

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Conrad as a Novelist

The original name of Joseph Conrad was Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski. He was born in 1857, a little less than a century earlier, in a part of Poland, which had been annexed by Russia. Conrad's father, who had a deep sense of care about Polish independence, once said that his son was born not in 1857, rather, "in the 85th year of Muscovite oppression." (qtd. in Watts 8)

All poles felt like people without country in the nineteenth century. Russia was not only the country that had come to dominate them and attempted to repress their sense of national identity. In 1772, Poland had been carved up and shared by Russia, Prussia and Austria only to be re-divided in 1793 and again in 1795.

The feeling of being without a country was particularly intense in Korzeniowski family, for the Korzeniowski had been landed gentry and, thus a family with a great deal to lose in the process of national subjugation. That feeling, in a sense, came to define the very life of young Joseph, who was to change countries, languages and careers, wandering the world far away.

Conrad was to suffer greatly in what had been his family's homeland. Apollo, his father – a poet, playwright, and translator – dedicated politically to the cause of Polish independence – was arrested in 1863 for his association with a revolutionary political group. As a punishment, Apollo was exiled to the Vologda region of Russia, hundreds of miles north of Moscow. There was no way out for the rest of family but to accompany him. Young Joseph nearly died on the trip, and the fierce winter weather soon thereafter affected the health of both his parents. His mother, Ewa, died of tuberculosis in 1865 as a result of privations of exile. By the age of eleven, Conrad was without parents as well as without a country. The role of guardian was eventually taken by Tadeusz Bobrowski, an uncle on his mother's side of the family.

Uncle Tadeusz tried his best to carry out an unexpected responsibility, sending Joseph to Krakow to school and later to Geneva to study with a tutor. His teenage nephew, however, was something of a romantic; he liked neither the tiring challenges of formal education nor the browbeating of the tutor to make him more practical, worldlier. What Joseph really wanted to do was join the French merchant navy. In 1874, he finally got his uncle's permission to do just that. The life that followed must have been more exciting than the life of a student, but it seems to have no more to satisfy Joseph, who sailed to places as far as Venezuela and the West Indies, lost at love, lost at small fortune gambling, and could have lost his life when he attempted suicide in 1878. It was in 1878 that his new identity as a French sailor suffered a serious setback: French immigration authorities prohibited him from continuing to sail on French ships.

Joseph had considered switching from the French to the English merchant marine and did so in 1878, thus making a change in direction that turned out to be fortuitous. He was for the next sixteen years to sail on British ships. He was eventually to change his name to Joseph Conrad, to become a British citizen in 1887, and to marry a British woman, Jessie George, in 1896. Most important to us, he was at about this same time to exchange sailor's life for that of the English novelist, publishing novels in what was his third language. In the process of doing all these things he was probably to come as close to adopting a new national identity as the son of aristocratic Polish patriot could come. Thus, Joseph Conrad who grew up amid political unrest in Russian-occupied Poland, spent twenty years at sea with the French and British navies and settled in England in 1894 has indebted us revolutionizing the English novels with works such as *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897), *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *The Inheritors* (1901), *Typhoon* (1902), *Youth* (1902), *Romance* (1903), *Nostramo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911), *Chance* (1913), *Victory* (1915) and other stories including some translations.

Contrasting life at sea with life on land is one of Conrad's motifs. So his works can be

categorized as land based works and sea based works. Most of his works are haunted by the past which was full of hardships and struggles; so his works reflect his autobiographical impressions too. In regard to the sources Conrad put in his writing Najder writes in *Joseph Conrad- A Chronicle*:

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Although scholars have shown beyond doubt that his literary works are mostly based on material drawn from real life or from reading, with his imagination playing a lesser part, we should not conclude that whatever we find in those works is a faithful rendering of fact. Conrad's tendency to color and turn into a myth his own past is most apparent in his "autobiographical" works. (39)

Conrad had his own views on science, art, the mystery of existence, ethics, and the role of the novelist. Talking about fiction he states that it "demands from the writer a spirit of scrupulous abnegation. The only legitimate basis of creative work lies in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make our life so enigmatic, so burdensome, so fascinating, so dangerous and so full of hope". (qtd.in Najder 275)

Conrad kept silent about the sources of *The Secret Agent* and affirmed that he did not have any political, social, or philosophical motives but twenty years later Conrad in his "Author's Note" gave an exceptionally candid and detailed account of his sources. Conrad himself accepts:

I had no idea to consider Anarchism politically; or to treat it seriously in its philosophical aspect, as a manifestation of human nature in its discontent and imbecility. The general reflections whether right or wrong are not meant as bolts. . . . As to attacking Anarchism as a form of humanitarian enthusiasm or intellectual despair or social atheism, that – if it were worth doing – would be the work for a more vigorous hand and for a mind more robust, and perhaps more honest than mine. (qtd. in Najdar 324)

Conrad was very much conscious regarding the artistic value of his work and its moral significance. His sincerity and honesty can be experimented from what he mentioned in his "Author's Note". However, the political substance of the book is obvious and it is above the general significance.

## 1.2 Literature Review

Joseph Conrad is today recognized as one of the first English modernists and a powerful writer of many sophisticated novels, who has achieved great critical acclaim. His work, which is largely based on his experiences at sea, is noted for its sharp and uncompromising evocation of a pessimist's view of man's personal and social destiny. *The Secret Agent*, one of his few land based tales, being set in London around 1886 is a detective story and an emotionally charged domestic drama. It has received much attention from literary critics, especially due to its elaborate use of irony and juxtaposition to present Conrad's dark interpretation of the moral desolation of man as social animal (Conrad xxiii) together with subtle, oblique critique of English society. Written in 1906 and published in book form in 1907, *The Secret Agent* was misleadingly subtitled by Conrad 'A Simple Tale.' As he subsequently wrote to a friend, he set out to produce "an ironical treatment of a melodramatic subject" (qtd. in Watts 112) involving anarchists, spies, detectives, and foreign powers. As a result, Conrad's "multi-layered plot, unusual narrative technique, ubiquitous irony, and his financial blending of historical fact and personal experience make his tale – and explanations of it-anything but simple". ( qtd. in Watts 46)

As with much of Conrad's fiction, *The Secret Agent* has its roots in factual events. In his author's note, Conrad has indirectly referred to an actual explosion in Greenwich Park on the 14 February 1894, which killed the bomber, a man named Michael Bourdin (qtd. in Watts 22). It is generally agreed that the Bourdin incident was a direct source of inspiration for Conrad, although he diluted his story's similarities to it. Likewise, Conrad's depiction of Russian anarchist groups, a Special Crimes Department, secret police agents, and the

surveillance of subversive groups is also fairly historically accurate. He has also put comments on British society into the mouths of his foreign character distancing them from himself and making his work "obliquely patriotic" (qtd. in Watts 32). Moreover, Conrad draws on his own experiences and reactions to them for inspiration and authenticity; they explain his aims in portraying the sort of society he creates in this novel as he mentions in his author's note that 'the memories of my solitary and nocturnal walks all over London in my early days' reflecting his life full of hardships.

Joseph Conrad believed that even "perverse unreason has its own logical processes" (qtd. in Watts 29). To that end, in 1907 he produced an extraordinary novel that sought to unravel the tangled skin of the revolutionary mind: *The Secret Agent*. In many ways, he was the ideal person to address the subject: The son of Polish patriots who had been forced into expatriation by Czarist Russia, he was intimately familiar with both accurate states and the revolutionary violence they engendered. In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad's terrorists are plotting in Edwardian London, capital of the principal liberal state of the day. It is this paradox which makes the novel particularly fascinating- and probably the best work of fiction.

*The Secret Agent* covers in those days when there was no terrorism. His insight into the terrorism before it existed is praiseworthy and some of the critics have remarked him as a social scientist. The Russia (USSR) wanted to colonize the states which were already colonized by the British and the French. This is one of the first novels to deal with terrorism.

The role of politics in Joseph Conrad's novel '*The Secret Agent*' is paramount. It is seen in several places in the novel such as the main character Mr. Adolf Verloc's own private life and his association with a quasi-political organization as a spy, the revolutionary ideas of F.P.; (i.e. *The Future of the Proletariat*, a political pamphlet and the characters' personal beliefs. In this way Conrad's depiction of anarchism has an enduring political relevance.

*The Secret Agent* is one of Conrad's later political novels and it deals with the anarchism, espionage and terrorism. In this regard the question naturally arises, who the anarchists are? Georges Sorel writes:

Anarchists have been portrayed as dangerous and violent, due mainly to a number of high profile violent acts including riots, assassinations, and insurrections involving anarchists. The use of terrorism and assassination, however, is condemned by most anarchist ideology, though there remains no consensus on the legitimacy or utility of violence. Some anarchists have opposed coercion, while others have supported it, particularly in the form of violent revolution on the path to anarchy or utopia. (12)

The sense of individualism remains high in some of the anarchists rather than collectivism and they believe in the individual existence and take collective existence as a non-entity. This is evidenced in *The Secret Agent* when in the course of executing the set mission. Stevie does not know what is up to, and the protagonist Mr. Verloc does not know or not told explicitly what the final mission of his job is. And finally the fateful suicide of Winne Verloc ends the story. They are consequently interlinked still has individual concern.

*The Secret Agent* covers those days and portrays anarchist groups before many of the social uprisings of the twentieth century. Conrad's attempt to reduce anarchists bears a political irony; however, anarchism has been experimented differently in the novel as Jacques Berthoud states:

The central issue in the novel is not how anarchism should be judged, but what anarchism reveals about the England of the time. Perhaps Conrad is right to insist that *The Secret Agent* is not an attack on anarchism as such; what it does, rather, is to drop anarchism in London life, and show that life suddenly losing its transparency and precipitating its murkier essence. (qtd. in Stape 106)

As a spy novel it reflects the real attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory on 14 February 1894 which killed Martian Bourdin, brother-in-law of one H.B.Samuels, a desultory anarchist pamphleteer who was carrying it. Conrad brings this idea of true event in his novel to shock the complacent British society vis-à-vis Russian communist blocks. The plot to destroy Greenwich is itself anarchic.

Jocelyn Baines, Conrad's first modern biographer in his essay 'A Critical Biography' talks; "the book lacks, unlike most of Conrad's work a unifying theme, and when it is carefully examined falls apart into an accession of only superficially related scenes" (41). Conrad seems to be lacking a unifying theme. The story is divided into espionage, anarchism and even terrorism. The sense of individualism among the anarchists is another matter in this novel. But Jacques, Berthoud stating it as a political fiction views:

Conrad is right to insist that in *The Secret Agent* he is not concerned refuting anarchism; he performs a more radical operation, which is to relocate it within the discourse of narrative realism. To be more precise, he seeks to challenge- in the name of concord and justice- not so much anarchism as such as the shallow or unimaginative liberal-progressive response to anarchism. (105)

Here, Jacques Berthoud supports the very affirmation of Conrad that he did not mean to treat anarchism in the satirical light.

Stating that the novel has Conrad's influence of early life sensations Aaron Fogel views: "the novel, though obliquely, examines the greatest trauma of his past, the one in which himself was psychologically blown bits by bits by politically caused death of his parents". (qtd.in Jordon 175)

Conrad's parents' death was a matter of political cause. His father was a rebellion against Russian rule over their country and was exiled for the same cause. Conrad was a small child at that time and had lived his early life amidst problems and hardships like Stevie in the novel blows himself bits by bits silently in the Greenwich bombing. Different resources of

narrative art make an imagined world a real one. The subject then takes the common place ideas, attitudes, emotions and a sense of political independence in Conrad.

In 'Author's note' of 1920 for *The Secret Agent*, Conrad recalls his "earnest belief that ironic treatment alone would enable me to say all I felt I would have to say in scorn; as well as in pity;" (6). Conrad himself expresses his intention to treat the novel ironically. Thus, Greenwich Bombing turns out to be an anti- anarchist gesture. Moreover, it being a spy novel the espionage is criticized and ironized by contempt and pity.

Similarly Terry Eagleton says; "The novel exploits naturalists devices to dramatise a bourgeois society from which human feeling is expelled, and in parodying that society implies a satirical protest against it".(qtd. in Jordon 158).

Anarchists in the novel seem to be contributing to the degeneration rather than regeneration. They are rather engaged in their personal motives. Universality of anarchism is questioned. Moreover, Stevie, a silent character in the novel seems to be representing as a victim of inhumanity in the social world.

In modern times, *The Secret Agent* is considered to be one of Conrad's finest novels and it has received numbers of criticisms on the text. The ultimate aim of this study is to reveal something hidden or unspoken explicitly i.e.the political irony that underlies in the novel. The above mentioned critics have analyzed the text from different perspectives. They have not given much emphasis on shaping the political irony in the novel. Without the study of political irony the text remains incomplete.



## 2. Irony

### 2.1 An Overview of Irony

Even though it is very difficult to define what irony is, the term irony basically refers to the contrast between the statement and its meaning or simply the difference between form and content. The basic feature of irony is a contrast between appearance and reality. No sensitive authors, critics, and readers can avoid sensing its presence and feeling its powerful impact in literature. So irony has become a major literary mode or device these days. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines the literary meaning of the term as: "use of words that say the opposite of what you really mean, often in order to make a critical comment". (R 58)

For many reasons the concept of irony is vague, unstable and multiform. The word irony does not now mean exactly what it meant in earlier centuries, or it means differently to different writers, critics and scholars. The semantic evolution of irony has been haphazard. Though the word has been applied to different phenomena, it is very tenuously related in application. M.H Abram's observation deserves citation on the evolution of the concept:

In Greek Comedy the character called the eiron was a dissembler who characteristically spoke in understatement and deliberately pretended to be less intelligent than he was, yet triumphed over the alazon-the self deceiving and stupid braggart. In most of the modern uses of the term "irony" there remains the root sense of dissembling or hiding what is actually the case, not however in order to deceive but to achieve especial rhetorical or artistic effects. (134-5)

The origin of the term has a long history and the term irony is used to hide what is actually the case for many reasons. So the history of irony reaches to Greek period:

In Theophrastus both the Eiron and Alazon were dissemblers, one concealing himself behind evasive, non-committal, self-depreciative mask, the other

behind a fascades of boast. But the modern ironist, whether he plays an ironic or an alazonic part, dissembles or rather pretends, not in order to be believed, but as has been said in order to be understood. On deception, there is an appearance that is preferred and a reality that is withheld, but in irony, the real meaning is meant to be inferred either from what the ironist says or from the context in which he says it; it is withheld only in the weak sense that it is not explicit or not meant to be apprehensible. (Muecke 35)

There is difference between deception, lies and irony. Deception and lies also claim to convey a truth but do not. They may also be seen as contrast between appearance and reality but they are not thought of as irony because in irony, the real meaning is meant to be understood, but in deception, lies, hoax, the real meaning is not meant to be understood.

Wyane C. Booth, in the preface of his book *A Rhetoric of Irony* tries to clarify the concept of irony as:

For both its devotees and for those who fear it, irony is usually seen as something that undermines clarities, opens up vistas of chaos, and either liberates by destroying all dogmas or destroys by revealing the inescapable canker of negation at the heart of every affirmation. It is thus a subject that quickly arouses passion. (IX)

Irony has become the mother of confusion and there is no agreement among critics about what irony exactly is. It has never been fully explored. That is why irony can mean many different things on many different pages and in many periods.

Another critic Northrop Frye deserves citation as he says:

The ironic fiction writer, then depreciates himself, and like Socrates, pretends to know nothing, even that he is ironic. Complete objectivity and suppression of all explicit moral judgements is essential to his method. Thus pity and fear are not raised in ironic art. When we try to isolate irony as such, we find that it

seems to be simply the attitude of the poet as such a dispassionate construction of a literary form, with all assertive elements, implied or expressed. Irony as a mode is born from a low mimetic; it takes life exactly as it finds it. But ironist fables without moralizing, and has no object but his subject. Irony is naturally a sophisticated mode... (qtd. in Booth.X)

Socrates was an ironist who pretended to know only one thing that is nothing. So, he is ironic by hiding his intelligence and knowledge. The ironic writer or speaker's awareness of himself as observer makes him free including a mood of satisfaction and his awareness of victim's unawareness leads him to see victim as bound or trapped where he feels free. The ironist's own attitude is that of man whose world appears real and meaningful, and who would see the victim's world as illusory or absurd. Northrop Frye writes: "if inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves, so that we have the sense of looking in the scene of bondage, frustration or the hero belongs to the ironic mode" (34). From this point of view we can say that pure or archetypal ironist is God who sits in heaven with knowledge and deprives us of knowledge keeping us in illusion what is going to happen. D.C. Muecke comments on god as a figure of archetypal irony as:

He is the ironist par excellence because he is omniscient, omnipotent, transcendent, absolute, infinite and free. The archetypal victim of irony is per contra, man seen as trapped and submerged in time and matter, blind, contingent limited and unfree- and confidently unaware that this is his predicament.(48-9)

Here, God is compared with ironist or a puppet master, or as playing a game in which men are toys, pawns, where men are taken lightly, whimsically and god smiling down upon his own creation making an object of a play. Booth refers some other terms that also say something and intend something else as:

There are many verbal devices that 'say' one thing and 'intend' another and thus invite the reader to reconstruct unspoken meanings. Metaphor, and simile, allegory and apologue-to say nothing metonymy, synecdoche, asteismus, michterismus, charientismus, pretrition or of bonter, raillery, burlesque and paronomasia. (7)

Despite some similarities between irony and other terms, irony is separate from them. It is different in nature, origin and kind. Rather metaphors can be used ironically. Irony as a direct and classic device is not only of oratory but of every kind of communication where it occurs. It is intended but covert. Discovering an ironic intention in a work depends in the ironic reconstruction. Irony has become a part of our life. We read life in a real sense. Irony is an extraordinarily good road into the whole art of interpretation-no matter of life of other, they bring to light the hidden complexities that are mastered whenever men succeed to understand each other most flat and literal. Booth remarks about the trouble of irony as:

Irony, an aggressively intellectual exercise that fused fact and value, requiring us to construct alternative hierarchies and choose among them; demands that we look down on other men's follies or sins; floods us with emotion-charged value judgements which claimed to be backed by the mind accused other men not only of wrong beliefs but of being wrong at their very foundations and blind to what these foundations imply-all of this coupled with a kind of subtlety that can not be deciphered or "proved" simply by looking closely at the words' no wonder that failure to communicate and resulting quarrels are often found where irony dwells. (44)

Quarrels and dissatisfactions are likely to appear in ironic treatment. So people who love irony are inclined to destroy other man's sacred objects and beliefs. Aristotle had used *eironeia* in the sense of self-depreciative dissimulation rather higher than *alazoneia* of boastful dissimulation. In this phase the word *eironeia* had been developed from a mode of behaviour

to a rhetorical figure and used to blame by ironical praise and to praise by ironical blame. If we see Cicero, he has not used 'eironeia' as an abusive meaning of the Greek word.

D.C.Muecke deserves citation, on the emergence of the word "irony" in English and into general use:

The word irony does not appear in English until 1502 and didn't come into literary use until the early eighteenth century. Dryden, for example used it once. English, however, was rich in colloquial terms for verbal uses which we might regard as embryonic irony: fleer, flout, gibe, jeer, mock, scoff, scorn, taunt. Putterham's *Arte of English Poesid* (ed. G.D. Willcock, and A. Walker London, 1936) actually translates ironia as "Drie Mock" and this clearly indicates an appreciation of the deadpan quality of a more subtle degree of verbal irony. (16-7)

Besides that, during late seventeenth century the words derision, droll, rathy, banter were used heavily which automatically helped to keep the word irony as a literary word later on. As in the rest of Europe, the concept of irony developed very slowly in England. For two hundred years and more, irony was considered as a figure of speech, defining the word as saying contrary of what one means, or as saying one thing but meaning another as praising in order to blame and blaming in order to praise. The more interesting meaning in Cicero as a way of treating one's opponent in an argument and as the verbal strategy of whole argument which was ignored at first.

By the middle of eighteenth century the concept of irony in England and in other European countries had scarcely developed in broad outlines. Muecke comments on the latter concept of irony in England as:

It was at the very end of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the Nineteen century that the word 'irony' took on a number of new

meanings. The old meanings were, of course, not lost and the old ways of being ironical were not discontinued, though one notices a tendency towards disparaging satiric irony as cheap and vulgar and skeptical irony as cruel, corrosive or diabolic. (19)

We can see new meanings, new in many respects, which we can sort out. Earlier, irony had been thought of as essentially intentional and instrumental, realizing a purpose by using language ironically but now it has been even unintentional-observable. We can see the concept of irony enlarged in Romantic period beyond Instrumental Irony (someone being ironical) to Observable Irony (things seen or presented ironically). So now irony has become double natured: sometimes instrumental and sometimes observable, where before, irony had been thought of as being practised only locally or occasionally but now we can realize the world itself as ironic stage and all mankind as merely players. So irony could be seen as paramount, obligatory, dynamic and dialectical. The emergence of new meanings of irony made German intellectual leader for many years. The principal ironist of the period was Friedrich Schlegel. If we see the chronological development of irony, first it was thought of irony not of someone being ironical but of someone being the victim of irony, changing the attention from active to passive. D.C.Muecke calls verbal irony an instrumental irony and Irony of Events, so he quotes how A.W. Schlegel sees irony of events in Shakespeare's Henry V:

After his renowned battles, Henry wished to secure his conquest by the marriage with a French princess; all that has reference to this is intended for irony in the play. The fruit of this union, from which the two nations promised to themselves such happiness in future was the weak and feeble Henry VI, under whom everything was so miserably lost. (19)

Commenting on the predicament of Henry V and how the event highlights the semantic inversion, he remarks:

The step that Henry takes to secure his future turns out to be the very step that ensures his future disaster. The resemblance of such an Irony of Events to what I have called Instrumental Irony can be made clear by describing, say, ironic praise in similar terms: the word what the butt of the irony takes as flattery turns out on reflection to be the reverse of flattery. (20)

Another philosopher Friedrich Schlegel adds a further and even more radical development of the concept. He made irony open, dialectical, paradoxical or romantic. For him the basic metaphysically ironic situation of man is that he is a finite being striving to infinite and incomprehensible reality. We can call this the observable irony of nature with man as victim. Irony, he says "is the form of paradox." Irony is "the analysis of thesis and antithesis." Schlegel comments on irony as:

Irony is the only involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation [...] everything should be playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden [...]. It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication. (qtd. in Muecke 24)

Schlegel argued that artistic creation has two contrary but complementary phases: expansive and contractive phases. In the expansive phase the artist is naïve, inspired and imaginative; but this thoughtless ardour is blind and unfree. In the contractive phase the artist is reflective, conscious and ironic but irony without ardour is dull.

Karl Solgar goes further and his concept of irony rises more ratified metaphysical heights than Schlegel's. He locates irony at the very center of life. He defines irony as:

While the universal, the infinite and the absolute can be manifested in particular, finite or relative forms, that is by a self negation or annihilation, this in turn must self destruct in the process of fulfilling their function which is to reveal the universal, the infinite and the absolute. The irony resides in the

two-fold opposed movement in which each sacrifices itself to the other. (qtd. in Muecke 25)

Here, he emphasizes how expressed and intended meanings oppose each other and sacrifice one to the other meaning. Another critic, I. A. Richards defines irony as "bringing the opposite, the complementary impulses in order to achieve a balanced poise" (250). For A.F. Schegel irony seems to have a satiric, moral or reductive function. Connop Thirlwall introduces the term practical Irony and refers Verbal Irony as Dialective Irony. D.C.Muecke comments on Thirlwall's introduction of the term as:

Thirlwall knew that he was using the English word irony in new senses. But these new senses had already been developed in Germany. Hegel, for example, had seen irony as the dialectic progress of history and before him Solgar had liberated irony from it's negative association. So it could be applied to situations and events that seem unpromising but surprisingly turn out fortunate. (28)

A sense of irony involves not only the ability to see ironic contrast but also the power to shape them in mind. Kierkegaard says, "irony is not present in nature for one who is too natural and too naïve, but only exhibits itself for one who is himself ironically developed" (271). For Sigmund Freud irony is very close to joking and it produces comic pleasures in hearers and readers. Goethe says, irony raises a man above happiness and unhappiness, good or evil, death or life. Kierkegaard agrees with Goethe's view and thinks that no true philosophy is possible without doubt and at the same token no authentic human life is possible without irony. This does not mean to advocate ironic presence in every work of art and human behaviour, the more lyrical the art is , the less ironic it becomes. Though the world without irony would be like a forest without birds, we need not wish every tree more bird than leaf. So we might see ironic and the non-ironic as complementary opposites, as reasons and emotions, mind and heart are, both desirable and necessary.



Verbal Irony is also called instrumental irony in which language is the instrument. However, it is not always easy to distinguish verbal irony from observable irony. In verbal irony the ironist says something in order to have it rejected as false. In observable irony, the ironist presents something ironic like a situation, a sequence of events, a character etc. M.H. Abrahams defines irony as:

Verbal irony is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. The ironic statement usually involves the explicit expression of one attitude or evaluation but with indication in the overall speech situation that the speaker intends a very different and often opposite attitude or evaluation.(135)

It is a figure of speech in which the meaning of a statement is different and opposite to the meaning intended. For example, when the son deviates from his study, fails the exam and his father says "congratulation". Here, the word congratulation is not used to appreciate the son rather it is used to express father's dissatisfaction to his son. So we find a sharp difference between an expressed and an intended meaning.

A complex instance of verbal irony can be realized in Jane Austin's "Pride and Prejudice (1813)". She opens the novel as "It is truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of wife" (qtd. in Abrahams 135). Here Austin does not mean what she has expressed as single wealthy man is in want of wife but she satiric here and she means that a single woman is in want of a rich husband.

In verbal irony, sometimes the meaning and evaluation may be subtly qualified rather than simply reversed and the clues to ironic meaning the author intends may be oblique and unobtrusive.

The term Romantic irony in its technical sense is more familiar to German than to English scholars. As M.H. Abrahams says:

Romantic irony is a term introduced by Friedrich Schegel and other German writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to designate a mode of dramatic or narrative writing in which the author builds up the illusion of representing reality only to shatter it by revealing that the author as artist is the creator and arbitrary manipulator of the characters and their action. (137)

In romantic irony the character builds up an imaginative and romantic world but at last this imaginative world is destroyed by the realization of ugly reality. One can find it constant dialectic interplay of subjectivity and objectivity. In the words of Muecke, "we are very close to romantic irony when the work is accompanied by a critical commentary on events and characters and closer still when the commentary directs its ironic attention to literary composition in general or even to the composition of the work in hand" (72).

Byron's great narrative poem *Don Juan* (1819-24) persistently uses this device for ironic and comic effect, revealing the narrator to be fabricator.

Schegel sometimes confusingly identifies romantic irony and distinguishes as infinitely superior to rhetorical irony. He tries to characterize the self-consciousness of the modern writer and his awareness of the complexity and the gelatinizing of things. Romantic ironist adopts an attitude at once of Romantic enthusiasm and ironic detachment towards his creation. The ironist has an attitude in which everything must be jest and yet serious, artless openness and yet deep dissimulation.

In romantic irony the author is like God or nature immanent in every created element and the reader is also aware of his transcendent presence as an ironic attitude towards his own creation. Muecke observes Romantic irony as:

Creative surpassing of creativity is romantic irony; it raises art to a higher power since it sees for art a mode of production that is in the highest sense artificial because fully conscious and arbitrary and in the highest sense natural

because nature is dynamic process internally creating and eternally going beyond creation. (25)

Romantic irony as an artistic tool envisages a double aim: by incorporating the artistic self awareness to imbue the created work with the dynamic of the creative process, and simultaneously but in reverse, to invent a form for expressing this artistic illusion of self creativity. A successful romantic ironic mode seems to be art raised to a higher power, a work whose raw material is already art. Romantic irony, even embraces verbal, structural, sophoclean irony, too.

In some works of literature "the author introduces a structural feature that seems to sustain a duplex meaning and evaluation throughout the work" (Abrahams135). One common literary device of this is the invention of a naïve hero, or else a naïve narrator to spokesman whose simplicity leads him to persist an interpretation on affairs which the reader shares the presence of author behind the naïve persona. In verbal irony the speaker has the ironic intention which is realized by both speaker and the readers but in structural irony, the knowledge of the author's ironic intention is shared by the readers but is not intended by the speaker. To intensify the sense of irony the author uses the fallible narrator who may not be stupid or credulous but has a "failure of insights". (136)

In Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (1729), he has used a naïve spokesman as economist who writes to convert the excess children of the oppressed and poverty stricken Irish into a financial and gastronomical asset. The economist here does not realize the ironic intention of the author whereas the readers realize it. In Swift's *Gulliver's*, an amusingly simple Gulliver is a typical example for the invention of a 'naïve hero' for the purpose of generating structural irony. Here, too Gulliver can not realize the ironic intention whereas the author and the readers realize it. The structural irony veers towards defeatism.

Wyane Booth, in his *A Rhetoric of irony* discusses on two types of irony: stable and unstable irony. M.H. Abrahams writes:

In *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974), Wayne Booth identifies as stable irony that in which the speaker or author makes available to the reader an assertion or position which, whether explicit or implied, serves as a firm ground for ironically qualifying or subverting the surface meaning. Unstable irony, on the other hand, offers no fixed standpoint which is not itself undercut by further ironies. (136)

Another type of irony is Socratic irony. It got its name from the philosopher Socrates who usually dissembled by assuming a pose of ignorance and having an eagerness to be instructed.

Another widely used irony is dramatic irony. In dramatic irony, the character is ignorant whereas the author and readers have knowledge of present or future. Here at last, normally the character has a journey from ignorance to knowledge M.H. Abrahams remarks as:

Dramatic Irony involves a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant; in that situation, the character unknowingly acts in a way we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the actual circumstances. (136-7)

Cosmic irony is also called "the irony of fate." In it, fate deliberately manipulates event so as to lead the protagonist to false hope and frustrates as well as mocks the protagonist. In Thomas Hardy's novel, we can find cosmic irony abundantly.

Another type of irony is a disjunctive irony. Non-resolution of the paradox intensifies the dramatic effect of disjunctive irony. Pandey rightly observes "This non-resolution makes the irony in *The Waste Land* disjunctive with a little astringent verges on the satire" (113). Here opposites go together with reluctance and apathy, so disjunctive irony leads to the final defeatism lacking resolution. It keeps the work poised on a paradox.

We can list the major writers in whose work, irony is significantly present: Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Cicero, Shakespeare, Pope, Swift, Johnson, Baudelaire, Henry James, Chekhov to Brecht and many more. At last, as Goethe says that irony is that little grain of salt that alone renders the dish palatable.

## 2.2 Poetics of Irony

Irony is a familiar concept and for that very reason, difficult to define. As an example of a stylistic figure involving double meanings, allusion, and antiphrasis, it can be analyzed in rhetorical terms. However it also invites a more philosophical approach.

Conrad himself speaks of his "ironic treatment" of the subject (12). In this instance, the proper function of the critic is to determine where the irony lies and what its significance is to the tale. Simply stated, *The Secret Agent* presents a perfect illustration of the ironic theme, cast in the characters of the story, and manifested in the plot. West and Stallman have defined irony in terms that are fully appropriate to Conrad's novel:

Irony is based on contrast- between what seems to intended and what is actually meant, between the apparent situation and the real one. In dramatic or tragic irony the spectator is aware of the ironic intent, of which the actor is ignorant. The spectator or reader knows the full situation, of which the actors or characters, to the contrary, are ignorant. (qtd. in Spector 70)

Such is the classical irony of *The Secret Agent*. Conrad's characters, certain of their knowledge of each other, actually are totally ignorant of the designs, plans, and thoughts of the people with whom they must deal, and of the way in which events must shape themselves.

*The Secret Agent* is a novel of political irony. Conrad's irony comes from the dialectical tension between the anarchists' outward representation of themselves as the true revolutionists and their inner reality which is dark, self-centred and demonic. These London based anarchists lack the sense of morality, humanity and even the anarchist principle. In the

novel, Conrad's gripping use of politics of irony functions as a tool to reduce the anarchists, and dislodge their activities. Conrad has presented the anarchists as quacks and their activities as sham. Conrad's indirect alignment to the then existing British colonial system is clearly seen as he seems against the anarchists who pose challenges to the system, His position is, thus pro-colonial from where his political use of irony uncovers the dark, naked and so called anarchism. Conrad's alignment with the British colonial system inspires him to adopt cynical attitude towards the anarchists since the latter pose challenges to the system. Conrad's lack of fellow feeling and sense of sympathy to the anarchists and his repeated use of politics of irony to undercut them reveal his utter distrust upon the anarchists, on the one hand, and his colonial bent of mind on the other.

Irony as "such does not now mean only what it meant in earlier centuries ,it does not mean in one country all it means in another" (Muecke 7). However, irony in its simplest meaning can be defined as in the words of Samuel Johnson, "a mode of speech of which the meaning is contrary to the word" (qtd. in Enright 5). But, mere, "antiphrastic inversion on the level of the word" (Hutcheon 62). itself sounds ironical since irony in its concept, use, and function is quite "obligatory, dynamic and dialectical". (Muecke 19)

Irony, more importantly, in its Greek use, is the result of the deliberate pretension of the *eiron*, an ironist, and the self- deception of the *alazon*, an object, a victim or the butt of the irony. The disparity between appearance and reality or *ironic* and *alazonic* features in irony has been later explored as a powerful "rhetorical enforcement" for its special rhetorical and artistic effects (Muecke 8) and then later as "a discursive strategy" for analyzing the politics of representation (Hutcheon 194). So, keeping view of the discrepant gap between what is said and what is intended. In other words, the sense of irony arises from a disparity between what might be expected and what actually happens; what is said and what is meant; or what is thought about a situation and what is actually the case; or a contrast between reality and an appearance. (Muecke 33)

The scope of irony as rhetorical enforcement was first observed in the irony implied in Socratic dialogue. Such an irony was later called as the Socratic irony which characteristically involves "a smooth low-down way of taking people in" that refers to Socrates' stimulated ignorance to make his arguments stronger (15). Socratic irony emerges from the speaker's pretension "to be ignorant ...under the guise of seeking to be taught by others," but ultimately she /he teaches others by "investigating the things beneath the earth and in the heavens ..." (Enright 9). The speaker dissembles by assuming a pose of ignorance, an eagerness to be instructed, by the discussant partner's opinions, although these, upon his continued naïve questioning, ultimately turn out to be vain or ill grounded. The audience's knowledge of speaker's pretended ignorance further sharpens the ironic effect. The mode of Socratic irony has also been adopted by Cicero and Quintilian who define irony "as a figure of speech" to elaborate "the verbal strategy of a whole argument". (qtd .in Muecke 17)

Verbal irony comes into being when the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the ostensibly expressed meaning. In verbal irony, the speaker provides some clues, and also makes the sharp ironic undercutting of the ostensible meaning inevitable. So, the ironic intensity of the verbal irony depends on the ironist's pretension to "aim at achieving maximum plausibility for his / her ostensible meaning" (qtd. in Muecke 45). In this sense, ironist and ironic pretension are the basic features of verbal irony, which is:

. . . a game for two players, the ironist in his/ her role of naïf, proffers a text but in such a way or in such a context as will stimulate the reader to reject its expressed literal meaning in favor of an unexpected 'trans-literal' meaning of contrasting import . . .[in which] the basic technique is either that going with their ironic butt and placing him/ [her] in high relief or that of depreciating oneself, which is the countersinking ontaglio method. (39-40)

It further underscores the point that the verbal irony depends on the author's ironic intention that is shared with the reader—a bond that allows for playing a verbal game of irony to take

place.

Verbal irony is often confused with sarcasm since the latter, too, has its apparent meaning undercut by the intended meaning. However, they are explicitly different as sarcasm is the taunting use of apparent praise for dispraise. Thus, sarcasm is harsh, direct and crude, whereas verbal irony is "outwardly accommodating and amiable and inwardly serene and reserved . . . [being] qualified by gentleness and benevolence" (qtd. in Muecke 17). Irony becomes "rhetorically effective and aesthetically pleasing" that generates the "curious feeling of paradox, of the ambivalent, of the ambiguity, of the impossibility made actual, of a double contradictory reality" that merges with "feeling of liberation" as in verbal irony "reality that definitely unmask the appearance," while sarcasm lacks this feel of liberation, which is not "for a moment plausible in its literal sense, [and] the tone conveys reproach so strongly that no feeling of contradiction is possible". (qtd. in Muecke 45-6)

Another type of irony is dramatic irony which involves a situation in which the author's ironic intention is shared with the audience or the listeners. However, unlike the Socratic irony, the characters' misinterpretation is based on actual ignorance and not on simulated pretension; unlike verbal, it involves characters' action in a particular situation. Dramatic irony, therefore, is a situation in which the reader shares with the author's knowledge of immediate circumstances or future events of which the character is ignorant. The audiences, thereby, detect a discrepancy between characters' perception and actions and the reality they face. Characters' beliefs and actions become ironic within that dramatic situation because they contradict from the reality of their actions. Dramatic irony achieves intensity by lending its *alazonic* [ignorant] character's "maximum conviction over what they believe and act" so that the inevitable demystification of the situation or the recognition of the reality generates intense tragic or comic irony (45). Dramatic irony proves tragic when the reorganization of the real situation leads to a:



. . . typical case involving a victim with certain fears, hopes or expectations who, acting on the basis of these, takes step to avoid a forcing evil or profit from a forcing good, but his/[her] actions serve only to lock him /[her] into a casual chain that leads inevitably to his/ [her] downfall.(69)

On the contrary, dramatic irony can also become comic in the happy ending sense if "it reveals the triumph of a sympathetic victim" (51). In other words dramatic irony can be comic if it generates humor, and leads the characters to the happy resolution. Though the term "dramatic" is used to connote a "popular sense of exciting and gripping situation" (66), it can also occur in narrative fictions "whenever an author deliberately ask us to compare what two or more characters say of each other, or what a character says new with he/she says or does later". (Booth 63)

The next type of irony is labeled as cosmic irony which has its roots in the implied faith in the relationship between the supernatural power and human beings. Cosmic irony is marked wherein supernatural forces such as a deity, or else fate is represented to deliberately manipulating events leading individuals to false and only to frustrate and mock them. So, it is also most often known as "the irony of the universe with [human beings ]or the individual as victim" (Muecke 23). In this mode of cosmic irony or the irony of universe, the expressed meaning is that human beings are like helpless puppets in the hands of supernatural forces, while the ironic meaning is often critical causing people to question God and universe as hostile and villainous to human beings. The ironic intensity in cosmic irony is further intensified by the characters' blind faith in supernatural force, in divinity and destiny, though such a faith may ultimately generate frustration and tragedy.

Another type of irony, which emerged out of the ferment of philosophical and aesthetic speculation in the nineteenth century, is romantic irony. Romantic irony has its roots in the paradoxical relationship between nature and human beings. For iconologists like Fredrich Schlegel, August Wilhelm, Ludwig Tieck and Kari Solgar, nature is "an infinitely

teeming chaos-an overflowing exhaustless vital energy" being in "process of becoming" with a dialectical process of continual creation and recreation, "while human being is "the created (and) soon to be decreed" with limited "thought" and "fixed language," becomes unable to acquire (any) permanent intellectual experimental leverages over "the world" (Muecke 23).

Romantic irony lies in the structure of human existence that is a finite being striving to comprehend an infinite (nature) hence incomprehensible reality. However, irrespective of his/her limitations, human life is "programmed" to grasp the "inherently illusive and protean" nature to "reduce it to order and coherence," which is inevitably doomed to result in a failure (Muecke 23). Irony ,then, becomes the true vision of nature and human life : "the world (has become) an ironic stage and mankind as merely the players" under this unavoidable irony of nature where human being as a creation (life) is inevitably undercut by the necessity of decreation (death) (Muecke 19). Romantic irony builds up the illusion of representing reality, only to shatter it by revealing that the author, as artist, is the creator and arbitrary manipulator of the characters and their actions. In this context, no human beings can be an ironist in the truest sense of the term except as one who builds up of the illusion of the reality destabilized by immediate shattering. Romantic irony as Schlegel says, is:

. . . the only involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation . . .

everything (in it) is playful and serious, guilelessly open and deeply hidden. It originates in the union of *savoir vivre* and scientific spirit, in his conjunctions of a perfectly instinctive and perfectly conscious philosophy. It contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the absolute and the relative, between the impossibility and the necessities of the complete communication. (qtd. in Muecke 24)

Romantic irony has established literature as the site of human consciousness about his/her ironical relation with nature, which activates tensions. The writer, as a romantic ironist, is " mobilized to recognize the limitations of his/ [her] perceptions of the infinite as inevitably

partial and thus in some degree false, yet s/ [he] must rightly value them" and should preserve" a balance in his/[her] work between rhapsodic affirmation and skeptical reservations". (Enright 12)

The paradoxical concept of irony has been rediscovered and also highlighted in New Criticism, especially by its prominents such as I.A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks, and Kenneth Burke in the twentieth century. New Criticism also views irony as "the bringing in of the opposite, the complimentary impulses" to achieve a "balanced poise" (Muecke 26). However, unlike the romantics, for New Critics, a paradoxical irony is not the outcome of paradoxical relationship of human beings with Nature rather of the multiple impulses and experiences that are likely to be subverted by another. So, to New Critics, literature is the representation of the fact of paradox, which shows how human beings maintain poised balance over such contradiction. Irony for new critics has become a general criterion of literary value-an internal equilibrium of opposite experiences, attitudes and evaluations. Thus, it becomes clear that "every literary context is ironic because it provides a weighing or qualification on every word in it, "thus requiring the reader to" infer meanings which are in a sense not in the words themselves: all literary meaning in this view become a form of . . . irony ". (Booth 7)

The nutshell survey of irony, so far in the preceding pages decodes the dynamic and complex nature of irony. In this sense, Wayne C. Booth gives his interpretive strategy of irony in his books, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974) by categorizing all types of ironies into stable and unstable. For Booth , stable irony comprises four "intended," "covert," "fixed," and "finite" marks in "application" (6). Booth identifies as stable irony that in which the ironic writer makes available to the reader an assertion, whether explicit or implied, serves as a firm ground for ironically qualifying or subverting the apparent meaning. The ironic writer in such an irony facilitates "literary fixity" of which we can have unequivocal, absolute and fixed ironic interpretation. In this view of irony, stable irony covers all intentional Socratic, verbal, structural, dramatic and cosmic ironies, which say one thing and mean the opposite.

Unstable irony, on the one hand, offers no fixed standpoint for its unequivocal interpretation since to give any fixed hint is either impossible or inadequate as the one interpretation essentially gets undercut by the other. Unstable irony, therefore, is a mode of reflecting the paradoxes and incongruities implicit in the structure of universe and in our existence. In this view of irony, unstable irony moves closer to what we, now, call deconstructive irony.

The deconstructive irony is the dominant twentieth century view of irony which is "relativistic and non-committal," that is a "view of life which recognized that experience is open to multiple interpretations, of which no one is simply right, and that co-existence of incongruities is a part of our existence" (Muecke 31). This mode of irony is based on the theoretical concepts of Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida, and exposes the impossibility of univocal and stable meaning. Its:

. . . overt production of meaning through deferral and defense has been seen to point to the problematic nature of all language: from a purely semantic point of view, the ironic situation of plural and separate meanings- the said together with unsaid held in suspension might challenge any notion of language as having a direct one-to-one referential relation to any single reality outside itself. (Hutcheon 57)

The quote above further suggests a way to think about ironic meaning as something in flux, and not fixed and stable. It is virtually impossible to label any fixed ironic meaning since every position gets undercut itself. It operates where, as de Man claims, "the sign points to something that differs from its literal meaning and has for its function the thematization of this difference" (qtd. in Hutcheon 64). The deconstructive irony is inherent in signification, in its deferrals and in its negations of fixity and certainty. Deconstructive irony, in the words of Pandey in *Intellectual History Reader*, is "a power to entertain widely divergent possible interpretations" to provoke the reader into seeing that there is *mise en abyme* -radical openness-surrounding the process by which meaning gets determined in texts and interpreted

by the readers" (665). Thus, irony in its latest sense leaves open the question of what the literal meaning might signify: there is a perpetual deferment of signification. It is therefore, the old definition of irony - saying one thing and giving to understand the opposite - is superseded. Irony is now saying something in a way that activates an endless series of subversive interpretations undercutting the other.

## 2.2 Politics of Irony

Irony is a "discursive practice or strategy" in the practice of cultural studies (Hutcheon 3). Discursive communities make irony possible in interpretation - whether arising from the ironist's intention or from the rubbing together of the apparent said with the implied unsaid meaning. The social scene of irony makes its politics inevitable in the mix of the said meaning with the unsaid one. The politics of irony, therefore, is its discursive presence in the aesthetic, social, ethical, cultural, religious, economic, ideological, and historical aspects of its contexts of use and interpretation.

The presence of discursive community is always a key in the use and the interpretation of irony. The notion of discursive community:

. . . is not understood at all but acknowledges those enabling constraints of discursive contexts and foregrounds the particularities not only of space and time but of class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual choice- not to mention nationality, religion, age, profession, and all the other micro-political groupings. (Hutcheon 92)

But this view of discursive community is a sense of overlapping [and sometimes even conflicting] communities or collectives. In general, discursive communities can be defined as the "complex configuration of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and communicative strategies" (91). This overlapping is the condition that makes the poetics of irony possible. The politics of irony, therefore, does not happen, as Pratt states, in "amiable communities" as it itself come into being in "contact zones" as the "social spaces where cultures meet, clash,

grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relationships of power" (qtd.in Hutcheon 93). In this sense, the entire multidimensional network has to be taken into account. The production of discourse as Foucault argues, "is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures" that rules of exclusion, classification ordering and distribution" (qtd.in Hutcheon 90). This is where the political use of irony gets heated within the social. Irony, as a cultural practice, involves forms of social practice of interaction between participants in particular situation. The politics of irony can not be:

. . . understood apart from its embodiment in context and also has trouble escaping the power relations evoked by its evaluative edge. The (paradoxically) enabling constraints that are operative in all discourses obviously function here as well, but is not only a question of who may use irony (and where, when, how) but who may (or can) interpret it. Whether viewed as an isolated trope or as the articulation of the human situation, irony involves the particularities of time and place, of immediate social situation and of general culture. (qtd. in Hutcheon 90-91)

Semantic dimension of irony is difficult to treat in isolation, without keeping not only one eye on the receiver, but the other on the surrounding tension-filled environments.

Great importance has been granted to the notion of a double audience in both exclusionary and inclusionary theories of how irony gets solidarity and frequently there are moral or political overtones. In this regard, the hypothesis of the concept of irony's political functioning in socio-cultural contexts comes from Mikhail Bakhtin's "idea of double-voicing or the dialogic" which suggests that the forms for transmitting speech can not be treated in isolation from the means of its contextualized dialogizing indissolubly knitted with one another (64). From the Bakhtinian view of dialogizing, it is irony in use, in discourse, which gets precedence over irony as a textual strategy. In other words, it is "irony's political

functioning in contexts-in the sense of the more specific circumstantial, textual and intertextual environment of the text in question," somewhat "broader than the pragmatic notion of contextual background -that generates overtones which facilitates an intercourse that enables the unsaid, enter into ironic political relation with the said" (Pandey 387-88). The cutting edge of irony is always social and political that gets heated at the evaluating edge and provokes responses from those who get it and in those who become its butt or the victim of it. The relations of power based in relations of communication with issues ranging from exclusion to inclusion, intervention to evasion, thereby make the functioning of irony inevitably political. Gender, race, class and sexuality condition the use and the interpretation of the specific function of ironic meaning.

The "social and interactive dimensions of irony's functioning" gets its political edge even out of the ironist's intentional and the interpreter's interpretive move with a certain attitude towards both the said and the unsaid meanings of irony in certain discursive situation (Hutcheon 10). In other words, irony comprises a complex intentional act on the part of both the interpreter and the ironist. Irony turns to be political in the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly expressed. Irony, as Christine Kerbart-Orecchioni views, "brings into play besides their linguistic competence, the cultural and ideological competences of ironist and audience". (qtd. in Muecke 40-41)

So, irony as a pervasive discursive practice brings forth the politics of human agency. Irony's discursiveness arises from the ironist and the interpreter as the agents who perform to attribute both meanings and motives in contextual frames for a particular purpose, and with particular means.

This study, thus, asserts that the politics of irony becomes possible because "discursive communities already exist and provide the context for both the deployment and attribution of irony" in the relations between meaning, between intentions and interpretations (Hutcheon 18). Irony builds up a political bond between the ironist and the audience by

invoking notions of hierarchy and subordination, judgment and perhaps even moral superiority. Irony's "semantic and syntactic dimensions can not be considered separately from the social, historical and cultural aspects of its contexts of deployment and attribution" (16-17). So, the interpreter's interpretation is not simply a matter of the subjective attitude of either interpreter or ironist, but [is] a function of the culture, language and social context in which both participants interact- with each other and the text itself. The political meaning of irony posits above the mere substitution of the identity and position of both the ironist and the audience to the matter of interpretation and to its use, as Hutcheon asserts, happens:

. . . in the space between the said and unsaid; it needs both to happen . . .

Ironic meaning is inclusive and relational: the said and the unsaid coexist in the interpreter, and each has meaning in relation to the other because they literally interact to create the real ironic meaning and the unsaid is not always a simple inversion or opposite of the said. It is the complex inclusive, relational and differential nature of ironic meaning making [So] it is [impossible] to treat the semantics of irony separately from its conditions of use and reception. (12-13)

The context plays crucial role in interpreting the ironic meaning and its politics. The politics of irony, therefore, is a relational strategy which "operates not only between meaning: said and unsaid, but also between people: ironist, interpreters, targets" (qtd. in Hutcheon 58). So, ironic meaning comes into being as the consequences of a relationship, a dynamic performative bringing together of different meaning makers and different meanings as well.

The idea of ironic meaning as relational result from the rubbing together of the said and the unsaid, each of which takes on meaning only in relation to the other, which, however, is not a relation of equals. The power of the unsaid to challenge the said is the defining semantic condition of irony.

Irony, being relational discursive strategy, has its transideological political functions.



The transideological politics of irony forces a distinction between irony that might function constructively to articulate a new oppositional position, and irony that works in a more negative and negativizing way. In a more explicit sense, irony can be provocative when its politics is oppositional or subversive. It, however, depends upon who is using and attributing it and whose expense it is seen to be. The transideological nature of its politics means that "Irony can be used either to undercut or to reinforce both conservative and radical positions". (qtd. in Hutcheon 27)

The use of irony from the position of power, especially by the dominant authority, generates irony's conservative political function. Conservative irony, as Elliott argues, "shores up the foundations of the established order" (qtd. in Hutcheon 29). The elitist mode of irony functions as a weapon for "negating" thereby becoming "largely destructive" (27). Negation is at the base of this position. The position that irony works as negating, as largely destructively is held by everyone who stands on the receiving end of an ironic attack, or by those for whom the serious and the solemn and the univocal are the ideal. The hegemonic cultures, and the totalitarian regime use or attribute irony with the view to materialize dangers in the protective cover of repressive irony. Conservative irony, as Bakhtin says, is controlled by the "dogmatic and authoritarian cultures that are one sided serious" (qtd. in Hutcheon 27). It is the repressive cultures' affirmative and the destructive political function of irony to reinforce the marginal be complicit with the system. In the "affirming and negating" use, irony functions, in Culler's words, as the "ultimate form of recuperation and naturalization": "we reduce the strange or incongruous, or even attitudes with which we disagree, by calling them ironic and making them confirm rather than abuse our expectations"(qtd. in Hutcheon 28). Conservative irony, therefore, functions to reinforce the power, or the authority.

The transideological politics of irony at once force a distinction between irony that works in a negative and negativizing way, and irony that functions constructively to articulate new oppositional positions. While conservative mode of irony reinforces the authority, it can

also be used to oppositional and subversive ends in radical mode of irony. Radical mode of irony is positive and constructively progressive wherein irony is used as a powerful weapon in the fight against a dominant authority-which the irony is said to work to destroy.

Oppositional theories such as racists, feminist, lesbians, postcolonial and other marginal groups argue from this position in different but related ways. In subversive irony, as Culler states, "the forces of oppression are subverted by the boundless powers of irony that no person can contain". (qtd. in Hutcheon 28)

Oppositional theories manipulate irony's multi-vocal instability at the expense of necessarily univocal social commitments in which irony functions to change and even turn upside down the historical and social reality rather than just suggesting its complexities of historical affairs. So, the subversive function is the "mode of the unsaid the unseen and the unheard relishing power in its verbal and structural forms" (4). Subversive irony is self questioning and internally dialogued mode that can and does function tactically in the service of a wide range of political positions, legitimating or undercutting a wide variety of interests. In this sense, as Hutcheon states;

. . . [I]rony is often connected to the view that it is self critical, self knowing, self-reflexive mode that has the power to challenge to the hierarchy of every 'sites' of discourse, a hierarchy based in social relations of dominance and overturn, is said to have 'politically transformative power'. (qtd. in Hutcheon 30)

The subversive political function of irony gets justified in Terdiman's concept of "counter discourse" since irony functions as a potential and effective strategy of oppositionality and seeks to displace and annihilate a dominant depiction of the world. In this view, subversive political irony relativizes the dominant authority and stability and approving its power. In this view, irony becomes "radical and democratizing" since it gives space for alternative reactions (38). Irony, thereby, involves social interaction as an inquiring mode to avoid the single and

dogmatic. It becomes as Bakhtin says, "a special kind of as arbitrary, and that demands revision of values and conventions, and oppositional theories exploit subversive or radical irony as a particularly potent means of critique of or resistance of social restrictions or even essential claims to truth. In this sense, irony becomes:

. . .one sign of a loosening of a bond that binds us to the single and the singular track, to a paranoid obsession with certitude and fixed and single destinations. "Irony can be . . . kind of general reflexive mode, one that has the potential to reflect and model the recognition that all conceptualizations are limited, that what is socially maintained as truth is often politically motivated.

(33)

The radical irony empowers the oppressed and the marginal to fight against prior politically motivated dominant or hegemonic cultures.

Irony has basically a corrective function. Thus, as D.C. Muecke reminds, the politics of irony is "like a gyroscope that keeps life on even keel or straight course, restoring the balance when life is a being taken too seriously. . . [and] also destabilizing the excessively stable. So, Irony has become an integral part of life, which empowers and enhances in the fight against socio-political ills.

### 3. Politics of Irony in *The Secret Agent*

#### 3.1 Synopsis of the Novel

*The Secret Agent*, set towards the end of the Victorian period was first published in 1907. The basic story is fairly straightforward, yet complexities arise since the narration moves back and forth in time.

The novel deals largely with the life of Adolf Verloc, an anarchist and agent of a foreign (Russian) power who is also a double-agent for the London police. He runs a pornography shop as a cover business in Soho, including the political pamphlets which remain a gathering place for all the anarchists. They are pleased to talk about revolution and share revolutionary ideas but they are empty like their souls. They are simply the men of tall talk. In fact, they are very lazy to act. Mr. Verloc runs the shop with his wife, Winnie, and they live above it with her mother and half-witted brother, Stevie. The Verlocs lack trust and mutual understanding.

After a period of inactivity, Mr. Valadmir, First Secretary of the embassy for which Verloc works instructs him to carry out an operation –the destruction of Greenwich by a bomb explosion in order to shock the complacent British government and police out of their benignly tolerant acceptance of anarchists and foreigners. Greenwich Observatory is believed to be a centre of science. Mr. Vladimir's aim is to force the authorities to clamp down on refugees from his own country, who ferment trouble there from their safe haven in England. Later, Mr. Verloc meets with his friends, who discuss politics and law and the notion of revolution. Through a tragic combination of circumstances, Verloc exploits Stevie to help in the attack, leading to the boy's shocking and bloody demise in a premature explosion. Stevie accidentally triggers the detonator, and blows himself which scatters his body parts into the several bits.

Verloc's contact with the Special Crimes Department in London is through Chief Inspector Heat, the officer subsequently charged with finding the culprits of the bomb attack.

Detective Inspector Heat discovers that Mr. Verloc to be responsible for the conspiracy, however, wishing to protect Verloc, his source of information. Heat sets out to pin the blame on another anarchist, the harmless Michaelis. Michaelis happens to be the darling of a ladies' social circle frequented by the wife of Heat's superior, the police Assistant Commissioner, who seeks to prevent Michaelis's incrimination after which point it becomes clear that their apparent resolution of the mystery, in terms of the reasons behind the bomb attack, has not even begun to address the real circumstances of human suffering and anguish around it.

When the Assistant Commissioner reveals the truth to Mrs. Winne about the explosion telling that he had recovered an overcoat at the scene of the bombing which had the shop's address written on a label, he unwittingly causes her to murder her husband. After Mr. Verloc's return he realizes that his wife knows that he has lied about the whereabouts of her brother, who has been killed by Mr. Verloc's bomb, and confesses what truly happened. Mrs. Verloc then attacks her husband with a knife, stabbing him. Grieving for Stevie and terrified of being sent to the gallows for her crime, Winnie is deceived and robbed by the man she trusts, Verloc's associate, Comrade Ossipon. In her 'utter desolation, madness and despair' she leaps to her death from a cross-channel ferry during an attempt to escape to France. The novel then ends with the chilling description of a determined anarchist bomb-maker. the Professor, loose on the streets, untouched by the police.

### 3.2 Politics of Irony in *The Secret Agent*

*The Secret Agent* exploits ironic mode of narration to undercut the anarchist activities in London, held to turn upside down the existing British colonial system of the time. The ironic mode of narration to dislodge the anarchists springs from Conrad's utter disbelief in the anarchists' rhetoric of revolutionary politics which foregrounds his colonial bent of mind. He employs irony to negativize the anarchists because these anarchists threaten and challenge the British colonial system. Conrad decries their political ideology as sham. He brutally underscores the anarchist activities as a sort of conspiracy against the system. Conrad posits

pre-colonial position in the novel since he undercuts the anarchists and wants them to be complicit with the system rather than challenge the system. Joseph Conrad, while ironizing the anarchist activities, employs irony as "a discursive practice or strategy" demystifying the politics of representation (Hutcheon 9). Conrad's use of political irony to undercut the anarchists in *The Secret Agent* lends it a political edge wherein the ironic unsaid replaces the apparently said. Conrad's political use of irony, thus, functions as a weapon for negating, negativizing, and destroying the anarchists' false claim over superior knowledge of the society and the people, and thereby forcing the anarchists to be complicit with the system. Conrad, from the conservative position, makes political use of irony against the anarchists to advocate on behalf of the existing British social system.

Conrad takes side with British authority and ironizes the anarchists by portraying their character as vain and absurd. In this light the anarchists are portrayed as foolishly ignorant and absurd. He locates immorality at the very root of their character. In *The Secret Agent*, the brutal irony against the anarchists emerges from their pretended concern for social improvement when rub against their obsession for personal self-aggrandizement or self-satisfaction; ranging from material greed, domestic comforts, thirst for power, etc. So, the unbridgeable gap between anarchists' words and their actual deeds lends Conrad sufficient room to direct brutal irony against the ongoing anarchism in London, which is also suggestive to his support to the British colonialism.

*The Secret Agent* is rich with events and descriptions which function as evidence to Conrad's pro-colonial position and his ironic attitude conveying hatred and complaints, towards the anti-British anarchists' activities. The writer's contempt and lack of fellow-feeling for Adolf Verloc, the agent provocateur comes to the surface in his description of the first appearance of Verloc, as:

Undemonstrative and burly in a fat pig style, Mr. Verloc, without either rubbing his hands with satisfaction or winking skeptically at his thoughts,

proceeded on his way. He trod the pavement heavily with his shinny boots, and his general get up was that of a well-to-do mechanic in business for himself. He might have been anything from a picture frame makers to a locksmith . . . an indescribable air which no mechanic could have acquired in the practice of his handicraft however dishonestly exercised: the air common to men who live on the vices, the follies . . . to drink sellers . . . to the inventors of patent medicines. (*The Secret Agent* 20)

The irony implicit in the quote above arises from the tension between Adolf Verloc's ideal appearance and his darker inner reality. Though, Verloc looks almost like an ideal late-Victorian man: a mechanic, or artisan, who has succeeded in business, the reality is that Verloc is actually a man of moral nihilism; not an honest craftsman turned businessman, but someone who lives off the vices, follies and fears of mankind. Verloc's outward appearance suggests the ideal, and his expression is specifically not evil, but his inner reality is that of a parasite, an exploiter of other people. The description of fat-pig Verloc is ironic, and the tone both disapproving and throw-away. The image of the fat-pig heaviness ironically works against the idea of efficiency required for a secret agent suggesting Verloc's confidence and efficiency as mere superficial qualities.

This anarchist Verloc who pretends to be seriously committed at bringing necessary social change is actually fond of domestic comforts, which is very ironic. Verloc "had an air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed" (*The Secret Agent* 14). The writer's ironic characterization toward anarchist Verloc reaches to extremity in his gratuitously unflattering comparison:

He generally arrived in London like the influenza from the continent, only he arrived unheralded by the press, and his visitations set in with great severity. He breakfasted in bed and remained wallowing there with an air of quite enjoyment till noon every day and sometimes even to a later hour. But when

he went out he seemed to experience a great difficulty in finding his way back to the temporary home in the Belgravian Square. (45)

The writer's characterization of Verloc above demands sardonic amusement at the lazy, inept Verloc who is described as excessively fond of domestic comforts. The disease "influenza" enclosed in the parenthesis or ironic marker, with which Adolf Verloc has been compared, intensifies Conrad's ironic attitude toward the anarchist. The unjust and unflattering comparison between Adolf Verloc and disease suggests Conrad's contempt for anarchist, and to say that the only difference between him and this disease is that the newspaper takes no notice of him also suggests piling on insults upon anarchists, unnecessarily. Similarly, Verloc stays out late not because he cannot find his way or has difficulty to find his way back to his hotel but because he has business to attend to. But, this imputation of navigational incompetence gets out its way from Conrad's distrust upon the anarchist activities. Conrad's contempt for the London based anarchists reveals his support to the British colonization of the time. His irony debunks the anarchists because they stand to challenge and change the colonial system.

The politics of ironic labeling attains extreme height in the writer's peroration on Verloc's death:

Night, the inevitable reward of men's faithful labour on this earth, night had fallen on Mr. Verloc, the tired revolutionist-'one of the old lot'-the humble guardian of society; the inevitable secret agent of baron stott-Wartenheim's dispatches; a servant of law and order. faithful, trusted, accurate, admirable with perhaps one single amiable weakness: the idealistic belief in being loved for himself. (204)

The strategy of gratuitous insult in the previous passage has been replaced here with excessive compliment, but the absurdity of the praise is equally ironic. The discrepant gap between the virtues invoked by the writer and Verloc's actual deficiencies foregrounds the



role of the negative in irony. The adjectives such as "faithful," "trusted," "accurate," and "admirable" in the quote above do not rightly label or describe Verloc. Each of these adjectives listed, contrarily suggest its opposite. In reality Verloc is Steive's murderer, and the scorned double agent, and certainly has more than "one single amiable weakness".

Joseph Conrad takes ironic notice of Verloc's ideal of his self-importance and indolence, and the reality of Vladimir's power over him. Verloc's defense of self- importance gets ruined when Vladimir, the Embassy's First Secretary, shouts "You are a lazy fellow" on his face and demands "activity" from him, and even threatens to cut him off his regular monthly pay (*The Secret Agent* 26). The writer displays discrepancy, in yet another instance, between Verloc's ideal of his self-importance and his actual timidness and helplessness as Verloc gets, so easily, disturbed by " the faint buzzing of a fly" against the window pane (29).

The fly's tininess is stressed against the largeness of the fat-pig Verloc. The big man is not literally or physically threatened by the energetic organism, yet it affects him unpleasantly. The useless activity of the fly is a philosophic challenge to the lazy fat-pig whom Vladimir pressured into action. Thus, Verloc's sense of importance and significance is shattered into dust. Conrad's irony towards anarchist Verloc, thus discloses an absence of community and his utter disbelief in the anarchists. The irony, therefore, in the novel turns to be political as it is directed toward anarchism to negate, negativize and destroy anarchist beliefs and to convince them to merge into existing authority.

Conrad shows no sympathy for anarchists. *The Secret Agent* evokes the dramatic range and depth of Conrad's moral concerns. Conrad's ironic method is a dominant and a passionate aspect of the novel. Conrad's ironic treatment attains his special aim to dislodge the illusions of the anarchists, who, avoiding or disregarding the data of human existence, embrace false conceptions, and remain in the gulf between appearance and reality.

*The Secret Agent* portrays no single, genuine hero. The novel instead concentrates on a group of anarchists. Conrad's portrayal throughout the novel is steadfast in its objectivity as

he seeks to focus on anarchists as shams without principles, and throughout the focus is on moral breakdown, its features and consequences. Conrad depicts the anarchists distracted from their set objectives in the search of means of personal self-aggrandizement or self-satisfaction, even by indulging oneself in immoral activities. Physical passion, selfishness, cruelty, material greed, corruption, ignorance, etc. collectively constitute their character. In this view, comrade Ossipon's immorality and material greed is strongly ironized as Conrad says "the codifying disposition of various classes of women satisfied the needs of his self-love, and put some material means to his hands"(217). Conrad critically observes anarchist Ossipon's immorality while the latter addresses Winnie Verloc, the widow of a very good friend of his own, "I've been fond of you beyond words since I set eyes on your face" (195). Comrade Ossipon further flatters Winnie to gain her confidence in him, in the following lines:

A love like mine could not be concealed from a woman like you,' he went on, trying to detach his mind from material considerations, the amount of money Mr. Verloc might have left in the bank. He applied himself to the sentimental side of the affair. In his heart of hearts he was a little shocked at his success. Verloc had been a good fellow, and certainly very decent husband as far as one could see. However, comrade Ossipon was not going to quarrel with his lock for the sake of dead man. (195)

The repeated focus on Ossipon's material considerations suggest that comrade Ossipon has a kind of obsession for the worldly comforts, especially sexual pleasures and his defense against the same is mere act of duplicity. Ossipon's self projected image of political idealism covers a reality of simple greed. Conrad attacks the anarchist's political ideal as lacking genuine motive, which in turn gives to understand his own alignment with the then British colonization. Conrad just denies each or any offence against the colonial system. The immorality of the anarchist Ossipon sees no boundary when he sets lustful eye on Winnie

Verloc, and pursues to possess her through tricky yet deceptive language. The selfishness and cruelty of philandering anarchist Ossipon, becomes Conrad's ironic butt, who on learning the truth of Adolf's death tricks Winnie Verloc out of her money by pretending to help her flee the country. Conrad undercuts Ossipon's "insane notion of strangling her in the dark" who pretends to help the desperate, helpless and confused Winnie (207). The writer's irony gets political edge as the irony implied reveals anarchists' selfishness, and cruelty through Ossipon's character, who:

. . . heard the guard's whistle at last. An involuntary contraction of the upper lip bared his teeth with all the aspect of savage resolution as he felt the train beginning to move. Mrs. Verloc heard and felt nothing and Ossipon, her savior, stood still. He felt the train roll quicker, rumbling heavily to the sound of woman's loud sobs, and then crossing the carriage in two strides he opened the door deliberately, and leaped out. (211-12)

Conrad, in the quote above, posits the unreliability, cruelty, and selfishness of the anarchist Ossipon who deceives the helpless and timid Winnie in her utter desperation to suffer and die on half way through their escape to the continent after he robs her of her material possessions. Comrade Ossipon, the robust anarchist, "flush of safe banknotes as never before in his life, " makes his escape-a saviour neither to Winnie Verloc nor to mankind. His actions further exemplify that the anarchists are betraying humanity (212). Ossipon's behaviour is neither sincere nor benevolent. Conrad, thus, shows cynical disbelief in the goals these anarchists outwardly profess. In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad's demonic portrait of anarchist motivation is that political goals such as revolution, justice, and freedom have little to do with what really drives the anarchists. Conrad's firm belief in colonial structure is revealed as he disapproves what the anarchists are doing in the society as an outrageous betrayal of humanity. The alignment with the British system inspires Conrad to adopt a very aggressive attitude toward the anarchists' rhetoric of political ideology. Conrad, therefore, exploits irony

as a weapon to disarm and completely destroy them and their political ideals. His projection of the anarchists as betrayer of humanity reveals his support for the British social system. Conrad does not want anarchism to flourish only to breed chaos and betray humanity.

In this light, Conrad undercuts Adolf Verloc, who pretends to be an agent provocateur, the protector of the Verloc family, and the society. The hypocrite Verloc, for personal safeguard, sacrifices the life of his mentally degenerated brother-in-law, Stevie, while bombing the Greenwich observatory wall. This demonic reality gives Conrad's political use of irony a cutting edge. The immoral and murderous anarchist Verloc not only makes his innocent and disturbed brother-in-law a scapegoat to save his own life but also runs a pornography shop as a cover business. In this light, Conrad ironizes the disparity between Verloc's social respectability and the reality he hides. The disparity is ironically conveyed by Conrad's summary of the shop "in which Mr. Verloc carried on his business of a seller of shady wares, exercised his vocation of a protector of society, and cultivated his domestic virtues" (15). Verloc pretends to be an ideal husband and a bastion of the social embellishments by the sale of goods people are ashamed of buying. Conrad's choice of words "exercised his vocation" is the kind of portentous phrase the self-important Verloc might use of himself, but in reality, he is a dishonest secret agent because he is too lazy to do a decent job, and "cultivated his domestic virtues" is a grand description to cover his disinterest in what actually happens at home. Adolf Verloc's hypocrisy and immorality come to the fore when Mrs. Verloc cries out in a whisper full of scorn and rage "he cheated me out of seven years of life," "he was a devil" (195-96). But like Mr. Verloc, Mrs. Verloc is not faithful in her conjugal life, either. Conrad, thus, ironizes Winnie's unfaithfulness as she recalls her early romance with the young butcher and confesses:

... 'that was the man I loved then,'... I suppose he could see it in my eyes, too. Five and twenty shillings a week, and his father threatened to kick him out of the business if he made such a fool of himself as to marry a girl with a

crippled mother and a crazy idiot of a boy on her hands. But, he would hang about me, till one evening I found the courage to slam the door in his face. I had to it. I loved him dearly. Five and twenty shillings a week! There was that other man a good lodger. What is a girl to do? Could I've gone on the streets? He seemed kind. He wanted me anyhow. What was I to do with mother and that poor boy? Eh? I said yes. (196)

The quote above ironizes their marriage as neither of them is sincere to the other.

Winnie's selfishness, weakness and unfaithfulness become subject to the writer's ironic attack since for her, her marriage with Adolf was a sort of contract that guaranteed social and economic safeguard of her own, her crippled old mother and her mentally degenerated brother. The irony, here, emerges from the contrast between Winnie's apparent self-portrayal as a good wife and her inner selfish persona who never loved Adolf in the true sense of the term. Her inconsistency in love gets further intensified and ironized as Winnie seeks help from the philandering Ossipon and pleads "I'll work for you, I'll slave for you. I'll love you ... I won't ask you to marry me" (205). The effects of moral blindness, as the lives and fates of Adolf Verloc and Winnie Verloc demonstrate, are staggering. Adolf's belief that he has been loyal to his employer, to the cause of social stability, and to his affection embodies grand illusion for which he pays with each other, masking their motives in the most insidious ways. They always refrained from going to the bottom of fact and motives. During their marriage of seven years, Adolf has kept his activities from Winnie, and Winnie has never fully admitted to him that she married him primarily for social and economic reasons.

In *The Secret Agent*, the anarchists spout the rhetoric of revolutionary politics, but the rhetoric is empty like their souls. What appears to them is extremism for its own sake. In this context, Conrad's irony brutally underscores the scope of the called perfect anarchist named professor who asserts: "I am the force" (215). Professor lives in illusion with the false belief

that he is a force and could further empower himself by perfecting his detonator paying no thought to the liable disaster his detonating device could cause to mankind. Professor's obsession to master the means of death emerges from the darker core of his motivations which is guided by contempt for the society. Professor's Holy Grail, the perfect detonator, is a symbol of the true promise of terrorism, a moment of violence that will transform a penniless nonentity into an avenging angel. Anarchist Professor's irresponsible attitude to humanity undercuts his revolutionary ideas as that of activating the society's status quo. This discrepancy naturally results in irony. Conrad sees no reason behind Professor's mad pursuit about perfecting his device for nothing, which sharpens the political edge of the irony in the novel.

Conrad also foregrounds a bitter reality about Professor's hidden pleasure seeking tendency, and his nihilism in Professor's own remark in the renowned Silenus Restaurant, "Bear! So be it! Let us drink and be merry, for we are strong and tomorrow we die" (215). The concluding chapter of *The Secret Agent* finds Ossipon and the Professor, the perfect anarchists, together in the latter's shabby room. Their discussion in the room and during their ride to and the time they spend in the renowned Silenus Restaurant, underlines the moral debasement that the anarchists and their actions personify. The Professor wants to exterminate "the great multitude of the weak" as the source of the world's problem with only the Professor remaining as a saving force (215). Ossipon, on the other hand speaks of eternity "a damned hole" (216). The entire conversation is no less morose than their immediate surroundings. Ossipon is in a state of total confusion and knows not where he is going, not even thinking of adding to his "collection of women" (215).

The note of nothingness rings out again in the penultimate paragraph of the novel. The incorruptible Professor is seen; in the very last paragraph "averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind, he had no future" (220). His thoughts, Conrad tells, "caressed the images of ruin and destruction," as he walked "terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling

madness and despair to the regeneration of the world" (220). In this view, Conrad's politics of irony, in *The Secret Agent* undercuts the anarchists who represent a sub-humanism in which madness and despair prevail and rule. For Conrad, the anarchists personify moral corruption and negation. Whether Conrad is viewing Adolf Verloc, the agent provocateur, or Alexander Ossipon, the principal writer of revolutionary leaflets, or the Professor, rigid and dangerous, he depicts them as odious human beings, ugly and malevolent. In this sense, Conrad argues, while treating the anarchists ironically, that these anarchists are mere breeders of chaos with no principle, no virtue, and no tradition. Conrad's politics of irony negativizes the anarchists and attributes to materialize danger such as chaos, vices, greed, etc in the protective cover. Conrad, thus, ironizes anarchism as the consummation of nihilism and its program of absolute denial and rejection of life and spirit. Conrad's ironic method, on the one hand, confirms rather than abuses the British authority; on the other hand, it condemns, negativizes and destroys anarchism as such.

Conrad repeatedly attributes the anarchists with mock-heroic tags and insulting adjectives which simultaneously elevate and deflate them. The novel displays the anarchists in their repulsiveness and degeneracy. Their slothfulness is always magnified, with graphic emphasis on physical extremes, as in the case of Michaels, "the ticket of -leave-apostle," "with an enormous stomach and distended cheeks of a pale, semi-transparent complexion"(39). The vain and condescending anarchists claim, falsely though, to have superior knowledge of the society and the people. In this view, Conrad's politics of irony demystifies the anarchists' pride which reveals that a will-to-power can be a motivating force behind their false claim, will-to-know. Conrad applies brutal irony to debunk the anarchists who live for dreams of power since they are just too lazy to work. Even, Michaelis, whose political ideology is inspired less by suspicion of the existing order than by " a faith revealed in visions," is aloof and pretentious because , with false self-confidence, he thinks himself privileged to possess " the secret of the fate discovered in the material side of the life"(41). But,

Michaels' vanity is easily shattered by challenges from other cynical anarchists as Conrad describes:

He was no good in discussion, not because any amount of argument could shake his faith, but because the mere fact of hearing another voice disconcerted him painfully, confusing his thoughts at once- thoughts that for so many years, in mental solitude, more barren than a waterless desert, no living voice had ever combated, commented or approved. (41)

Conrad's choice of words such as "solitude," "waterless," barren, " and " desert" in the quote above functions to ironize the anarchists' false self confidence. Michaels's self confidence gets deflated by the mere fact of hearing another voice. Conrad, thus, asserts that the anarchists' ascendancy through privileged insight is a sort of illusion not their confidence. In this context, Conrad's politics of irony dislodges the illusion of the anarchists who remain stagnant in the gulf between appearance and reality.

The other cynical anarchists are not free from similar duplicity, either. They also claim ascendancy through privileged insight of the sort. Comrade Alexander Ossipon nicknamed the doctor shows his absolute confidence in the criminologist Lombroso's taxonomy, which he believes, provides an all-powerful key to understanding. Ossipon scrutinizes others with "that glance of insufferable, hopelessly dense sufficiency which nothing but the frequentations of science can give to the dullness of common mortals" (42). But, the baffled Ossipon cannot apply the Lombrosian taxonomy to explain the mad and desperate Winnie, rather loses control over his own self and walks disregarded. "without looking where he put his feet, feeling no fatigue, feeling nothing, seeing nothing, hearing not a sound" (220). Ossipon's blind faith in Criminologist Lombroso's taxonomy shows less his confidence than his ignorance and obsession. Conrad's scathing irony disarms Ossipon and marks his Lombroso's ideas about degenerate types a sheer quackery. Ossipon's false , smug



sense of superiority to will-to-power of science as such, regardless of its validity, thus, adds a cutting edge to Conrad's politics' of irony to denounce anarchism as such.

Conrad's contempt for anarchists gets unfolded, in yet another instance, in his description of aggressive Karl Yundt, the old terrorist. Conrad's attribution of words such as "old" "bald" "moribund" and "murderer" to Yundt's appearance contributes to denounce the anarchists. Conrad underscores the scope of the anarchists since they chant fake revolutionary slogans but do nothing to improve anyone's living conditions. He disapproves the anarchists' violence for the sake of fame and power rather than a means to attain genuine political end. Conrad, thus, ironizes the old terrorist Yundt who makes a show of himself to be the most cynical of all the anarchists. The old terrorist Yundt, torn by age, leaned on a thick stick, fiercely speaks of his cynical dream in the following words:

A band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of the that resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for nothing on earth, including themselves and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity-that's what I would have liked to see.(40)

It reflects the ironic unsaid of the said wherein the old terrorist Yundt provokes his cynicism fiercely emphasizing on destruction in the service of mankind but himself appears " hopelessly futile in the light of Mr. Vladimir's philosophy of bomb throwing" (46). The indolent, toothless, old Yundt completely lacks commitment as to put his words into actions. Yundt's rhetoric of revolutionary politics is extremism for its own sake, unconcerned to offer practical solutions. Yundt's cynicism ironically displays anarchists' thirst for glamour, violence and power regardless of social correction. Conrad's irony deflates Karl Yundt's pretended cynicism as he describes:

The famous Terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as his little finger against the social edifice. He was no man of action; he was nor

even an orator of torrential eloquence, sweeping the masses along in the rushing noise and foam of a great enthusiasm, with a more subtle intention, he took the part of an insolent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses which lurk in the blind envy and exasperated vanity or ignorance, in the suffering and misery of poverty, in all the hopeful and noble illusions of righteous anger, pity and revolt. The shadow of his evil gift clung to yet like the smell of a deadly drug in an old vial of poison, emptied now, useless, ready to be thrown away upon the rubbish heap of things that had served their time. (44)

The irony lying hidden in the texture of the quote is reflected in Conrad's choice of words and phrases. such as "no man of action," "venomous evoker of sinister impulses," "vanity," "ignorance," "blind envy," "deadly drug," to denounce and deflate the cynic self projection of the old terrorist Yundt. Conrad's deft handling of irony undercuts the anarchists' ubiquities, who chant fake revolutionary slogans.

Power and knowledge are perhaps most plainly united in professor's quest for "a really intelligent detonator" (57). Professor's obsession with explosive wares fills his spirit, falsely though, with smug sense of superiority. In his illusion, he asserts transcendental superiority by elevating himself above others:

They are inferior. They cannot be otherwise. Their character is built upon conventional morality. It leans on the social order. Mine stands free from everything artificial. They are bound in all sorts of conventions. They depend on life, which in this connection, is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex, organized fact open to attack at every point; whereas I depend on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident. (57-58)

Conrad's irony is embedded in the disparity between confident Professor and his causal condescension which is easily thwarted by the sense that the multitudes thronging the

pavements exceed his destructive capacity, and thus mark the limit of the mastery he pursues to attain through even the most ingenuity. The cutting edge of Conrad's politics of irony undercuts the anarchists as breeders of chaos and violence as Professor adds with "leisurely assurance: To break up the superstition and worship legality should be our aim" (61). The anarchists breed chaos and cause violence for fame and power, unconcerned about society and humanity, which naturally results into irony. The repeated point of irony in Conrad's unflattering portraits of the anarchists is that their political ideas should not be taken at face value because they are a screen for other motives having less to do with social improvement than with personal self-aggrandizement or self-satisfaction. The astonishing events of the novel reinforce the irony of these descriptions by putting the lie to all of the anarchist's various claims to mastery through knowledge.

#### 4. Denunciation of Anarchists

Conrad's use of political irony functions as a weapon to undercut the anarchists' political ideology in *The Secret Agent*. Conrad's disagreement with the anarchists' political ideology gets unfolded in his ironic mode of narration to denounce them. The ironic mode of narration displays the discrepancy between anarchists' representation of themselves as true revolutionists fighting for the cause of humanity, and their inner reality which is dark and demonic. Conrad debunks these anarchists since they chant fake revolutionary slogans but are, actually, too lazy to work for social mobility. The anarchists are, rather, immoral, inhumane, greedy, hostile, pessimist, and completely irresponsible to mankind. The discrepant gap between anarchists' pretended sense of self-importance and their inner darker reality lends Conrad sufficient room to employ his politics of irony against them.

Conrad's politics of irony owes to conservative political function of irony. His irony, thus, functions to negativize and destroy the anarchists' rhetoric of revolutionary politics. Conrad defends the British colonial structure by exploiting political irony against the anarchists since the latter pose challenges to the existing social order. His position is thus pro-colonial in *The Secret Agent*. He ironizes the anarchists with the view to make them confirm rather than abuse the British colonial structure of the time. Conrad's utter distrust upon the anarchists and his repeated use of irony to undercut their activities explicitly suggest Conrad's pro-colonial position in the novel. Conrad's alignment with the British colonial system inspires him to adopt cynical attitude towards the anarchists. His use of political irony lacks the sense of fellow feeling for the anarchists. Conrad attributes insulting remarks succeeded by words of excessive compliments to the anarchists which naturally sharpen the cutting edge of his use of political irony against them. His cynicism toward the anarchists inspires him to hurl the mock-heroic tags upon the anarchists, which ironically inflates and later deflates the anarchists. Thus, Conrad's irony disarms and destroys anarchists, on the one hand, and also

reveals his support for British colonialism, on the other. His political irony not only negativizes anarchism, but also forces them to be complicit with the system rather than challenge the system.

Conrad portrays no single, genuine hero, in *The Secret Agent*. The novel seeks to focus on anarchists as quacks without principles, and the focus is on moral breakdown, its features and consequences. Conrad brutally ironizes the anarchists' pretended revolutionary ideology by decoding their thirst for personal self-aggrandizement or self-satisfaction, even by indulging oneself in immoral activities. Lust, material greed, corruption, cruelty, ignorance, nihilism, etc build up the characters of these anarchists in *The Secret Agent*.

Conrad's contempt and lack of fellow-feeling for the anarchists get revealed in his description of the appearance of Adolf Verloc as "fat-pig" and one who lives on the "Vices," and the "follies". Adolf Verloc always makes show of himself as an ideal family man and a bastion of social embellishments. But, Conrad reveals Verloc's inner reality as that of a parasite, an exploiter of other people; Verloc is, actually, a repugnant killer, responsible for dismembering Stevie, a mentally defective child, for personal safeguards. Actually, Verloc is a man of moral nihilism, never honest to family and society. The gulf between Verloc's ideal of his self-importance and his actual darker reality becomes butt to Conrad's use of political irony. The description of fat-pig heaviness ironically works against the idea of efficiency required for a secret agent. Conrad ironizes Verloc's confidence and efficiency as mere superficial qualities and the motive behind the employment of political irony against the anarchists is to negativize the anarchists' political ideology, to force them to give up, and to make them accept the British laws rather than challenge the law and order of that time. Conrad compares Verloc with the disease 'influenza' which intensifies Conrad's ironic attitude toward the anarchists. But, this strategy of gratuitous insult has been later replaced by words of excessive compliments like "accurate," "faithful," and "admirable," but the

absurdity of the praise is equally ironic. The discrepant gap between the virtues invoked by the writer and Verloc's actual deficiencies foregrounds the role of negative in irony.

Conrad shows no sympathy to anarchists. *The Secret Agent* evokes depth of Conrad's moral concerns. Conrad's ironic treatment attains his special aim to dislodge the illusion of the anarchists, who disregarding the date of human existence, embrace false conceptions, and remain transfixed in the gulf between appearance and reality. In this view Joseph Conrad ironizes comrade Ossipon's self projected image of political idealism which hides a reality of simple greed and lust. The philandering Ossipon sets eye on Winnie, and later tricks Winnie out of her money in the disguise of a "saviour" Conrad's irony, here exemplifies that the anarchists are betraying humanity. They are saviors neither to mankind nor to the society. Conrad, thus, posits the unreliability, cruelty, and the selfishness of the anarchists through comrade Ossipon's character.

In, *The Secret Agent*, the anarchists spout the rhetoric of revolutionary politics but the rhetoric is empty like their souls. What appears to them is extremism for its own sake. In this context, Conrad's political irony brutally underscores the so-called perfect anarchist named Professor. Professor asserts his transcendental superiority by elevating himself above others. In his illusion, he dreams to destroy everything, once he invented the perfect detonator. Anarchist Professor's irresponsible attitude to humanity undercuts the anarchists' revolutionary notion of activating the society's status quo. The discrepancy naturally results into irony. Professor's obsession is nothing but extremism for its own sake.

For Conrad, the anarchists personify moral corruption and negation. Whether Conrad views Adolf Verloc, the agent provocateur, or Alexander Ossipon, the Principal writer of revolutionary leaflets, or Professor, rigid and dangerous, he depicts them as odious human beings, ugly and malevolent. In this sense, Conrad argues, while treating the anarchists ironically, that these anarchists are mere breeders of chaos with no principle, no virtue, and no tradition. Conrad, thus, ironizes anarchism as the consummation of nihilism and its

program of absolute denial and rejection of life and spirit. Conrad's ironic method, on the one hand, confirms rather than abuses the British colonialism: on the other, it condemns, and negativizes anarchism as such. Hence, Joseph Conrad's politics of irony in *The Secret Agent* relates to his support for British colonialism. The brutal irony against the anarchists emerges from Conrad's pro-colonial position.

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