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Politics of Irony in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

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Abstract

Conrad's *The Secret Agent* uses irony to reduce the anarchists as pests. What he represents as the anarchists are the Irish and Indian revolutionaries indulging in subversion in London in an attempt to force British Empire to withdraw itself from these countries. Irony in the novel is the vehicle carrying the colonial interests of the British Empire

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I. Introduction

The research is an inquiry into Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) from the perspective of irony. The novel is considered a contemporary classic because of its political theme that supports to maintain the then British Empire in various colonies around the world. The novel moves around the popular incident of explosion in Greenwich Park in London. There is a conflict between British government agents and the agents of an anti-imperialist foreign embassy. Underlying, the battle is fought between imperialism and anti-imperialism. The latter hires terrorists and socialist revolutionaries to create insecurity and destabilization in London. The game moves onward but the former gets victory against any attempt of causing disturbance to smooth governance. Conrad's *The Secret Agent* uses irony to reduce the anarchists as pests. What Conrad represents as the anarchists are the Irish and Indian revolutionaries indulging in subversion in London in an attempt to force British Empire to withdraw itself from these countries. Conrad's use of irony is related to the colonialist interests of the British Empire.

The hypothesis is that Conrad who worked as the captain of British transporting resources from the colonies to Britain ironically deflates any attempt that has the potentiality to weaken the British Empire, particularly the attempt by Russia to provoke anti-imperial activities on British soil.

There is a foreign embassy in London that is quite active for a long time to create an unhappy and insecure Europe. Mr. Verloc, a British subject has been working secretly to carry out outrages in London under the embassy. The first secretary of the embassy, Mr. Vladimir, speaks to him:

> The evil is already here. We don't want prevention—we want cure . . .
>
> 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 . . . a clean sweep of the whole social creation. . . . The attack must have all the shocking senselessness of gratuitous blasphemy. . . . A dynamite outrage must be provoked. I give you a month. (22-33)

The embassy secretary speaks with confident authority; he wants to destroy whole social construction in London with an explosion of a bomb at Greenwich Observatory that would fatally wound the pride of British people and that would be far more effective than killing thousands of people. The anarchist carries a failed attempt of explosion.

However, since Conrad has to fulfill colonialist interest of British Empire, such enimic attempt falters in the counteraction of the Special Crime Department. The Assistant commissioner and the Attorney General of the department inquire the Greenwich explosion thoroughly ultimately to exterminate the root of terrorism from London. The former says:

> What pleased me most in this affair . . . is that it makes such an excellent starting point for a piece of work which I've felt must be taken in hand—that is , the clearing out of this country of all the foreign political spies, police and that sort of-of-dogs. In my opinion they are ghastly nuisance. Also an attempt of danger. . . . All that's wanted now is to do away with the agent provocateur to make everything safe. (213-15)

The Assistant Commissioner is quite nationalistic and speaking in a tone of victory against the revolutionaries and anarchists who endeavored against British peace and

security. He smears all such dogs and agents with a black paint and expels them from London territory.

Irony falls abundant as the narrative in *The Secret Agent* goes against the anarchists and on the favor of British officers. Irony itself works as an agent in the novel working to empower British Empire fight against any pests. It is Conrad's conservative politics of irony.

Since its publication in 1907, *The Secret Agent* has got wide discussion till date with equal fervor and has drawn attention of many scholars and researchers. Owing to different perspectives, the critics have widely explored into it.

Terry Eagleton foregrounds it to be a politically charged novel in his essay "Form, Ideology and *The Secret Agent*". Commenting as such, he writes:

> For it is, self-evidently, a political novel and materialistic criticism shouldn't give itself an easy ride by choosing as its object texts which spontaneously confirm to its method. *The Secret Agent* well seem too ideologically 'guilty' a fiction to strain the assumptions of an ideologically oriented criticism . . .. *The Secret Agent* seems to me a peculiarly paradigmatic examples of the complex relations within fiction between form and ideologies, formal elements and ideological fiction between form and ideologies, formal elements and ideological sub-ensembles, aesthetic devices and codified perceptions that this is so because of the unusual 'foregrounding' of the ideological which the novel effects is doubtless true . . .. (158-59)

Eagleton emphasizes that any reading of the novel other than political one would be just an objective and surface study of the method while ideology is its primary subject.

The psychological aspect of the novel is quite attractive. In "The Fragmentation of Sympathy in *The Secret Agent*", Aaron Fogle discusses the fragmented psyche of the contemporary English people:

> This novel, though obliquely, examines the greatest trauma of his (Conrad's) past . . . if we are to reach the brilliantly self-contradictory tone of the novel at all, the ingenious way in which it plays fragmentation against humanity, hilarity against depressing tragedy and builds comic details into a tragic whole, we have to hint at the source of its story confusion of detachment and empathy as coming from Conrad's need to handle the theme—the political annihilation of a family—objectivity, and at the same time see the dangers of his own inquiry. (175)

Fogle's comment covers the issue of the author's personal problem and tries to universalize it as one of total humanity. He assumes that literary production is shaped by the historico-cultural situation of the writer.

In the author's note, Conrad himself discloses:

> I remember, however, remarking on the clinical faculty of the whole thing, doctrine, action, mentality and on the contemptible aspect of half-crazy pose as of a brazen cheat exploiting the poignant missies and passionate credulities of mankind always so tragically eager of self-destruction. That was what made for me its philosophical pretences so unpardonable . . . blood stained inanity of so famous a kind . . . or even unreasonable process of thought. (3)

Conrad exposes the criminal faculty of human thought, which, sometimes, is impossible to imagine. In the same vein, the novel is interpreted as a gothic one: "In

fact, in *The Secret Agent* (1907), Conrad engages in a highly articulated debate with the gothic tradition . . . the eighteenth-century gothics so optimistically endorsed" (Bernsteim 285). It incorporates terrific human impulse.

Quite distinctly, the novel caught the eyes of the scholars from medical literature as well. Its study from a new kind of mental disorder, zoophiles-psychosis, says:

> The cab ride episode was a dramatic illustration of the extent to which individuals with the disease would go to protest the abuse of animals . . . . throughout the novel, Stevie consistently responds to reports of suffering inflicted on human beings in the same way: he is angry, upset, overwrought, unhinged both by suffering he sees and by reports of suffering he overhears. (Kelly 99-100)

The Secret Agent is woven around the backdrop of an explosion that is endeavored to blow Greenwich Observatory in London. The principal characters are Mr. Verloc, his wife Winnie, her brother Stevie, the professor, Ossipon, Michaelis, Karl Yundt, Mr.Vladimir, Chief Inspector Heat, and Assistant Commissioner of the Special Crime Department of British security force. They fall under two categories: the officers of British government and the anarchists and revolutionaries under the care of a foreign embassy.

The omniscient narrator of the novel unfurls the mysterious story initiating with the view of Mr. Verloc's shop and his living rooms. The narrative provides a diabolic representation of the shop and the life he lives. From the shop the keeper sells nothing particularly. It remains suspiciously ajar in the evening and the young costumers enter ringing the doorbell. Verloc has some underground political

involvement and he says his wife to honor his political friends who come to visit him there.

It is interesting to know how Verloc lives there. Parentless and homeless, he hires the apartment where his wife, her mother and her brother live together. Though is faintly mentioned of his Anglo-French decency, there is no further information. Verloc and Winnie are childless. The brother is mentally retarded and remains fully under their care. Verloc works as a spying agent under a foreign embassy besides being an agent to a police inspector of Britain to provide secret information to him.

Early in a morning he goes to the embassy with a fear that people would see him going there and suspect. Mystery rises when he takes an appointment with the first secretary of the embassy, Mr. Vladimir. The latter behaves rudely with him and gives an order to blow the Greenwich Observatory within a month that would expose public insecurity and moral scar in British people. Returning home, Verloc calls his other friends Karl Yundt, Ossipon, and Michaelis to share the action but he fails in getting their cooperation . However, he requests the professor to make a bomb. Stevie accompanies him to carry the bomb to Greenwich but he, due to his mental infirmity, stumblen on a tree and explodes the bomb in Greenwich park blowing himself unto pieces, quite near the destination. The explosion raises public attention with a mystery.

No sooner the explosion happens, the police officers of the Special Crime Department become active. The honored and reliable Chief Inspector Heat rushes to the park and the hospital to study the case. He finds a piece of coat's collar with an address in it that the dead man left as the only clue to probe into the mystery. Having remained unknown about the explosion before it happened, Heat suspect's Michaelis' hand behind the explosion and tries to save Mr. Verloc—the real criminal—only to

save his personal spy. The Assistant Commissioner is dissatisfied with what Heat does and derives the firsthand information about the case himself. Knowingly, Heat attempts to defer and blur the case but it disillusions his superior who really knows the double role his subordinate plays. The Assistant Commissioner himself meets Mr. Verloc and his wife and knows the real criminal.

Moreover, the Assistant Commissioner understands the Greenwich as one of the series that the foreign embassies carry. He visits the first secretary of the embassy Mr. Vladimir and talks openly to him that his embassy has some underground political activities to harm British Empire. He discloses the embassy's relationship with anarchic and revolutionary agents and threatens that the only solution to solve the problem is to exterminate such agent provocateur who work against the empire where the sun never sets.

Joseph Conrad is taken widely as a colonial writer. In the Heart of Darkness he empowers Cruz to tame the native of Congo on Africa. He narrates the African world a the space of horror and people there as savage animals. Here in *The Secret Agent* too, he shows the real picture of the contemporary London of the early twentieth century. When the empire is full fledged he works for maintaining the status quo of imperialism and he blows the anarchic and revolutionary agents fatally; he sweeps any harming and alarming attempts not to bring any disturbance in British governance. As a vehicle of carrying author's intention in the play, irony works as his chief means to subdue the disturbance that challenges colonial health.

In order to harmonize the space and length of the present study, the dissertation is divided in four different chapters—introduction, discussion on irony, analytical observation of the novel and a summing up of the project in conclusion. The introduction is the general outline of the research. The second chapter exclusively

presents a detailed discussion on the idea of irony that Hutcheon talks. The third chapter investigates the novel through the lens of irony. And, the conclusion records the finding of the research.

II. Politics of Irony: The Theoretical Discussion

Irony, the word comes from Greek work ‘eiron’ who was a person taken as a disambler, a pretender and the notion frequently recurs now in the theories of irony and figurative language in general. The study of irony is much like the study of a symphony or other aesthetic forms. One cannot always keep straight whether to be critical or entertained. When a new irony flashes in a mind, every time, there is a temptation to sit, reflect and enjoy it—the capacity irony has entertained for centuries. With much educational value, irony has taught us to discover ambiguities whenever we happen to look and has sensitized us to the contradictions of life. Often taken as a derogatory term in the past, however, it has now been a soothing vehicle and the hero of interpretive tools in academia. Probably, this is why, Anatole France says, “The world without irony would be like a forest without birds” (qtd. in Muecke 6). Its growth has come along the rugged trails.

All art or literature is supposed to be essentially ironic. Coming to the present times, irony doesn’t mean what it used to mean in bygone centuries; neither does it mean same in one and another place and likely is the case among the scholars. The evolution of the meaning of irony is haphazard. Earlier irony was the communication of one meaning through the pretence of one thing trying to convey its opposite. Modern view takes irony as an attitude, a perception of incongruity, futility or false pretense. In this regard, irony can be perceived as: The amusing or strange aspect of a situation that is very different from what you expect; the use of words that say the opposite of what you really mean often as a joke and with a tone of voice that shows this.” In more critical and convincing way, M. H. Abrams writes, "In the modern critical uses of the term ‘irony’ there remains the root sense of dissembling or of

hiding what is actually the case; not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effects" (142).

Defining irony is such a risky business for irony is what it is not; uncertainty and instability of meaning—the concept—gives an easy way out from defining this sliding phenomenon. The exploration of the functions of irony in literature and expanding claims made for it have given rise to various definitions and descriptions only to fade away from the scene—and form its history of growth and development.

The meaning of irony—the phenomenon—was experienced before it was named. Used unconsciously for a long time, irony appeared in English only in “1502 and didn’t come into general literary use until the early eighteenth century” (Muecke 16). And it developed very slowly in England defined as saying the opposite of what one intends like praising in order to blame in order to praise.

Irony got a number of new meanings in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Old meanings were forgotten as they became cheap and diabolic. Totally new radical meaning transferred the concept. Then, irony became “double natured, sometimes instrumental, sometimes observable,” and it became “obligatory, dynamic and dialectical” (19). Friedrich Schlegel, August Wilhelm, Ludwig Tieck and Karl Solger were principal ironologists of the time. Their developed consciousness took irony in terms of someone being ironical and another being the victim of irony. Schlegel was radical to make it more “dialectical, paradoxical or ‘Romantic’” (23). Later, I. A. Richards, Connop Thurlwall and Hegel revolutionized the practice of irony in the post-Romantic period when it became more nihilistic in nineteenth century and more realistic in twentieth century.

Now, we take irony as a way of life and its experience open to multiple as the structure of existence of opposites as the structure of existence. In academia, irony is a

way of writing which leaves its meaning open to any context for there is constant deferment of significance. Cutting across various academic disciplines irony had created a recent insurgence of interest which is impossible to ignore. The writings of, certainly, Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Michael Foucault, Richard Rorty, Hayden White, Marshall Berman, Wayne Booth and others have contributed to this growing fascination; and, needless to mention, it has been the master trope in the recent writings of feminism, marginality, post-colonial retaliation and subaltern insurgency. Irony now has apparently won the day.

More than poetics of irony, politics of irony has heated the day. It is embedded with the birth of discourse; discourse analysis is ironic analysis which, in cultural studies, concerns the matter of representation. In the consequences of interpreting texts it is essential to know how the scene of irony appears in the eyes of the beholders, how they recognize it in what situation, what would be the meaning of irony, what makes it distinct from other rhetorical tropes and what is the transideological politics of irony?

Till date, the analysis of irony had been done from the perspective of the ironist making problem of comprehension on the part of interpreters of irony. It was such a parochial practice that to decode irony, S. Gaunt says, in a discourse one already had to be sure about "a detailed knowledge of the personal, linguistic, cultural and social references of the speaker and the audience" (qtd. in Hutcheon 116). But the theories of irony now a days assert, in an egalitarian way, that there remain ironies which the interpreters can reconstruct. So, the emphasis is shifted to interpretive ironies which are more situational observable and accidental than intentional—a transition from 'being ironic' to 'is ironic'. To call something ironic is to frame or contextualize it in such a way that the intention could be either of the ironist or of the

interpreter. Hence, it is evident that irony happens in any discourse with the confluence of three stands: the intentionalist position, the reverse position that irony is a matter of reading, and their shared responsibility in the use and attribution of irony. This complex and potential interaction makes irony a performative happening. Here, question arises, how do we recognize and attribute irony?

It is easier to recognize and attribute irony in performance art than in literature in which only words are given. However, different contextual signals are specific in the discourse and texts which lead the interpreter recognize irony. The textual forms like “social, historical, ideological, political, geographical” etc. provide ample space to discover irony (Hutcheon 142). Whether textual or atextual, such circumstances play significant role in generating meaning at any time—making a verbal play in which the confluence of the said and the unsaid together make it an irony.

The context is inclusive enough to encompass the background assumptions along with which the interpreters interpret an utterance. Whatever may be the context—circumstantial, textual or intertextual—it enables the unsaid to be the ironic relation to the said. Jonathan Culler, about the context, says, "[c]ontext is not given but produced; what belongs to a context is determined by interpretive strategies; contexts are just as much in need of elucidation as events; and the meaning of context is determined by events" (qtd. in Hutchon 145).

He makes us aware of context and makes us aware of the three elements in the interpretation of irony: “[T]he circumstance or the situation of uttering/interpreting; the text of the utterance as a whole; other relevant intertexts” (143). The first is the communicative context which makes statements meaningful as irony; it gives ground to answer the question: who is attributing what to whom, how, why, and where? The second is the formal context of the work as a whole which makes irony happens. And,

the third is the product of the relevant utterances that bring the interpretation of the utterance in question. Here, irony becomes the result of what Cleanth Brooks calls "the obvious wrapping of statement by the context" (qtd. in Hutcheon 144). However, Jonathan Culler's idea that "context is not given but produced" is more inclusive (qtd. in Hutcheon 145). Question arises: How does irony happen?

Provided that irony is the result of the ironist, interpreters and certain contexts, we cannot be sure that the business of dealing with irony is so much easier. All readers cannot be the interpreters. Irony happens because discursive communities exist to provide context for the use and attribution of irony. Not all but ones who understand that irony exists and understand how it works belong to the community—those who are knowledged enough about the nature and possibility of irony. It is not that irony creates the community but the vice versa. Thus Hutcheon defines:

> I want to define these discursive communities in general by the complex configuration of shared knowledge, beliefs, values and communicative strategies. The issue of multiplicity and diversity . . . is, for me, less a problem than the very issue at the heart of the complexity of ironic communication. (91)

Discursive community cannot exist on its own; it has its wider relationship with the socio-historical milieu and includes people of heterogeneous identities.

> [D]iscursive community is not unrestrained at all but acknowledges those strangely enabling constrains of discursive contexts and foregrounds the particularities not only of space and time but of class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual choice—not to mention nationality, religion, age, profession and all the micro political groupings in which we place ourselves or are placed by our society. (92)

Such wide encompassing nature of discursive community assumes openly held beliefs. One's nationality, neighborhood, profession, religion and many other things come into play.

Communication happens though we lie or misunderstand each other. It is because meaning is not something firm and fixed. G. D. Martin, in this context, says, "different people live in different worlds of discourse. The whole communicative process is altered and distorted by these different worlds" (qtd. in Hutcheon 89). In an ironic discourse the process of communication is not always distorted but sometimes made possible by those worlds which form our assumptions and preconceptions with which each of us, by this or that way, are related. Irony is not just a simple decoding of an inverted message; it is a complex semantic process in which the combination of said and unsaid converge in a acultural shape. It is the interpretive community that enables the happening of irony.

Irony is a discursive phenomenon that can never remain far from its context.

> Discourses are forms of social practice, of interaction between participants in particular situation whether this be in face to face communication or in interpreting artistic texts where the circumstances of utterances that the interpreter infers from a text are what every reader had to take into account. (90)

In this respect, Michael Foucault asserts that discursive formation extend the focus broadly into the context of institutional networks: "[T]he production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures" (qtd. in Hutcheon 90). Here, political dimension of irony gets heated. Further, discourse can never exist without the power relations of socio-historical conditions. The question is not only who may use the irony but who may interpret it

too. Whoever or however it may be used, irony involves instanced of time, place, social situation and general culture.

The critics argue that irony is produced in “dialogic or intersubjective way . . . establishing community or consensus” (91). In mutual contexts, the interpretive community creates the scene of irony. irony itself comes into being what M. L. Pratt calls in “contact zones” at the “social spheres where cultures meet, clash, grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (qtd. in Hutcheon 93). How does the meaning stand of irony?

Today, when the critical theories of impossibility have knocked the door, irony has been freer and more relevant; it is chief means to pose problematic of all language. The notion of language having its one to one relation to the reality is challenged and plurality of meaning is foregrounded through the help of irony—the said and unsaid are mixed together, "[I]rony happens in the space between the said and unsaid . . . ironic meaning is inclusive and relational: the said and the unsaid coexist for the interpreter, and each has meaning in relation to the other because they literally interact to create the real ironic meaning" (12).

Though it is inappropriate to leave all about the meaning of irony on the ground of poststructuralist play, its meaning lies in between what precedes and follows it; i.e., in the conditioning and context of the positioning of irony, the socio-historical competence of both the ironist and the interpreters. We cannot make meaning away from its worldliness; meaning is the matter of context.

Though our meaning cannot exactly be as the things in themselves are, we try to attribute it on the basis of certain system. It is, but, sure that ironic meaning is not as easy as unironic one for irony is more what it is not apparent.

> In order to deal with the issue of ironic meaning [we] have to go beyond the traditional concepts of semantics . . . and look as well to pragmatics, the social and communicative exchang4e of language . . . [it] is something that happens rather than that simply exists. And, it happens in discourse, in usage, in the dynamic space of the interaction of text, context and interpreter. (58)

Irony is not straightforward semantic notion. It is a communicative process and has "relational, inclusive and differential" semantic characteristic (58). It is relational for it lives in said and unsaid meanings and between the ironists, interpreters and targets. To bring together the different new meanings and critical edge of judgment, a dynamic relationship exists there. Irony's inclusiveness makes it possible to rethink standard semantics of irony making it easier to understand as a straightforward meaning substitution. And the differential characteristic offers a problematic kinship between irony and other tropes like metaphor and allegory.

However, ironic meaning is more relational than inclusive and differential because the said and unsaid take on meaning only in relation to the other. The defining meaning of irony occurs on "the power of the unsaid to challenge the said" (59). Ironic meaning is just like the production of third note in the music which is produced when two motes are played together. We don't have to reject literal meaning to get an ironic meaning because it is "simultaneously double (or multiple)"; the literal and hidden—stated and unstated—rub together to produce a spark, the real ironic meaning (60). This process is the way to explain politics of irony and its oppositional power. Irony is distinct and has special aura.

Irony is distinctly different from all other figures of speech and other rhetorical strategies because of its "edge" (37). While assuming its meaning with the

friction of both said and unsaid, with the attitudes of ironists and interpreters, an evaluative, critical and emotive dimension—the edge—enters. Irony not only adds richness to a discourse but also some feeling: setting the relationship between stated and unstated, it offers some attitude and judgment—a perlocutionary act in the language of speech act theory. It is the expressive function of language with direct expression of the speakers' attitude. This creative participation in meaning making comes through the collaborative process of evaluation. This affective charge gives rise to various functions of irony: reinforcing, complicating, ludic, distancing, self protective, provisional, oppositional, assailing and aggregative.

As a relational discursive strategy, irony had its transideological political functions. Irony functions "tactically in the service of wide range of political positions, legitimating or undercutting a wide variety of interests"—the transideological politics of irony. It is a liberation of irony from a parochial view of confining it as a limited rhetorical trope and bring into discursive strategy. Discourse comprises of wider social and interactive dimensions of irony's functioning. The transideological politics of irony brings, on the one hand, "a distinction between irony that might function constructively to articulate a new oppositional position" and, on the other hand, "that would work in a more negative and negativizing way" (16). In other words, irony can be provocative when its politics is conservative or authoritative at the same time when its politics is oppositional or subversive. However, it depends on who is using and attributing it and at whose expense it is seen.

The use of irony from a dominant and ruling position creates irony of a conservative political function. Used from an authority, this elitist use of irony is a weapon of suppression and destruction of any oppositional voices. This notion of

irony as a way of negation appears to be held by the ones who have been on the receiving end of an ironic attack or by those for whom the serious and the unironical are the ideal. "In a totalitarian regime (or simply in a repressive discursive context) to use or attribute irony in order to undermine from within is relatively straightforward, if dangerous: the rules and norms are known and adhered to in the letter . . . of the ionizing utterance" (16)

The totalitarian regime uses irony to materialize dangers in the protective cover of repressive irony. This conservative function of irony is controlled by, as Bakhtin says, “one sidedly serious dogmatic and authoritative cultures” (qtd. in Hutcheon 27). It is the totalitarian cultures’ affirmative and destructive political functions of irony to force the marginals adhere with the system, though they always wish to subvert it.

Quite opposite, irony’s positive and constructive—radical—transideological function is explored very lately. It has been a powerful tool or weapon to fight against dominant authority. Recently, feminist, post-colonial, gay and lesbian and other subaltern theories have taken this position in their own ways but related somehow. The other side of irony—negating—is supposed to be largely destructive; it is taken by almost all who have been on the affirmative and destructive functions cannot exist in isolation for those who see it destructive happen to see it equally affirmative. This “transideological duality” provides us space on the one hand to reduce strange or incompatible or the attitudes which we disagree and on the other hand allows a text to contain whatever doubts cone to mind—a benefit of doubt (29).

This revolutionary view of irony that is really subversive and oppositional is mostly taken to be a “self-critical, self-knowing, self-reflexive mode” which is powerful enough to challenge the hierarchic sites of discourse (30). Created on the

basis of social relation and dominance, the hierarchy tries to subdue any counter attack. Irony's ability to undermine it bears, in P. Stallybrass and A. White's words, "politically transformative power (qtd. in Hutcheon 30). This is why such counter discursive power of irony has been the chief weapon of the oppositional theories—which are based in race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality,etc.—to displace hitherto depicted unreal picture of the world. This power passionately works when the dominant and established discourses try to crush it down. In this contest, irony uses the very language as its strength for it provides the ironic discourse time and relates the dominant authority and stability appropriating its power. This closeness makes irony an appropriate strategy of retaliation though the chance is that it may assimilate, sometimes with the established knowledge and power—a probable interpretation. Now, irony has been an apt mode for political opposition. "[b]ringing together Dubois's early idea of black double consciousness and Bakhtin's notion of double voiced discourse," Hutcheon exemplifies, "African American theorists have indirectly theorized irony in their discussions of 'signifying'" (31).

This practice of repeating and revising the white discourse brings a compromise between the two opposing forces so that the center hears the marginal voice. Feminists, who have realized the power of irony to destabilize the established discourse, use irony for both "oppositional and critical ends" and for working on "ideological contradictions" so as not to dissolve into male oppressive dogma (31). Irony, for them, is both rhetorical and political means to deconstruct and decenter patriarchal discourses. Feminists, with their refuge to irony, have assumed a privileged status to critique old dogmas and resist patriarchal social restrictions. Irony has its charming history as being one of the weapons in the issue of culture of resistance.

Hence,

> Irony's transideological nature has meant that it has often been used as a weapon of dominant cultures to keep the subservient in their place; strong arguments have also been made for irony as something that springs from recognition of socially constructed self as arbitrary and tat demands revision of values and conventions. (32)

Hitherto marginalized ones have got a powerful weapon of irony to use it as privileged status to critique old dogmas and restrictions. However, same transideological quality of irony has provided another space to silence any of such subversive voice. This dissertation explores how Joseph Conrad has manipulated the conservative political function of irony to deflate any attempt that had the potentiality to weaken the British Empire in *The Secret Agent*.

III. Politics of Irony in *The Secret Agent*: The Textual Analysis

Irony has become a pervasive discursive strategy on present culture of study and its dominance has sparked debates whether it should be lauded as a vehicle for political commentary and whether its political function is essentially conservative or subversive. The present research has an attention on *The Secret Agent* not only because it is one of Conrad's most important political novels but also because it is most ironic one. The goal of the dissertation is to analyze the novel to show that Conrad has a conservative political function of irony to reduce the anarchists in London as pests. His anarchists are the Oriental revolutionaries indulging in London in an attempt to force British Empire to withdraw itself from these countries. Conrad's treatment of irony is related to the colonialist interest of the British Empire. To accomplish the goal, the dissertation attempts to probe into the narrative strategy which is frequently hyperbolic and diabolic on the representation of the anarchists and dominating and authoritative on the representation of the British officers. The latter wins the battle. *The Secret Agent* presents "a perfect illustration of the ironic theme, cast in the (character's role) in the story, and manifested in the plot" (Spector 69).

There is no obvious relationship between irony and politics. Though different, the transideological politics of irony functions in two dimensions: conservative politics of irony functions provocatively and authoritatively and the radical politics of irony functions as oppositional and subversive. Irony is often used to reinforce the established attitudes rather than to question them. Joseph Conrad is often taken as a colonialist writer. As such, he desires to legitimize colonies of British Empire elsewhere. In *The Secret Agent* there is a battle between British authority and foreign embassy(ies). The author's conservative politics of irony supports the former and any

attempt to harm British bureaucracy fails flat. The Special Crime Department of London turns victorious against the socialist and revolutionary anarchists who blast an explosive at Greenwich Park as a threat of public security.

Conrad's narrative endows a authority to British police and the anarchists fail to be victorious. It is because of the politics of irony the author exercises to dominate any oppositional view. The dissertation explores the narrative representation of the anarchists and the police of London's Special Crime Department.

The novel opens giving an overview of the resident and the shop its central character—Mr. Verloc—has; he does some "ostensible business" which gives an inkling of the narrator's intention on the life of the man (1). Irony initiates when the narrator says: "In the daytime the door remain(s) closed; in the evening it stood discreetly but suspiciously ajar" (1). The room provides a confusing and unclear vision. It contains nondescript packages "very flimsy . . . heavy black figures" which are haphazard and bestow disorder (1). The costumers who approach the shop ate also of confusing identity. They are young and mature both but "as if they were not in funds" and come with their collar turned upwards (1). The initiation sets a confusing atmosphere.

The narrator ironically presents Mr. Verloc as having exercised his vocation of a protector of society. Irony moves onward when the narrator accounts how he arrived London. "He generally arrived in London (like the influenza) from the continent, only he arrived unheralded by the press; and his visitations set in the great severity. He breakfasted in bed and remained wallowing there . . ." (4). It is not provided where he comes from. His identity ever remains buried into uncertainty and we know that he is a French descent but the narrator, here, has just to say that Mr. Verloc came like an influenza—out of blue—but without any notice of the public

attention. Influenza gets its fame, though notorious, but Verloc not because in the eyes of narrator he is no less than an animal who only lives to eat and wallows in bed. However, as he becomes busy in evenings his work is “in a way political” for he warns his wife to be “nice to his political friends” (5). His politics is not that one generally understands; it is something secret and underground.

Mr. Verloc carries a contradiction in his life; with a manner of devoted fanaticism he embraces “indolence from an impulse as profound as unexplainable” though he was “(b)orn of industrious parents for a life of toil” (10). With such laziness, he is, however, “not devoid of intelligence” (10). As Hutcheon says, irony arises from the space between said and unsaid, Mr. Verloc, being represented by the narrator, assumes ample of such irony. It is quite tough to have a clear overview of him. There is some “indescribable air . . . common to men who live on the vices, the follies” in him (10). Such remark do not provide a good picture but surely “the air of moral nihilism common to keepers of gambling house”(10). It is very diabolic and shocking to know about Mr. Verloc that, at the same time, his mission in life is “the protection of social mechanism” (10). How can he be the protector and savior of the social orders, if he already carries diabolic and nihilistic moral character? The narrator presents succession of such contradictions in the life of Mr. Verloc which in itself creates many unsaid spaces; there lies Conrad’s treatment of irony in the novel.

Mr. Verloc is associated with some job of a foreign embassy; it is not disclosed, could be for the purpose of some secrecy. Called by the embassy, Verloc reaches there; when he reached there we find officers “of pasty complexion and of melancholy ugliness” who blink with weak eyes “pathetically through the glasses (13-14). Mr. Verloc is ushered to privy councilor that refers him to meet the first secretary Mr. Vladimir. Verloc, who has been working as a secret agent for past

eleven years in the embassy, is received very coolly; he becomes the matter of jock there and his presence becomes irrelevant. He has a submissive “forward inclination” there (17). The terrorists follow “an internal logic or emotion of their own” that normal people do not share and cannot resolve (Falcoff 39).

Soon the embassy officer, the first secretary, makes his intentions clear by commenting about the behaviors of police in London: “we are not satisfied with the attitude of the police here” (14). Who is he to criticize police behaviors and to desire “the occurrence of something definite which should stimulate” police vigilance? Moreover, when Mr. Verloc and the embassy secretary talk, the latter says that they want “the accentuation of the unrest of the fermentation” in London(14). Here, Conrad makes it clear that neither Mr. Verloc nor the embassy he is associated have positive attitude about British government. The first secretary believes that if terrorism is to be truly effective, it must be directed “against the spirit of age” that enrages the British subjects (Gary 27). But, ironically, the rage harms the pests themselves; it is because the author has to deflate any of such attempts to harm British governance through his politics of irony.

Mr. Verloc is working in the embassy for a long time; he had begun his connection there with “stealing French gun designs”(19). The embassy, by inciting anarchic activities in London wants the empire to withdraw its domination from the colonies.

So far Mr. Verloc’s connection with the embassy is concerned, he is there for long; but, in such a long time he has come there “only twice” because he has the embassy and it “would destroy (his) usefulness”(25). He is one of the vice presidents of the revolutionary society. He is such an “agent Δ, whose warnings” have “the power to change the schemes and the dates of royal, imperial, grand-ducal journeys

and sometimes cause them to be put off altogether"(24). It is with these testimonies, the foreign embassy and the working class people like Mr. Verloc have affinities, who solely want to work against the will of British government. Surely in the eyes of the omniscient narrator, they are the pests in London.

The embassy intends to direct its secret agents, who are the proletariats, to create a moral wound in British government. To do it, following the old and used up models like "assassination of president," an "outrage of church", or a "murderous attempt on a theatre" would be almost conventional (28). Their revolutionary anarchism is not just the intention of vengeance or terrorism; but, they say, it must be "purely destructive" which is determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation (29). It is not only breaking of a few back windows in a man's house but, at least, to raise the roof, for example. The embassy has to apply such "incomprehensible, inexplicable, almost unthinkable" anarchism that would hurt the "science" of governance(30). In this regard the first secretary of the embassy--Mr. Vladimir--invites Verloc and gives a detailed lecture of carrying out a bombing which would morally wound the government; and, "the whole world has heard of Greenwich" which, they want "to raise a howl of execration" in the whole British Empire (31). A battle is sure to begin with this underground plot of the embassy which hires the anarchists to fulfill its undercurrent mission.

The embassy, though on the appearance it is meant for give and take between the governments, has its own diplomatic and secret policies. There cannot remain harmony between countries and their ideas, interests, and way of diplomatic dealing differ which cause dissatisfactions providing enough space for enmity. Charging on the public security seems the best option of causing harmfulness for the embassy. In *The Secret Agent* Mr. Verloc is given the job of blowing Greenwich Observatory. The

politics of irony, since Conrad uses the authoritative one, shatters the attempt of the anarchists and terrorists.

Mr. Verloc's appointment at the embassy makes it sure that the office secretly hires the anarchists and terrorists to destabilize British security. Verloc, has to blow Greenwich Observatory because the embassy wants "activity-activity" not merely the discussion (20). The ironic narrative strategy of provoking colonialism and keeping the colonies upright that Conrad applies deflates Mr. Verloc's endeavor. The anarchists/terrorists take the nature of present British economy "cannibalistic" which puts the proletarians always on the question of their existence. Verloc is just an example on the surface. There are many such agents who have devoted their lifetime in Central Red Committee carrying our some activities against the empire though they claim themselves to be English subjects. There is a professor, who is never named, Michaelis, Ossipon, Karl Yundt etc. They are homeless, familyless and historyless anarchists. Verloc is sure that his fellows would help him a lot. Returning home from the embassy, he calls his friend to work out the plan of explosion. But his plan remains unsupported once Verloc loses his self-confodence and the helping hands of his friends:

> In the light of Vlatimir's philosophy of bomb throwing (Verloc's friends) appear hopelessly futile. The part of Mr. Verloc in revolutionary politics having been to observe he could not all at once . . . take the initiative of action . . . he asked himself scornfully what else could have been expected from such a lot, this Karl Yundt, this Michaelis-this Ossipon. (47)

Verloc's downfall begins as his friends leave him alone to accomplish the explosion.

The anarchists have their underground life. During daytime, they hardly appear in the public. Only the evenings allow them roam along the London streets. They form plans sitting underground. Their life also remains always on the verge of death but they suppose that they would never be arrested. It is not only because they are secret but also for they bring death in themselves. “I shall never be arrested,” the professor says because the game of playing with him requires “sheer, naked, inglorious heroism” in the police (60). He always carried a detonator in his pocket to blow himself in case anybody tried to arrest him. It takes twenty seconds for the bomb to explode and “anything within sixty yards” goes to pieces (60). And irony is that this man thinks: his character is “well established” and has got a “force of personality.” In his opinion, everyone is inferior to him on the ground that “their character is built upon conventional morality” while he is free from any “social order” (62). Life is not a historical fact for the professor which is “surrounded by all sorts of restrains and considerations” (62); later, his superiority is evident for he depends “on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked” (63). It is an irony that terrorists are treading all the time followed by death, they “go hungry sometimes” but suppose themselves superior to all (64). It is because the narrative has to kick them later from their so supposed high ground.

The anarchists are associated with the “Central Red Committee” (71). But, the narrator presents the committee and its members with a veil of mystery. It has “no permanent place of abode and of whose membership (is) not exactly informed” (71). It is the author’s ironic intention behind writing the novel on the favor of British Empire. However, Mr. Verloc is the useful and honored member of the committee. “A prominent member of the group,” he is the center of general intelligence as he is the most useful member of it (68). Being in the inner council of the anarchists, he is

forced to become an agent provocateur. But he is also a police agent and "the behind-the-scenes activities of a police department are an essential part of the novel" (Nash 322).

The British government, on the other hand, has its bureaucrats and police officers always on an alert position. The Special Crime Department, knowing the probable attacks, remains vigilant about such anarchist activities; the department affirms that "nothing of the sort even be thought of without the department being aware of it within twenty-four hours" (78). The Chief Inspector Heat is working reliably in his department having his promotion and reputation "very rapid" (78). Amid this atmosphere, a sensation spreads that somebody exploded a powerful bomb in Greenwich Park of London. A man, carrying the explosive, has blown himself into pieces in the suicidal attempt. Surprisingly, the police and the Special Crime Department is not informed anything about it. Heat is the "principal expert in anarchist procedure" and has had a disagreeably busy day since "his department received the first telegram from Greenwich a little before eleven in the morning" (77). Since breakfast, he has not eaten anything—an incident that shows his on the surface nature of dutifulness.

To have a thorough investigative account of the explosion, Chief Inspector Heat rushes himself. By the time he reached there the man who blew himself in the park was assembled of his pieces of body and taken to hospital. The first eyewitness of the accident "had seen something like a heavy flash of lightening in the fog" and he ran "between the trees towards the Observatory (80). In the hospital, Heat observes the torn pieces, almost unidentifiable, and takes "the gruesome detail of that heap of mixed things" and assumes a force of sympathy mixed with a form of fear" (80-81).

The dead man might have stumbled against the root of a tree and the thing he was carrying must have gone right under his chest, he assumes (82).

The inspector's feeling of sympathy and fear on the observation of the dead man has an ironic inkling. A hint leaks that Heat has other unsaid side of job where the irony falls. Now he becomes ambivalent on himself. "Before the public he would have liked to vindicate the efficiency of his department by establishing the identity of that man" but after he knows the details, it appears, however, "impossible" for him (83). It is under such duality he meets the professor--one of the dangerous anarchists--on his way while running to headquarter from Greenwich. The meeting makes the professor fearful and he lightly grasps his "India-rubber ball" in his pocket, which is the "supreme guarantee of his sinister freedom" (75). Professor is sure that the inspector will arrest him but the latter says, "You are not wanted . . . not yet. . . . when I want you I will know where to find you" (86). These words and the "yet" he pronounces has, in silence, the other unsaid ironic part of his life. Further, he says, quite opposite to the professor's assumption, Heat would not lay hands on him. "Ah! the game," ironizes the professor. Exposing his so called officiality and his power Chief Inspector Heat says to Verloc: "You may be sure that our side will win the end. It may yet be necessary to make people believe that some of you ought to be shot at sight like mad dogs. Then that will be the game" (88). What is unsaid here is that the inspector only wants to put dust on the eyes of the people. He knows that shooting the anarchist on the spot will make the case more mysterious and more effective. On the surface his dialogue is expressed from the space of superiority and seems like a warning to the anarchist; the other way round, it is on the favor of these anarchists. When police shoots them, people will get the news about the existence of anarchists

in London and their sense of complacency and security would sway; this is what the anarchists feverishly want.

Celebrated inspector Heat surely plays double role. He has equal access to the activities of the anarchists too. Now Heat has to make his Assistant Commissioner that he is on the investigation and at the same time he has to save the principal anarchist making sure of his post and prestige. “The problem immediately before the chief inspector (is) that of managing the assistant commissioner of his department, his immediate superior. This is the perennial problem . . . (89). To avoid the investigation directly on the anarchists, he says that London anarchists have nothing to do with the explosion; the assistant commissioner ironizes: “I dare say you (are) right . . . in telling me at first that London anarchists (have) nothing to do with this” (91). It is enough that the officer is literally dissatisfied with his subordinate’s behavior. It is his argument of “general mistrust of men’s motives and the efficiency . . .” (93). Adding more fuel to this gap Heat says that the case is rather unaccountable for “foreign anarchists” have come to London (95). The more Heat tries to tamper the case the more suspicion heightens for his senior doesn’t believe him.

The narrator now makes the Assistant Commissioner more responsible and dominant. Heightening his authority against any beating about the bush regarding the matter of Greenwich bombing investigation and realizing that he is “a born detective” the Assistant Commissioner gets hold of the case himself “with growing interest” (110) and comes with the accentuated features of “energetic Don Quixote” (108). He has a limited belief on what inspector Heat does and doubts his “notion of moral confidence”(108). “He is upto something,” he says and adds that any of subordinates could live in such a mystery that the commissioner would suppose to hold all the threads in his hands while they “fasten the other ends of the threads where

they please" (107-8). Cutting the naïve duplicity Heat is trying to keep him in, the Assistant Commissioner determines to turn his subordinate "inside out like an old glove" (111). Irony gets more heated when Inspector Heat tries to veil the case and the Assistant Commissioner tries to unveil the latter's attitude. This conflict is the space of politics of irony because the context determines what is to be irony and what is not. Moreover, their power relation makes the scene of irony happen. Both of them

> say something (they) don't actually mean and expect people to understand not only what (they) actually do mean but also (their) attitude toward it . . . the scene of irony involves relation of power based on relations of communication. It unavoidably involves touchy issues such as exclusion and inclusion, intervention and evasion. (Hutcheon 2)

It would surely harm the inspector's reputation, his comfort, and even his so called efficient performance of his duties and thereby numbing the anarchic activities in London.

Still, Heat feels sure that his officer doesn't know this secret involvement with the anarchists. But the latter says: "Come, Chief Inspector, this finessing with me is highly improper . . . . And it is also unfair, you know. You shouldn't leave me to puzzle things out for myself like this. Really, I am surprised". (116).A little later, the Assistant Commissioner adds: "Your idea of secrecy seems to consist in keeping the chief of your department in the dark" (124). Irony is ample on the way Inspector Heat confesses his relationship with Mr. Verloc. For a long time, Mr.Verloc, being the spy of certain foreign embassy, provides the secret plans of the embassy to him. Heat says: "Mr. Verloc (is) . . . a prominent member of the Revolutionary International Council . . . whenever I've had reasons to think there was something in the mind . . . I

have always found he could tell me something worth knowing" (123). Consequently, at the heart of London, security is the most important phenomenon of human life. Foreign embassies are the centers which are working, though unapparent, to bring a political, social, and public unrest. People could die anywhere anytime. "All these people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury . . . their horses, carriages, houses, servants had to be protected; and the sources of their wealth had to be protected in the heart of the city and the heart of the country" (10). In such a threatened and evil complacency, Greenwich explosion makes the Assistant Commissioner anxious about Public security. Owing to it, he opines that the existence of any secret agents shouldn't be tolerated. That the spy will, at any time, distort the information has been a mere commonplace. In their political revolutionary action, the professional anarchists are unlimitedly free to fabricate the very facts and spread the "double evil of emulation on one direction and of panic, hasty legislation, unreflecting hate, on the other" leaving the world imperfect (130). This is why the Assistant Commissioner is careful enough to deal with the present case with special secrecy and of his own firsthand investigation.

For the Assistant Commissioner, Heat's role is enough and he wants him to be dysfunctional in the Special Crime Department for he is providing shelter and security to the anarchists to keep up his reputation and promotion. Such secret tool of a police inspector should surrender as a whole to the department instead of remaining the private property of Chief Inspector Heat. The Assistant Commissioner's seeking help and counseling from his senior, Sir Ethelred, qualifies how and why the criminal class of revolutionists and anarchists are intertwined with state mechanism and how, thereby, it is necessary to eliminate them. He says:

> (A)ny given act of violence damaging property or destroying life—is not the work of anarchism (alone), but of something else altogether—some species of authorized scoundrelism. . . . the existence of these people in the pay of foreign government destroys in a measure the efficiency of our supervision . . . the existence of these spies amongst he revolutionary groups, which we are reproached for harboring here, does away with all certitude . . . I call it an episode . . . it is not part of any general scheme, however wild. . . . these fellows are perfect pest. (131-32)

The commissioner is sure that the anarchists are supported by the police authority; under such shelter, they are walking with their chest upright with sinister freedom. Police supervision and its efficiency is tampered by the disgusted pests like Inspector Heat. “Irony has an evaluative edge and manages to provoke emotional responses,” Hutcheon reminds, “in those who get it and those who don’t as well as its targets. . . . This is where the politics of irony get heated” (2). Here, the target of irony is inspector who fuels anarchism wearing the cloak of a police officer.

The narrative is dominant to qualify the power of British bureaucracy in defending its status quo. Knowing the root cause of anarchists and their harmfulness no less than the pests, the author with an ironic twist insists to maintain the status quo of British governance. It is on this ground the Assistant Commissioner, instead of instructing Heat to go on with the case, wants to seek his explanation personally. He wants to investigate the spy of the great power-Russia or/and India-himself; it is a desire to know something at firsthand against the national calamity.

Chief Inspector Heat is flayed in the eyes of the Assistant Commissioner. The ground of trust is lost. The old and valued man has already taken his liberties. When

many things are appearing clear about Mr. Verloc being the chief hand behind the Greenwich bombing, he still insists that "(Verloc) knows nothing of this affair . . . I think that the man who has most to do with it will turn out to be Michaelis" (124). Heat proceeds his own way and the Assistant Commissioner has his own way to probe into the issue. The former is dissatisfied with the way the latter is behaving with him." He is intensely disgusted in the secrecy of his heart at the unofficial conduct of his immediate chief. But he was not quixotic. . . . The case is not followed properly, its being tampered with he thought" (191). Heat is already losing his confidence; he is no more heroic and quixotic in his investigation as he was earlier.

The inspector essentially wants to hang and tamper with the case. He has got the torn piece of the coat's collar in which there is the identity of the blown man's address. With it, he walks to Verloc's shop to Breet Street. "He hoped Verloc's talk would be of a nature to incriminate Michaelis . . . . Finding Mr. Verloc home, he felt disappointed" (190). Heat has simultaneously his double to play: he has to investigate the case and find the criminal to prove himself the trustworthy servant; on the other hand, he has to save the same criminal to continue his public stand. Critic Tony Tanner says

> a hidden part of a man committed to order and society might suddenly embrace and identify itself with a being, a presence, an apparition which seems most antithetic to his own conscious self, a walking reminder of all that inner darkness and weakness which civilized man has suppressed. (qtd. in charters 332)

Heat assumes such quality but, since he has to be revealed truly, his expectation goes wrong when he finds Verloc at home. The narrator, in order to make the anarchists hopeless, reflects on the mentality of Heat as follows:

> The turn this affair (is) taking meant the disclosure of many things—the laying waste of fields of knowledge . . . . It would leave Michaelis unscathed; it would drag to light the professor's home industry, disorganize the whole system of supervision. Make no end of a row in the papers, which . . . (appear) to (Heat) by fools for the reading of imbeciles. (198)

Inspector Heat, the supporter and provoker of the anarchic activities in London, is fighting his hopeless and losing battle. The investigation is surely going to prove him a fraud inspector who is really a pest for the Special Crime Department and, at the broader level, to the British government. Unknown to the Assistant Commissioner's pursuit of reality, he still tries to defend himself. In fact, rather than making the investigation easier he's making it vague and unidentifiable. Behind the commissioner's knowledge, he reaches to Verloc's shop. Even when Verloc confesses the "whole story" the inspector is not in the mind of arresting the terrorist (197). Rather, he says, "My advice to you is to clear while you may. There are some of them . . . who think you are already out of the world . . . vanish. Clear out" (198). If he is a true police inspector he can never pronounce such remark to a criminal who he is in search of; he can never speak in the favor of the criminal. This is his own true identity Heat exposes shamelessly. Verloc, too, expects his security under the inspector to escape the arrest: "I wish you would take me away tonight. I would go quietly" (199). Conrad has his narrator ironize severely on such pests who are trying to weaken and bring about an instability in British Empire.

The Assistant Commissioner looks the case more deeply and from the new perspective. He takes the accident not as a mere attempt of single and simple person.

The two men who appear on the surface are simply the grass root agents. And the plan is not of a minor thought. He takes it broadly as a “national calamity” (136).

Moreover, it is “the inference that (is) imparted abroad for the purpose of committing this outrage” (132). It is not something which is done for just once but a series of an episode. The Assistant Commissioner wants to excavate the secrecy in such a radical and efficient way that, he believes, will change whole traditional way of criminal investigation. It is, in his words, “a new man’s antagonism to old methods. A desire to know something firsthand” (135). For this investigation, he is not with full authority and he never supposes himself as such. there is his chief commissioner, Sir Ethelred, to give him proper suggestion and judgments. Beyond any jealousy and attraction of promotion, he wants to carry out his duty as an amateur responsibility.

At times he turns symbolic when he talks to others. It proves his wider range of understanding, deeper level of sensitivity, and a testimony how he really deals with the case. When he returns taking an interview with Verloc, before Heat does the same with the criminal, he comes to his Chief Commissioner. On the entrance, he talks with the helper of the chief and tells that he is not just hunting the “sprat” inquiring into Verloc (202). By this, in an ironic level, he means: he is trying to find the root cause of anarchic activities in London. He is spying for “a dogfish” which is “a noxious, rascally looking, altogether detestable beast with a sort of smooth face and moustache” (203). And this beast is a witty fish” which works under some “Great power” (203,132). In fact, it is an honorary. The underlying irony here lies not on a simple decoding of single message but more on a “semantically complex process of relation, differentiation and combining said and unsaid meaning” (Hutcheon 9). What lays beneath the Assistant Commissioner’s words matters more important.

In the Assistant Commissioner's understanding, Verloc is not the crux of problem. He is only the secret agent who is a puppet at the hand of some foreign honorary officer. Verloc's psychological state in the afertermath of the bombing has been very pathetic. When the Assistant Commissioner meets him he is in "an irresistible need of confessing—of making a clean breast of it to somebody" and risked consciously nothing more but arrest for him (207). He is just like a man after committing suicide with the notion that it would end all his troubles and who disillusioningly discovers that it did nothing of the sort. He's been so much helpless that neither he could have an asylum to some foreign country disappearing from his activities nor he could leave his post from the Red Revolutionary Committee in the fear that his comrades would take action against. With no apparent decision, he can take no action.

On the upper level, the Chief Commissioner takes the case with high seriousness and knows it as a representation of a "sequence of powerful agents" (Murly 60) He puts it with "the question of his country's domestic policy" (209). He finds himself on the battleground where he crusades with valor. He assures his subordinate that he will talk with the Attorney General tonight. By now, this affair which, in one way or other, "disgusted Chief Inspector Heat (seems) to him a providentially given starting point for a crusade" (209). It is an expert efficiency of probing into a case. It is sure, the responsible members of the Special Crime Department appear vehemently victorious; there is no chance on their part to lose this battle.

Conrad's irony obviously strengthens the status quo of British Empire. He shuns any activities which create disorder in the empire. It is exiting to have a look at the fall of chief secretary of the embassy Mr. Vladimir. Though an honorary, he

enacts his government's policies secretly. His embassy is, for a long time, fueling anarchic activities there. This chief secretary is the chief target of Conrad's ironic arrow. Early in chapter two when Mr.Verloc meets Mr Vladimir, he behaves from his authority and under whom Verloc feels as an insignificant lad; Verloc cannot stay with his head high; neither can he answer well feeling that his moral energy is not as high as that of Vladimir. The latter teaches Verloc what his embassy needs to do is "activity-activity"(20). Scolding Verloc, he says: "You—a member of starving proletariat . . . you desperate socialist anarchist . . . it is not a philanthropic institution" (18-19). He adds: "we are not satisfied with the attitude of the police here . . . what is desired . . . is the occurrence of something definite which should stimulate the vigilance . . . what is desired for just now is the accentuation of the unrest of fermentation . . . an alarming fact" (14-15). The same man of authority—the first secretary of the embassy—turns scared when he, unexpectedly, meets with the Assistant Commissioner. He cannot act properly in fear. He stays in subdued tones and appears "descended from generations victimized by the instruments of an arbitrary power. He (is) racially, nationally, and individually afraid of the police. It (is) an inherited weakness, altogether independent of his judgment, of his reason, of his experience. He (is) born to it" (211). Mr. Vladimir in the beginning of the novel and dealing with Verloc and Vladimir now in the presence of Assistant Commissioner has got an 'U' turn. Earlier, he was authoritative and wanted some activity to alter the way of people's life in an evil atmosphere; he was dissatisfied with the police and wanted to answer with a challenge; but, he's out off his confident ground now. With the police officer he is completely scared and his head naturally inclines towards the gentleman. His rosy countenance is weathered; his wittiness turns to seriousness. Adding to it a British lady says: "he has been threatening society with all sorts of

horrors . . . aprops of this explosion in Greenwich park. It appears we all ought to quake in our shoes at what's coming if those people are not suppressed all over the world . . . this (is) such a grave affair" (210). This remark kicks Vladimir from a height to gutter. All the charge of Greenwich bombing and creating social horror center at him. Foreign people's activity makes British subjects suffer greatly.

Shamelessly, Vladimir leaves the hall but the Assistant Commissioner follows him. Vladimir feels uneasy and infuriated when the other says that Verloc is arrested. As if he doesn't know anything about Verloc, Vladimir remarks: "A lying dog of some sort" with his "Oriental phraseology" (213). But, in the heart, he is dazzled by the miraculous efficiency and cleverness of English police; to know about Verloc's arrest, he literally falls sick. Adding more to his anguish and grief, the Assistant Commissioner makes good use of the situation. He shoots an ironic arrow to the man:

> What pleased me most in this affair is that it makes such an excellent starting point for a piece of work which I've felt must be taken in hand—that is, the clearing out of this country of all foreign political spies, police, and the sort of-of-dogs . . . they are ghostly nuisance; also an element of danger. (213)

The narrative, here, is utterly powerful. The foreign embassy secretly has no ground to exist in Britain. He loses his necessity of existence. No less than a dog, he is an utter enemy of the empire and all people of his class are the same. If they remain any longer in London they "will be only feeling up the lying spirit of these revolutionary scoundrels" (213). He rises in police efficiency and pulls their performance higher. He proves the speed and excellence of British police: "in less than twelve hours we have established the identity of a man literally blown to shreds, have found the organizer of the attempt and have had the glimpse of the inciter behind him. And we

could have gone further" (214). This remark about the work excellence of British Special Crime Department is the proof that no one can work behind the police eyes. The empire has smart security provision. No criminal can escape from police vigilance. And it proves that the empire is appropriately functioning against any threats and dangers. Irony lies here that the Greenwich bombing which the embassy and the anarchists hoped to destabilize the security in London turns back to themselves with the big question of their existence in London. It is foreign government that grumbles on the activities of the empire—police knows it all. The Assistant Commissioner, with his victory says that he "wanted particularly to tell (Vladimir) of (their) success" (215). Further, he retaliates with fatal blow: "we can put our finger on every anarchist here. . . . All that is wanted now is to do away with the agent provocateur to make everything safe" (215). This time, the ironic target is all the pests—the Chief Inspector Heat (the most dangerous of the anarchists), along with all socialist revolutionaries and the foreigners who fuel such pests. Conrad himself accepts that he has best treated the novel through ironic eyes:

> The Secret Agent is a perfectly genuine piece of work. Even the purely artistic purpose, that of applying an ironic method to a subject of that kind, was formulated with deliberation and in the earnest belief that ironic treatment alone would enable me to say6 all I felt l would have to say in scorn as well as in pity. (7)

The irony used from the position of imperialist operspective destroys such elements which are trying to subvert British system of governance.

IV. Conclusion

Reading a text from the perspective of irony is what contemporary research has embraced. Though an oceanic field, irony has its safe tunnels to come out of it; the transideological politics of irony has two functions: the subversive and the conservative. Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* successfully stands an exemplary novel in which the author manipulates the conservative politics of irony to maintain the status quo of the British Empire against the anti-colonial rage.

There is a battle game between the imperial and anti-imperial forces. A foreign embassy in London hires the anarchists and socialist revolutionaries to carry underground plots to weaken British Empire. Mr. Verloc is the one who tries to blast the complacency and weaken her pride; he burns his own finger in the attempt of explosion and consequently dies at the hand of his own wife, Winnie. On the contrary, Conrad presents the Special Crime Department of London abundantly powerful and faster in investigations. In less than twelve hours of the Greenwich explosion, the British police officers establish the identity of the agent and the organizer of the attempt-Mr. Verloc-and the inciter behind him; it decides to do away with the agent provocateur to make everything safe in London.

The subtext of *The Secret Agent* has conservative politics of irony to reduce anarchists as pests in London. What Conrad represents as the anarchists are the Irish and Indian revolutionaries active to subvert the British Empire and thereby forcing to withdraw it from the colonies. Conrad's use of irony deflates such attempt that has potentiality to weaken British Empire through anti-imperial activities. Conservative politics of irony has in the novel to affirm colonial interests of the British Empire.

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