send bombs and cause calamities, no longer a Jeremiah or the hooded, mystery man wearing sunglasses who appeared in his police sketch, he was repeatedly described as a "hermit" as he appeared in newspaper photos and television news programs— a shaggy, disheveled man wearing an orange prison jumpsuit and handcuffs—so that he became, rather like Conrad's anarchists in *The Secret Agent*, a kind of grotesque caricature of radicalism. In May of 1996 a columnist for Fortune magazine described him as a "depraved, creepy, and unwashed" loner "with serious personal hygiene problems"; and by June thousands of postings had appeared on the internet including jokes about a "Unabomber Political Action Committee," a proposal for a Tour de Unabomber bicycle race ("The Kaczynski Cup"), mock ads for exploding cabins, and actual ads for T-shirts and caps with his picture on them promoting Montana as being, "the last best place to hide."[28]

One of the more thoughtful ironies and one that was repeatedly emphasized was that despite the Unabomber's contempt for computers and the "techno-nerds" who designed them one of the chief reasons he was captured was that his brother David had read the Manifesto on the internet on a computer so he could compare its contents with letters and essays he had received earlier from Kaczynski. It was also pointed out that despite the Manifesto's sneers at "leftism" (that is, the welfare state) and the dependency it supposedly promoted, Kaczynski himself had often depended on loans and gifts from his family to help him to maintain his subsistence.[29] Moreover, as described by the mainstream media, his cabin and his solitary life in the wilds of Montana seemed squalid rather than the idealized primitivism and the devotion to "WILD nature" he had extolled in his Manifesto. In fact, his defense attorneys prevailed on the government to truck his 10x12 cabin in toto from Montana to Sacramento (where his trial was being held) in the expectation that jurors would find it convincing evidence that Kaczynski was so deranged that he should not receive a capital sentence.

The irony and ridicule rose to a crescendo during and after Kaczynski's brief trial in early January, 1998, which ended abruptly with his attempted suicide and plea bargain. By that time the mainstream media had had ample opportunities to interview anyone who might have had any contacts with him so they could produce a biography of sorts and to discover numerous anecdotes about him (some supposedly originating from his defense lawyers) emphasizing his eccentricities, including his alleged beliefs that "satellites control people and place electrodes in their brains. He himself is controlled by an

[27] Letter to *New York Times*, 24 April 1995. Reprinted in Douglas and Olshaker, 183.

[28] Daniel Seligman, "Creepspeak Revisited," Fortune 133 (13 May 1996), 201. Serge Kovaleski and John Schwartz, "Got a Craving for Unabomber Tidbits? Internet Supplies the Munchies," *Washington Post*, 25 June 1996.

[29] Seligman, 201.

omnipotent organization which he is powerless to resist."[30] As depicted by the media, his biography was no more impressive than that of Conrad's anarchist Professor, but it was considerably more pathetic. His childhood and adolescence, portrayed in a New Yorker article, was that of a "bookish, brilliant boy" who "skipped two grades, had few friends, liked to shut himself up in his attic room. He was a nerd's nerd, shy and arrogant, socially doomed — At sixteen, Ted entered Harvard on a scholarship. He lived in Eliot House, where big, swaggering rich boys ruled the roost. Ted, physically slight and badly dressed, ate alone" (Finnegan, 54). This and other accounts told how no one at the University of Michigan remembered him, his unpopularity as a teacher at Berkeley, and his lack of relationships with anyone—with the partial exception of his immediate family—after he moved to Montana. Assessments of his personality, life history, and writings by psychiatrists—particularly the ones who were assisting his attorneys—were more abstract but just as dismissive. For them, the Manifesto was not a ringing defense of "autonomy" and a damning indictment of "industrial society" but a symptom of Kaczynski's own isolation and evidence that he was a paranoid schizophrenic. "The explanations for his chronic social isolation which he offered during the testing," wrote one of them, "were clearly contradicted by Mr. Kaczynski's writings that document his despair over both his inability to establish normal human relationships and his inability to comprehend why he has been unable to do so" (Quoted in Finnegan, 55). Seen from the perspective of the Unabomber and his Manifesto, such diagnoses were efforts by conformists to defend themselves against disturbing ideas by ridiculing their author as a "sickie"[31]—but, unfortunately for Kaczynski, it was these diagnoses, not the Manifesto, that would now be heard and seen in the media and at his own trial.

The transformation in the mainstream media of the Unabomber from a terrorist and serial killer who might still be taken seriously as a thinker was completed by his suicide attempt which was treated either as a trick (to escape the death penalty) or a joke because of the means he employed (hanging himself with his underwear). Before Kaczynski's arrest and trial, *The New York Times* said, the Unabomber had seemed to many people to be a "man of ideas" who might be evil, but was nevertheless a "serious person. To read about him in many newspaper accounts was to hear of a mysterious philosopher: dangerous yet compelling, brilliant, intriguing ... Now he's just a nut. Or, perhaps worse, a fraud," who had become the subject of tasteless jokes by talk-show hosts and radio personalities about his "stretched-out underwear."[32]

[30] William Finnegan, "Defending the Unabomber," New Yorker, 16 March 1998, 60. Subsequent references are given as Finnegan.

[31] "In journals found in Mr. Kaczynski's Montana cabin, prosecutors say there are extensive comments showing that he would view any attempt to portray him as disturbed as an act of sabotage directed at the Unabom campaign ... [he] wrote that if he has murdered enough people by the time he was killed or caught, society was bound to label him a 'sickie' to undermine his credibility." William Glaberson, "Disrupting the Unabomber Trial, but to What End?" *New York Times*, 11 January 1998, Week in Review.

[32] William Glaberson, "Rethinking a Myth: 'Who Was That Masked Man?"' *New York Times*, 18 January 1998, Week in Review.

For just as Conrad had emphasized the Professor's isolation and personal failures to discredit and deflate his diatribes against mediocrity and society, the American media used Kaczynski's eccentricities, social phobias, and "disturbed" mental condition to discredit his Manifesto's ideology.

It is also ironic that Kaczynski's failure to grasp the irony and pathos of the terrorists in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* resulted in both his unironic jeremiad/Manifesto and the ironies unleashed on the Unabomber by the mainstream media. Perhaps a final irony is that one outcome of this brilliant, but disturbed, man's efforts was the heightened awareness of and increased desire for technology to protect Americans from terrorism.

Conrad—despite his relentless irony—never allows his readers to ignore the human consequences of Vladimir's plot and the Professor's bombmaking skills and how they had killed Stevie and then, indirectly, destroyed Winnie and Verloc. In contrast, the American mainstream media often entirely ignored Kaczynski's victims as they subjected him to a barrage of ridicule, kitsch, and irony, sometimes mixed with a little pathos, even though the families of the men he had killed—Hugh Scrutton, Thomas Mosser, and Gilbert Murray—were sitting in the courtroom and so were some of Kaczynski's surviving bomb targets, several of whom had been mutilated by his explosives. There were a few exceptions to this pattern. William Glaberson of *The New York Times*, for example, tried to remind his readers that Kaczynski's victims were more than names and numbers. Hugh Scrutton, the computer store owner killed by a bomb left in his parking lot, he wrote, was "adventurous..., dabbled in pottery and had traveled the world. As a young idealist in the 1960s he had worked for Eugene McCarthy's campaign. He left a mother and a sister."[33] But remarks like this were rare in the media as Glaberson's peers focused virtually all of their attention on Unabomber jokes, the pathos of Kaczynski's refusal to acknowledge the existence of his brother and mother in the courtroom, and the complicated legal maneuverings of the defendant, his defense attorneys, government prosecutors, and the trial judge as they struggled to gain control of the judicial process. Moreover, despite the mainstream media's abhorrence of terrorism and terrorists, there are no equivalents in its coverage of the Kaczynski story to the horror that readers of *The Secret Agent* can feel when Conrad goes "beyond ... irony" to achieve empathy with characters like Stevie and Inspector Heat as the former suffers and Heat imagines "ages of atrocious pain and mental torture... contained between two successive winks of an eye" (88).

[33] Glaberson, "Heart of Unabom Trial Is Tale of Two Brothers," *New York Times*, 4 January 1998. In addition, David Kaczynski, who had emerged as an heroic figure during the trial, made a statement after his brother's confession that included his and his mother's "wish to reiterate to the surviving victims our deep sorrow and regret, to express our wish to reach out to you in whatever way possible to ease your pain and express our love." "Remarks on case by Kaczynski's Brother," *New York Times*, 23 January 1998.

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