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The Imagination of Urban Chaos: Representations of Terrorism in Late Victorian and Modernist Literature

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of English at the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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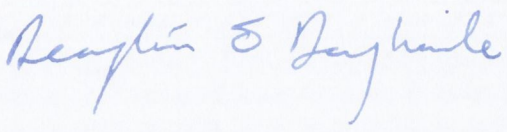

Deaglán Ó Donghaile

Summary

Modern terrorism emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, when outbreaks of apparently sporadic violence by nihilists, Irish republicans and anarchists changed the way in which the public viewed the issue of political subversion. Russian nihilists opened the age of terrorism with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, who was killed by a bomb in St Petersburg in 1881, and shortly afterward Britain was terrorized by Irish republican terrorism when, from 1883-1885, Clan na Gael launched its brief but spectacular dynamite campaign by setting off a series of explosions in several cities. This outbreak was soon followed by the political violence and revolutionary rhetoric of the anarchists, whose "propaganda-by-deed" continued up until the end of the 1890s. The political atmosphere of this period was also expressed in literature – in popular novels, in the anarchists' own journalism and, finally, in the pages of the modernist journal, *BLAST*. This thesis examines the literature, published during the late Victorian and early Modernist periods, that explored the issue of political violence: its presence was felt in popular novels, journalism and literary modernism, introducing to literature the character of the modern terrorist, who became an emblematic figure of *fin de siècle*.

Beginning with an examination of the "dynamite novels" of the 1880s and 1890s in Chapter One, this thesis will argue that the rhetoric of revolutionary politics and the counter-discourse of mainstream conservative opinion made their way into popular fictions. This chapter will examine the place of the dynamiter in the popular imagination by analysing his role in these overlooked popular novels. Chapter Two will focus on the underground anarchist press by highlighting the potentially subversive nature of the written word when employed in the service of a radical cause. The anarchist movement circulated its own underground literature, such as the newspapers *The Torch* and *Commonweal*. Featuring political polemics and speeches made from the dock by anarchist bombers and revolutionists, this chapter will indicate how the writers and ideologues of the extreme left promulgated their own language of subversion. Using previously unexamined journalism, I will explain how the anarchists' desire for 'absolute liberty of action' had a literary application.

Examining the presence of the anarchist in H.G. Wells' popular novel *The Invisible Man* (1897), Chapter Three will discuss how libertarian rhetoric became the subject of popular fiction, and how Wells' depiction of the political figure of the anarchist as a fictional villain, the Invisible Man, is an expression of Wells' support for state

socialism. Anarchism also transgressed the boundary between "high-brow" and popular literature; appropriated by the literary avant-garde, political terror characterized Wyndham Lewis' Vorticist journal, *BLAST* (1914-1915), which blended radical style with avant-garde writing. While Joseph Conrad's novels, *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911), are clearer examples of this modernist phenomenon, this short-lived Modernist publication adopted the rhetorical strategies of anarchism, and presented a subversive form of Modernism that combined radical poetics and literary shock tactics with the explosive aesthetic of modern political terror.

This thesis offers the first analysis of how the literature of terrorism straddled the boundary between 'high' and 'low' literary culture. It enjoyed a unique position within the field of literary production, as it satisfied popular curiosity with terrorism while, simultaneously, inspiring the modernist *élite*. From the popular dynamite fictions of the late Victorian period to the avant-gardism of the Vorticists, terrorism provided popular readers with up-to-date literary thrills and furnished their modernist counterparts with suitably aesthetic shocks. Observing or reading about the terrorist spectacle creates guilty pleasures and even complicity in the pure 'event' of the outrage. Its radical and explosive tactics are of a transitory, momentary nature but their presence in literature is enduring. By describing how fiction, journalism and experimental literary modernism reflected and capitalised upon the spectacular and alluring nature of the modern terror-effect, this work will offer the first description of terrorism's place in the history of literature and literary aesthetics.

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To my parents, Michael and Martina Donnelly, I owe an immense debt of gratitude for instilling in me a love of reading and for encouraging me along the path of academia. My brother, Ruairí Ó Donghaile has helped this work from its inception and my sisters, Una, Niamh and Caoimhe deserve a special mention. Finally, my love and thanks go to Christina Sherlock for her love, patience and support during the past four years, without which this project would never have begun. Above all else, its completion is due, and dedicated, to her.

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Introduction:
Shock, Politics, Literature

Writing in 1757, Edmund Burke explained that "(n)o passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear." For Burke, fear was the most paralysing emotional state that the human being could experience, "(f)or fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain." It also had a voyeuristic appeal, "for terror", wrote Burke, "is a passion which always produces delight".[1] Three decades later, he returned to this theme in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in which he complained that with the overthrow of the *ancien régime*, "(p)lots, massacres, assassinations" had become the stuff of social change. Viewing events in France as an outbreak of anarchy, Burke believed that the revolutionaries were causing violence for its own sake: "(a) cheap, bloodless reformation, a guiltless liberty, appear flat and vapid to their taste. There must be a great change of scene; there must be a magnificent stage effect; there must be a grand spectacle to rouze the imagination, grown torpid with the lazy enjoyment of sixty years security, and the still unanimating repose of public prosperity."[2] Regardless of Burke's conservative view of the Revolution, it is his interpretation that is striking, as his *Reflections...* is the first attempt to understand the sensory impact of political terror and offers a politicised version of his earlier writing on the sublime. Although Burke pointed to the sublime nature of state power in his *Philosophical Enquiry*, as displayed in the torture and execution of "the late unfortunate regicide",[3] Robert Francis Damiens, who had attempted to assassinate Louis XV in 1757, the French Revolution, with its spectacularly levelling policies, turned the political process, along with its judicial spectacles, on its head (Damiens' is also the example with which Michel Foucault opened his 1975 critique of official power, *Discipline and Punish*). It was only when monarchists found themselves on the receiving end of republican justice that the very political implications of inflicting pain and imposing terror began to haunt conservatives.

Burke's *Reflections* presents the sensation-effect of radical politics and an understanding of subaltern political change, or revolution from "below", that is influenced by his earlier dissertation on the sublime and the workings of fear. As will be seen throughout the course of this thesis, the spectacular nature of terrorism

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[1] Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and* Beautiful (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.53, 42.
[2] Burke, Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (First published, 1790, London: Penguin, 1986), p.156.
[3] *A Philosophical Enquiry*, p.36.

(subversive political violence that targets a subject-population so as to induce a state of fear, and thereby further a particular cause) is central to its literary and political presence. Burke's argument proposes that revolutionary political violence rouses the imagination: that "torpid" minds are enlivened by terror is his central, and most enduring, argument. The entertainment-value of political fear was underlined in the late eighteenth-century gothic novel, a genre that processed contemporary anxieties over Jacobinism as horror. For example, the spectacularly bloody end meted out to the villainous Prioress in Matthew Lewis' 1796 novel, *The Monk*, is a typically "shocking event" of this genre, yet one that is based on fears of the revolutionary crowd: the "incensed Populace"[4] that beats her to a bloody pulp was clearly inspired by the tyrannicidal republican mob.

Burke's influence continued into the following century and his theories on political shock were updated by Thomas Carlyle, who in 1837, reminded the Victorians about the "the Sansculottic Earthquake" that had rocked France and the rest of Europe.[5] But Carlyle's scare-mongering also had a more immediate target: throughout the 1830s "official terrorism" was being employed in Britain to suppress agricultural agitation (known as the 'Swing' uprisings),[6] and in the same decade demands for democratic reform were being made by the Chartist movement. This interpretation of political terror led middle-class Victorians to experience political terrorism in the terms that we understand it today: as a subversive tactic that is used, in a spectacularly violent manner, to undermine state power. With Chartism, the bourgeoisie of mid-nineteenth century Britain were subjected to a domestic version of French Jacobinism, their fears fuelled Carlyle's explicitly politicised model of the sublime. This spectre re-emerged in anti-colonial form with the outbreak of the Fenian rebellion of 1867, which, although an Irish affair, included bombings, arms raids and prison escapes in England. European monarchs were again reminded of their vulnerability when, in March, 1881, the Russian Tsar, Alexander II was assassinated by Nihilists in St Petersburg. While Nihilist violence was restricted to the Russias, Irish political revolt continued, firstly with the outbreak of the Land War in 1879. In 1883, Irish revolutionaries in Clan na Gael brought their struggle to England by commencing a two-year bombing campaign. The dynamite campaign is the subject with which this thesis opens: the urban chaos caused in Britain by Clan na Gael shook the establishment and continued into the next decade with the scattered, but nonetheless shocking, anarchist activity that occurred throughout the

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[4] Lewis, Matthew, *The Monk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.355-356.
[5] Carlyle, Thomas, *The French Revolution: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), p.16.
[6] Hobsbawm, Eric and Rudé, George, *Captain Swing* (London: Phoenix, 2001), p.282.

1890s. With these outbreaks, the Burkean image of the *septembriseur* of the revolutionary September Massacres[7] was replaced in the popular imagination by the more modern figure of the lone, bomb-wielding terrorist. Taking his place alongside the symbolically loaded figures of the *flâneur*, the prostitute and the gambler, the terrorist appeared as another modern character at large in the metropolis.

This thesis will argue that modern terrorism – the subversive political violence of an essentially Jacobin and anti-imperial nature that occurred during the late nineteenth century – was a literary as well as a political phenomenon. By examining the relationship that exists between writing and terrorism, and by analysing some of the literature that explored the issue of political violence published during the late Victorian and early Modernist periods, it will argue that a unique relationship exists between terrorism and the written word. Building on the work of Barbara Arnett Melchiori, whose 1985 study, *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel*, analyses literature as an expression of "middle-class public opinion" and anxiety over radicalism,[8] it also draws on Judith R. Walkowitz's critique of the social and cultural milieu of the late-Victorian metropolis, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. This study will update the work of both authors by arguing that terrorism was a modern, media-conscious phenomenon that 'spoke to' its target audience, the educated British middle class, by causing political shocks that were transmitted via the "ideologically charged" pages of the modern press.[9] The explosion of dynamite bombs was made even more 'audible' by newspaper reports in a process that was, in turn, repeated by novelists who appropriated newspaper stories and recycled them as fictions. From the penny evening papers to the more authoritative papers like *The Times*, the entire newspaper industry printed sensational stories about terrorist outrages, unwittingly aiding the bombers in the process by publicising their efforts. This thesis will study the literature that features urban terrorism as a part of this cultural and political spectrum, and will point out that, since the 1880s, it has been generated and sustained by the media.

For the purpose of this study, Walter Laqueur's definition of modern terrorism is illuminating: "The fascination it exerts... and the difficulty of interpreting it, have the same roots; it has an unexpected, shocking and outrageous character... the characteristic features of terrorism are anonymity and the violation of established norms."[10] These unique characteristics distinguish terrorism from state violence and

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[7] Rudé, George, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p.111.
[8] Melchiori, Barbara Arnett, *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p.5.
[9] Curtis, L. Perry, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p9.
[10] Laqueur, Walter, *The Age of Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1987), pp.2-3.

government oppression, and have coloured the reception of political violence since ancient times: terrorism has been employed since at least A.D. 66, when the Sicarri, a group involved in the Zealot struggle in Palestine, murdered their victims in public and in broad daylight; in the eleventh century the Persian Assassins terrified their enemies by striking against them at unpredictable times and in the least expected places. Their methods were copied by another regicide, François Ravaillac, who assassinated the French king, Henry IV, in 1610. In nineteenth-century Ireland, the tradition of "moonlighting", or violent agrarian protest against landlordism, culminated in the stabbing to death in Dublin of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and his Under Secretary in 1882. These methods of rebellion were also exported to Pennsylvania, where they took root in Irish mining communities in the 1870s and were practiced by the clandestine coal miners' group, the 'Molly Maguires'. But during the 1880s terrorism was transformed and updated as an insurrectional strategy with the help of modern technology, the most important new weapon in the revolutionary's armoury being high explosives. These were rapidly developed, made commercially available and became a more powerful alternative to gunpowder after Alfred Nobel patented dynamite in 1867. From this point, terrorism became a far more spectacular affair than it had ever been before, as the explosion of dynamite bombs made for shocking political statements and provided newspapers with sensational headlines. Ever since, terrorism has been practiced by groups and individuals with differing political ideologies, making it, as Laquer has stressed, an "all-purpose and value-free" phenomenon.[11] In recent times this has led to its adoption as a tactic by radical groups from across the political spectrum, and its popularity as a method of protest is attested to by the fact that it has been adopted by the Israeli Stern Gang, the left-wing Red Brigades in Italy, Irish nationalists in the Provisional I.R.A., right-wing militia men such as Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, and by Islamic fundamentalists in Al Qaeda. Because of its adaptability, terrorism has a broad, trans-political appeal and what unites the groups that have adopted it since the 1880s is their appreciation of its importance as a cultural and symbolic weapon.[12]

The progress of the Industrial Revolution and the seemingly unstoppable rise of modern capital dealt severe blows to radical working class consciousness across Europe with the defeat of the revolutions of 1848; the economic boom that lasted from the 1850s until the early 1870s did not favour the radical left, as prosperity

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[11] Laquer, Walter, *The Age of Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), pp.3-4.

[12] Ferracuti, Franco and Bruno, Francesca, "Psychiatric Aspects of Terrorism in Italy", in Barak-Galantz, Israel and Huff, C. Ronald (eds.), *The Mad, The Bad and the Different* (Lexington: Gower, 1981), pp.199-214, p.201.

supported the economic and political strength of conservatives, and mass-protests by socialists did not feature in daily political discourse until the late 1880s, when the suppression of demonstrators in Trafalgar Square in November 1887, known as "Bloody Sunday", encapsulated ruling-class resistance to the resurgence of organised labour. Nevertheless, labour survived the politically lean decades of the nineteenth century and its voices could still be heard by the bourgeoisie. The French anarchist, Élisée Réclus, complained that, despite the apparent veneer of progress, the century was "an age of cruelty and violence", and he claimed that terrorism was the "fatal and necessary" result of modern civilisation. As it provided a voice to the excluded, it promised, in his opinion, to be one of the "external shocks which change the form of society."[13]

The terrorist, especially the anarchist, was the social and political foil to the bourgeois and, as the Russian novelist and veteran Nihilist, Stepniak (Sergei Kravchinski), insisted, this figure came to characterise the political climate of the *fin de siècle*. Exiled in London, Stepniak wrote that the Tsarist regime was a doomed system because of its refusal to accommodate a large and growing middle class. By leaving its working class badly underdeveloped, it attempted to amalgamate capitalism with a feudal ideology and in doing so produced the worst possible kind of autocratic tyranny. As a result of this economic and political absolutism, many of the country's aspiring bourgeoisie were designated "illegal men", or outlaws, by the secret police: "It is from this class of 'illegal men' that the ranks of terrorism are recruited... the creation of this class of men, destitute of political rights, bears the same relation to the sytematization of terror that the creation of the proletariate (or class economically spoiled) bears to the organization of capital. The one is the material substratum of the other."[14] For Stepniak, modern capital bore a direct relationship with violent political subversion, and another Russian exile, Mikhail Bakunin, wondered: "(w)hat can be more filthy than our respectable, hierarchical world of middle-class civilization and cleanliness, with its smooth Western façade hiding the most awful debauchery of thought, feeling attitude and actions". For Bakunin, the question of autocratic tyranny was not limited to Russia, but was one that was relevant to every developed capitalist state, where middle class existence

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[13] Réclus, Élisée, "An Anarchist on Anarchy", *Contemporary Review*, Vol. xlv (January-June, 1884), May, 1884, p.638 and *Evolution and Revolution* (Third Edition, London: International Publishing, 1886), p.3.

[14] Stepniak, Sergius (Sergei Kravchinski), "Terrorism in Russia and Terrorism in Europe", *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. xlv, March, 1884, pp. 325-341, p.336.

provided only "a cheerless and aimless emptiness".[15] Born into a landed Russian family, Bakunin himself represented a political type – that of the well-to-do man turned radical. Because of this universal characteristic of capitalism, Stepniak believed that the terrorist was representative of his era, a figure encapsulating "a certain type of modern humanity, which in our generous age is reproduced in hundreds of forms throughout the world". Arising in the 1880s, this figure was the political other of the prosperous, settled bourgeois and his unquiet double. According to Stepniak's model of modern society, the late nineteenth century was the beginning of an era of endless class conflict, when a "whirlwind of... terrible struggle"[16] had already begun. For him, the coming age would be characterised by an emerging global conflict between the rich, industrialised capitalist states and their internal enemies, the terrorists.

This thesis will examine the presence of the terrorism in popular novels, in journals and newspapers written by the supporters of terrorism, and in avant-garde modernist literature. During this period, acts of terrorism, as carried out by Russian nihilists, Irish republicans, and continental anarchists, caused political chaos. As Stepniak noted in 1884, dynamite had by then "become the accredited symbol of anarchy" and "the banner" of several revolutionary groups. Recognising that the bomb had become a symbol uniting "hitherto disconnected acts" of subversion, he asked his hosts, the British, "are we on the eve of a new era in the revolutionary movement?"[17] The militant Irish republican terrorism with which this thesis begins, the dynamite campaign of Clan na Gael, was representative of this new age in violent political protest. This new kind of terror was a distinctly urban phenomenon aimed at causing political disruption but, as Laqueur stresses, the bombings that became endemic throughout the 1880s rarely achieved revolutionary change.[18] Stepniak insisted that these outrages and attacks were systematic and therefore unbeatable. They "have never been measures of personal defence or vengeance", he warned, "they have always contained an element of aggression, of war". What made them novel, and distinctly modern, was the fact that they were designed to shock and carried with them a spectacular sensation-effect. For Stepniak, "the creation of terrorism" during this period was not just another outbreak of resistance: it

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[15] Bakunin, Mikhail, Letter to Sergei Nečaev, June 2nd, 1870 (translated from the Russian by Olive Stevens), *Selected Writings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), p.186.
[16] Stepniak, Sergius, *The Career of a Nihilist* (London: Walter Scott, 1901), Preface to the Second Edition, x.
[17] Stepniak, "Terrorism in Russia and Terrorism in Europe", p. 325.
[18] Laqueur, ibid, p.5.

was the invention of "an idea, a tendency, and a system."[19] Just as the Al Qaeda hijackers of September 11th, 2001, targeted the World Trade Centre, a building that was symbolic of global capital and economic imperialism, the Clan na Gael dynamiters of the mid-1880s also chose their targets so as to shatter imperial prestige, capture the popular imagination and to shock the British public. They attacked buildings and public monuments associated with British imperialsm, such as Nelson's Pillar, and they bombed the Houses of Parliament at Westminster - the very centre of British democracy, for some, but the dynamiters attacked it for its colonial role in relation to Ireland, as Irish elected representatives were forced to sit there. Their campaign amounted to an assault upon a range of symbolic targets that, at the end of the nineteenth century, fulfilled a similar cultural role to that of the Twin Towers at the beginning of the twenty-first: as monuments to the global reach of their respective empires.

Beginning with an examination of the dynamite campaign of the 1880s in Chapter One, it will be argued that the rhetoric of subversive politics and the counter-rhetoric of mainstream, conservative opinion made their way into fictions, which provided a platform for both obscure Irish nationalist writers and self-confessed Tories like Robert Louis Stevenson. This chapter will examine the place of the dynamiter in the popular imagination by analysing his role in these popular fictions of the late Victorian period. As well as examining more realistic representations of dynamiting, it will also examine some of the nationalist technological fantasies that were written during the mid-1880s. This campaign followed the abortive Irish Fenian rebellion of 1867, which was the fourth revolutionary outbreak to occur in Ireland in less than seventy years:[20] following the Young Ireland rebellion of 1848, the Fenians and the dynamiters proved that Ireland did not conform to the bourgeois model of a pacified, post-revolutionary Europe. After the failure of this planned, mass uprising, which included arms raids and attacks in England, the Fenians' revolutionary ideology was adopted and updated by Clan na Gael, a US-based grouping of Irish ex-patriot revolutionaries, many of whom had taken part in the 1867 rising. Founded in 1869, this new wing of "the American Celtic revolutionary movement"[21] organised the Dynamite Campaign of 1883-1885, during which targets in British cities were bombed by small cells of "dynamiters". Their campaign, aided by the propaganda spread by the "Dynamite Press", reminded the British public that, despite the

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[19] Stepniak, ibid, pp.327, 330.

[20] The other rebellions were the United Irish Rebellion of 1798, its sequel, the "Robert Emmett Rebellion" of 1803, and the micro-outbreak led by the Young Ireland movement in 1848.

[21] Anon, *Incipient Irish Revolution: An Exposé of Fenianism To-Day in the United Kingdom and America* (London: Eglington & Co., 1889), preface, i.

presence of a strong constitutional nationalist party under the leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell in Westminster, the threat of an Irish rebellion was never far away. Pamphlets written by militant Irish nationalists in the United States recommended the destruction of London: "Pour down fire," urged one, "in the way of dynamite, on the modern Sodom, the British metropolis".[22] This new political violence, with its rhetorical "forces of suggestion", was viewed as one of "the various links in the chain of modern socialism",[23] and the dynamiters' bombing campaign was equated with the outbreaks of nihilism and anarchism that were shaking the continent. The Secret Service spy, Henri Le Caron, claimed that their threats to leave "London, Liverpool, Manchester and Bristol, in ashes", amounted to a "system of warfare " that was "characterised by all the rigours of Nihilism".[24] It was also one that created a literary debate as conservative authors who despised their methods and objectives were confronted by radical novelists who, at the very least, understood their actions, and sometimes even supported them in their fictions, as did Donald McKay in his 1884 novel, *The Dynamite Ship*, and Tom Greer in his 1885 fantasy, *A Modern Dædalus*. As Michael Denning has argued, popular fiction was "one of the first mass media" and was "central to contemporary cultural politics". The 'dime novel' and the 'penny dreadful' were "inscribed"[25] with the political concerns of its readers, and Irish political revolt was a recurring theme in popular literature. As well as having a presence in fiction, the dynamite campaign saturated the official political imagination. This culminated in 1887, when CID and Home Office figures invented the 'Jubilee Plot', in which an *agent provocateur*, Frank Millen, was commissioned to devise a scheme to bomb the thanksgiving service in Westminster. The plot never materialised, but the officially-inspired intrigue ended up on the pages of the *Times*, where it was publicised as another Irish conspiracy (in the same year the paper falsely accused the Irish nationalist leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, of involvement in the Phoenix Park killings, and he successfully sued the *Times* for libel in 1890).[26]

After the activities of Clan na Gael's "dynamite soldiers"[27] ended in 1885, Britain experienced another brand of terrorism, as the anarchists at the *fin-de-siècle* made their mark on the popular imagination. Chapter Two, with its focus on the

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[22]McGill, P.P., "The Dynamite Evangelist", quoted in "The Fenians in America", The Times, Thursday, October 27th, 1881, p.6.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Le Caron, Henri, *Twenty-Five Years in the Secret Service: The Recollections of a Spy* (Yorkshire: EP Publishing, 1974), reprinted from the 10th Heinemann edition, 1893, pp.202, 155-156.
[25] Denning, Michael, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987), pp.2, 12.
[26] See Campbell, Christy, *Fenian Fire: The British Government Plot to Assassinate Queen Victoria* (London: HarperCollins, 2002).
[27] Denning, ibid, p.32.

underground anarchist press, will highlight the potentially subversive nature of the written word when employed in the service of a radical cause. From the political polemics of anarchist journals such as *The Torch* and *Commonweal*, to the violent declarations made from the dock by anarchist bombers and revolutionists, this chapter will indicate how the writers and ideologues of the extreme left consciously developed their own language of subversion. Lacking the political centralism of the Irish revolutionaries, the anarchist movement proved difficult to suppress, its membership being truly international and its organisation lacking any coherent structure. As well as planting bombs, members of the anarchist movement also circulated their own brand of subversive underground literature. This chapter will use previously unexamined writing by the anarchists themselves to illustrate how their rhetorical and journalistic efforts made terrorism an explosive literary phenomenon

Attacking symbolic buildings: the scene of the explosion in Westminster. The artist is seated in Gladstone's seat. From *The Illustrated London News*, January 31st, 1885.

in its own right. Their enemies in the establishment considered these pamphlets and journals to be as dangerous as dynamite, and the journalistic material examined in this chapter provides a sequel to the "murderous oratory"[28] of the dynamite press.

Although the British anarchists did not make their presence felt until the 1890s, their continental comrades had been grabbing the headlines for a decade, while Nihilism, which can be read as a Russian version of anarchism, had been undermining Russian autocracy since the 1870s. By now, Irish republican dynamiting was history but continental scare stories, carried both in the press and in popular fictions, combined to create the anarchist hysteria that characterised the decade. The anarchist movement was a much larger affair than Clan na Gael had been: a mixture of revolutionaries, criminals and downright lunatics, it was characterised by its trans-national character, as anarchism was the common political creed of revolutionary cells in Germany, France, Britain, Spain, Russia, Italy, and the United States. Anarchist clubs were considered by the conservative middle-class as a symptom of urbanisation, immigration and even of the spread of literacy. More so than the Irish republican bombers, whose motives were anti-imperial, the anarchists were directly inspired by the French Jacobin tradition. Their desire for "absolute liberty of action"[29] and the replacement of the capitalism with various kinds of libertarian utopias was a survival of the sans-cullottism that appeared to have been buried by the Industrial Revolution, and their journals and newspapers reflected this. For Isabel Meredith, the heroine of the 1903 novel, *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, to "die on a scaffold or a barricade, shouting Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" was her ultimate, youthful, *raison d'être*.[30] She grows up to become the editor of an anarchist journal, *Tocsin* (in reality, the authors of the novel, Helen and Olivia Rosetti, edited the journal, *Torch*), and proceeds, with revolutionary ardour, to publicise her cause. One observer described how anarchists like the Rossettis, with their clandestine printing presses, were deliberately "slippery" and "ill-defined" as they were "founded to meet the special need of a particular moment, and they pass away with the circumstances that called them into being."[31] As we will see with the Rossetti sisters' semi-autobiographical novel, this meant that the anarchist movement was inherently unstable as it also supported indiscriminate acts of political terror carried out by

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[28] Anon., *Parnellism and Crime, Or "The Bloody Work of the Two Leagues"* (London: The Times, 1887), p.24.
[29] Dubois, ibid, p.48.
[30] Meredith, Isabel (Helen and Olivia Rossetti), *A Girl Among the Anarchists* (Duckworth & Co., London, 1903; reprinted Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p.10.
[31] Dubois, Félix, *The Anarchist Peril*, Translated by Ralph Derechef from *Le péril anarchiste*, Paris: Flammarion, 1894 (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894), pp.29, 47.

individual terrorists; while developing an ideology with varying degrees of philosophical sophistication, as expressed by pacifist thinkers such as Peter Kropotkin and Errico Malatesta, anarchism was, at the same time, the ideology of choice for café-bombers and assassins. The anarchists' support for both tendencies meant that violent terrorism was as much a part of their popular image as their revolutionary political theories, making them, in the eyes of the public, a confusing and contradictory grouping.

Chapter Three will discuss how this subversive became the subject of popular fiction; by examining the presence of the anarchist in H.G. Wells' popular novel of 1897, *The Invisible Man*, it will be shown that the anarchists' political culture was absorbed into the mainstream and reprocessed as a source of popular entertainment. Wells commodified a dangerous ideology by repackaging and subtitling it as "A Grotesque Romance", but although his short novel provided readers the possibility of exploring political violence from a safe distance, it is clear that this fiction, despite its apparently reassuring closure, does not fully resolve the problems that beset the relationship between mainstream British political culture and its aberrant other, continental anarchism. As the American anarchist, Benjamin Tucker, explained, "the vast army" of the left was divided into two schools of socialistic thought: "State Socialism and Anarchism". This chapter will examine Wells' novel as an expression of state socialism, or, "the doctrine that all the affairs of the men should be managed by the government, regardless of individual choice."[32] As an anarchist, the Invisible Man challenges the state and offers a privatised form of terror as an alternative to its authority but ultimately fails in his endeavour.

Faced with this new form of protest, the novelists, radical journalists and modernists of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries responded to terrorism by attempting to transform it into a literary spectacle. While right-wing novelists saw fiction as a means of defusing the terrorist threat, nationalist authors and anarchists saw the written word as a vehicle for their political ideals. While these writers commodified terrorism as the stuff of popular fiction, they also transgressed the boundary between "high-brow" and popular literature. Terrorism would remain a staple of popular fiction, as proven by the popularity of Edgar Wallace's 1905 anarchist thriller, *The Four Just Men*, but it also appeared in a different genre, in avant-garde writing. The *modishness* of terrorism, already expressed by the rhetoric of the desperate characters of the popular fictions examined in Chapter One, and in the subversive journalism studied in Chapter Two, saturated early modernism. While

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[32] Tucker, Benjamin R., *State Socialism and Anarchism: How Far They Agree & Wherein They Differ*, 6th ed. (London: A.C. Fifield, 1911), pp. 5, 9.

Joseph Conrad's novels, *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911), are clearer examples of this phenomenon, the processing of terrorism-as-literary-style assumed a subtle and more apparently abstract form in its expression in the pages of the Vorticist journal, *BLAST*, published in 1914 and 1915, which is examined in Chapter Four. This Modernist publication self-consciously adopted the rhetorical strategies of earlier radicals, particularly the anarchists, and, in doing so, the Vorticists presented a subversive form of Modernism that combined radical poetics with the explosive aesthetic of modern political terror. By celebrating the shocking poetics of the explosion, as symbolised in the journal's experimental typography and eye-catching title, *BLAST* illustrates how subversive politics imbued early modernism and updated the Burkean fixation with the sublime, fitting it into a new pattern of modernist aesthetics. The journal provides a literary reworking of the manner in which the shocks of revolutionary violence impacted upon the constitution of the modern subject. As Burke pointed out, the sensational aspects of the sublime, danger and pain, when regarded "at certain distances, with certain modifications", can produce delight rather than fear.[33] This is what the Vorticists wished to create with their journal and its appropriation of radical chic. As well as serving as an example of how the terrorists' efforts were deliberately adopted by the literary avant-garde, the explosive modernism of *BLAST* also complicates Pierre Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production as a political space within which writers take and defend positions. The strategic "field of struggles" that is determined by functions of capital underlines, for Bourdieu, the opposition between art and money, between "pure" art and "commercial" art.[34] But the Vorticists' journal adopts and assimilates terrorism, a political phenomenon that had already proven itself a very profitable subject matter for writers such as John Coulson Kernehan, whose novel, *Captain Shannon*, was published in several editions of both sides of the Atlantic and for other, more mainstream popular authors such as Wallace. This undermines Bourdieu's distinction between more aesthetically "true" forms of literature and other, less genuine ones, such as popular fiction, which were dedicated to making money for both publishers and authors. While Bourdieu regards the literary field as one of conflict between mainstream authors and their bohemian opponents, it is clear that the "field" was also a marketplace in which writers of varying political persuasions could sell their fictions along with their radical or conservative views. In reality, the "field" was an aesthetic arena in which apparently bohemian modernists could

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[33] Burke, *Enquiry*, pp.36-37.
[34] Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp.37, 185.

appropriate the shocking political matter of terrorism and use its notoriety as a means of publicising themselves. When considered in this light, the malleability of terrorism as a literary commodity contradicts Bourdieu's model, which, simultaneously, made for a profitable subject-matter for popular authors while, at the same time, serving as a staple of experimental literary modernism.

This thesis offers the first will explanation of how subversive political violence straddled the boundary between 'high' and 'low' literary culture and enjoyed a unique position within the field of cultural production, as it satisfied popular curiosity with terrorism while also entertaining the modernist *élite*. From the popular dynamite fictions of the late Victorian period to the avant-gardism of Wyndham Lewis and the Vorticists, the political phenomenon of terrorism provided the mass of readers with literary thrills and their more aesthetically-inclined counterparts with artistic shocks. The terrorist "spectacle" creates, as Jean Baudrillard has argued, guilty pleasures and even complicity in observing and being subjected to the "event" of modern terrorism:[35] this thesis describes how modern fiction, journalism and experimental literary modernism reflect and capitalise upon the spectacular and alluring nature of the modern terror-effect. The pleasures provided by the arbitrary revolutionary violence which Edmund Burke anticipated in his *Philosophical Enquiry* and then alluded to in his *Reflections*, lingered into the late nineteenth century, when they were intensified and transformed by the writers who chose terrorism as their subject matter.

Just as terrorism lies at the heart of the imagination of urban chaos, so too does its corresponding characteristic – invisibility. The imperceptibility of trans-national, border-crossing subversives undermined the subjectivity of the modern state, its policing systems and its agents. While the figure of the detective has garnered much critical attention, one of his doubles, the mysterious and charismatic terrorist (whose political intent is blurred with criminality in the figure of Arthur Conan Doyle's villain, James Moriarty), has received very little analysis. The Clan na Gael dynamiters who constantly entered Britain and Ireland from the United States under the direction of the mysterious "Number One", were the first representatives of this type. The anarchists who regularly arrived in London seeking sanctuary from persecution in their own countries, and joined the libertarian underground in the city were their sequel. As Barabara Melchiori has pointed out, the terrorist's concealed identity was important, as anonymity "was brought to the fore at a moment of great

[35] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: Verso, 2002), p.4.

public sensitivity concerning the behavioural habits of conspirators."[36] Combined with their flair for indiscriminately blowing up buildings and carrying out what appeared to be random assassinations, the invisibility of terrorists not only confused police forces but also undermined popular notions of public identity. During the 1890s, when the surveillant strategies of the state were being pioneered by champions of the visible such as Francis Galton and Alphonse Bertillon, and when their methods were being vindicated by fictional detectives like Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, it appeared that a handful of committed radicals could not only terrify the modern metropolis but, in the case of the dynamiters, who carried out coordinated bomb-attacks on the London railway, actually bring it to a halt. Judith Walkowitz has described how the "public" landscape of the privileged *flâneur* came undone at the *fin-de-siècle*, since the metropolis was destabilised by the addition of new enigmatic figures. At this point the city became "a contested terrain" that was characterised by its new spaces, new journalistic practices and the spread and range of public spectacles.[37] This thesis will include terrorism among these new phenomena, and will suggest that the dynamiter and the anarchist ought to be numbered among the "new urban travellers"[38] of the period: for the first time, it will explain how terrorism amounted to the politicisation of the figure of the *flâneur* who is, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, an "unknown man" of the city.[39]

"Anyone is at liberty to enter Westminster", complained *The Illustrated London News* after Clan na Gael attacked the Houses of Parliament and the Tower of London on January 26th, 1885. The paper complained that the Clan na Gael dynamiters, "the dastardly scoundrels who ignited blocks of dynamite in these places", had hidden among the crowds of sightseers who visited the Commons, and made themselves invisible among the "large numbers of visitors, men, ladies, and children, who came to see the interior."[40] As can be seen in the image below, Westminster was not immune from public curiosity, nor from the circulation of people, as ticket-holding visitors were allowed to pass by policemen at the entrance to parliament. From here, they could walk through the Norman Porch and into the lower chamber, the spot where one of the dynamiters placed a small bomb. Another was left in St. Stephen's Crypt and a device was also planted in the armoury at the

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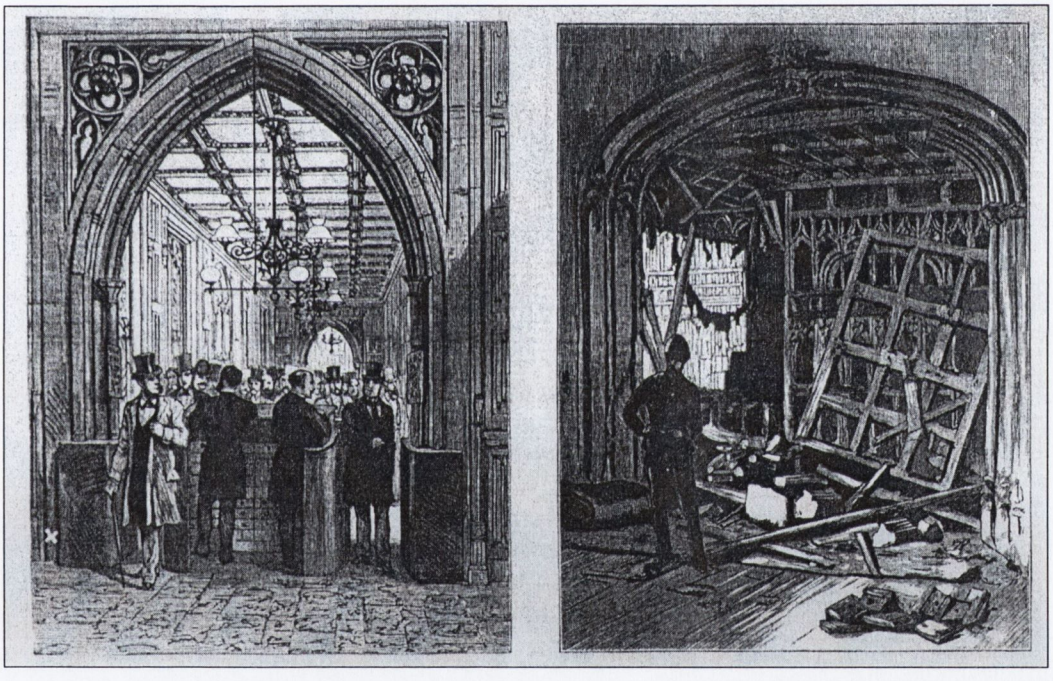
[36] Melchiori, ibid, p.26.
[37] Walkowitz, Judith R., *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), pp.17-18.
[38] Ibid, p.18.
[39] Benjamin, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, translated by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1997), p.48.
[40] "Dynamite Explosions: The Tower and the Palace of Westminster", *The Illustrated London News*, January 31st, 1885, p.123.

Tower, which exploded almost simultaneously with the ones in Westminster. This bomb, it was believed, was smuggled into the tourist attraction either inside "a man's hat" or "in a woman's dress".[41] Just as the fugitive in Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Man of the Crowd", resists the surveillant gaze, or "the calm but inquisitive interest" of his pursuer, and then dissolves into "the mob"[42] and evades detection, the terrorist appeared able to move at will in and out of Victorian Britain's most politically sensitive spaces. It was feared that the bombers who disguised themselves as tourists and planted the "infernal machines" that shattered the bar at the Commons, wrecked the armoury at the Tower and badly injured two policemen in St. Stephen's Crypt could conceal their devices inside a hat or even in the lining of a woman's dress, were no more conspicuous than the next man or woman waiting in



Terrorism amounted to the politicisation of the figure of the *flâneur*: "Anyone is at liberty to enter Westminster", complained the *Illustrated London News*, after the bombings of January, 1885. In the image on the left, 'x' marks the spot where one of the devices was left. [43]

line to view the sights of London.

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[41] Ibid, idem.
[42] Poe, Edgar Allan, "The Man of the Crowd", *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (London: Dent, 2000), pp. 108, 112.
[43] *The Illustrated London News*, Saturday, January 31st, 1885, p.127.

Making use of the urban crowd, both as camouflage and as the target audience whose attention he (or, apparently, she) sought, the dynamite bomber wanted, above all, to capture the imagination of the late Victorian public. In doing so he became another curiosity in the urban panorama. While many of the Clan na Gael dynamiters were captured (including Thomas Clarke, who, in a reversal of his political role in the 1880s, became a consciously public figure as the first signatory of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic in 1916), their campaign had an enigmatic appeal for the law-abiding British public and the newspapers that reported their subversive activities. As with the detective, who, as in Poe's story, belongs to the city, the terrorist owes much to the urban imagination; even after his campaign ended this imaginary sustained the image, and even the chic of the bomber, as one of the most charismatic figures of the era.

The Novelty of Terrorism

As one journalist complained, dynamiting was "not an ordinary crime... it is a new one":

> Assassination of individual rulers, or ministers, we have had from old, but the modern dynamiter, the wholesale indiscriminate assassin, in comparison with whom the Thug was an embodiment of sweetness and light – this monstrosity, until it sprang into existence, was a creature that the ordinary mind was incapable of even imagining.[44]

Terror has a place in the history of aesthetics and, like Edmund Burke, the writers of the 1880s were faced with the novelty of revolutionary political violence. What distinguishes their perspective from Burke's is their lack of patience: while, for Burke, shock lingered on the mind, the terrors of the dynamite campaign and anarchism registered differently upon the modern imagination. These shocks owed their power to the fact that people did not contemplate them for very long, and were received by a modernised public, whose consciousness was shaped by the culture industries of the later nineteenth century. They were far less inclined to contemplate the gradual impact of shock upon "the natural frame and constitution"[45] of the human mind than

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[44] "Detectives and Their Work", *All the Year Round*, 25 April, 1885, quoted Melchiori, p.29.
[45] Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry...*, p.41.

Burke's contemporary readership had been. For them, terror was not a measured experience but an immediate one. Burke's theory explains the workings of the sublime upon of an eighteenth century consciousness but the late-Victorian public received images of catastrophe and disaster in a very different manner, via text and images contained in the pages of the popular press, and in the sensational fictions examined here. These readers were just as voyeuristic as their enlightenment counterparts had been over a century before, but the changes caused by the rise of industry, democracy and mass literacy meant that the sensation-effect of political violence registered upon another psychic level. Terror, as Burke would have it, continued to produce delight but in an altogether different way because the late Victorian public had a shorter attention span. The terrorists who vied for the

Terrorism was "not an ordinary crime". This image, from *The Illustrated London News*, shows the damage caused to the bar of the House of Commons by a dynamite bomb.[46]

[46] *The Illustrated London News*, ibid, p.134.

attentions of late-Victorian newspaper-readers provided political violence for this media age, when economies, industries and technologies of image production were modernising and reorganising social reality.[47] Because it was an age of disjunction and defamiliarisation, they were conscious of the need for suddenness and unexpectedness in their attacks and also in their statements (bombings such as the Westminster and Tower of London attacks were carried out without warning). Occurring within an age of dislocation and media-saturation, and having been adapted to suit it, their tactics represented a new departure in the history of political terror. These shock-tactics were novel: while conservatives shuddered at the thought of aristocratic heads being wantonly displayed before Jacobin crowds in 1793, the new terrorism that began with the opening of the dynamite campaign in 1883 was of a far more transitory, momentary nature and did not allow for much contemplation. Its lack of predictability, the very fact that it could not be anticipated, is what distinguishes modern revolutionary violence from the kinds of terror that haunted Burke's empirical imaginings on the sublime. For Burke, terror was a sensory and physical effect but the "unprecedented sensory complexity and intensity" of the late nineteenth century, with its new media and technologies of communication, such as the penny evening paper, the telegraph, cinema, and the railway, required more competitively violent and immediate shocks. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch has pointed out, nineteenth century industrial modernity was saturated with trauma and with popular images of "potential disaster".[48] The explosion itself became the revolutionaries' ultimate political message in the "sensory overload"[49] of the late nineteenth century city. The bomb attacks against "conspicuous public edifices",[50] aimed as they were against symbols representing the British state, meant that dynamiting and anarchism were distinctly modern types of political protest aimed at capturing the popular imagination. With its staccato of explosive shocks, revolutionary political violence became a very different kind of gesture than it had been in Burke's day, and even in Carlyle's. The stream of fresh 'outrages' that occurred during the 1880s and 1890s fit into a later, more consciously modern mould of political violence that was itself competing for space within the modern media. The vision of political terror presented by these earlier writers concentrated less on

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[47] Crary, Jonathan, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp.2-3.
[48] Schivelbusch, Wolfgang, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century,* translated by Carl Hanser Verlag from *Geschicte der Eisenbahnreise* (Munich, 1977), (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p.130.
[49] Singer, Ben, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp.2, 8..
[50] *The Illustrated London News*, ibid.

its transmission and impact, focussing instead on its residual effect on the subject's conscience. The modernised and updated version of terrorism that is examined in this thesis had a more 'industrial' and therefore chaotic character than the refined terrors of the enlightenment and the early nineteenth century. This work will offer the first explanation of how terrorism fits into this field of aesthetic and literary history.

Chapter One

Technology and Terror: Dynamite Fictions of the 1880s and 1890s

In March 1884 the London *Times* reported on "the Dynamite Party", a collective of extreme expatriate Irish republican groups which, under the umbrella-name of Clan na Gael, campaigned and propagandised in the eastern cities of the United States for Irish independence. The report noted that the newspapers being published by this militant grouping was "the latest growth in journalism" and *The Times* pointed to one publication, *Dynamite Monthly*, which it bluntly described as "the organ of the scientific war". This radical paper, it claimed, had a circulation of 22,000, to whom it reported that a new revolutionary substance was about to serve the "patriotic purposes" of militant Irish nationalism. Enlivening traditional separatist dogma about Ireland's struggle against "that utter abomination, the British Empire" by adding praise for TNT, *Dynamite Monthly* is typical of the Irish republican press-in-exile (known as *the dynamite press*) in that it celebrated the fact that this relatively new high explosive could be put to political use. Not only did it have commercial and industrial potential but, the Dynamite Party hoped, it might also be included in the Irish republican arsenal. The *Times* noted that in discussions over tactics that might be employed in the coming "scientific war" with Britain, "it is dynamite which is most to be relied upon." Dryly, the British newspaper pointed to "the praise of dynamite which is sung with the greatest enthusiasm" and found that many of the extremists were almost overwhelmed by the propaganda value of this new *materièl*: "The very name and thought of the thing suggest ideas to the writer which he can hardly find language to express." The conspirators could only "struggle for utterance" and their ideas were delivered "in a disjointed form, shot out one after another from the intense central heat of the soul". In order to illustrate this point, the *Times* included a sample of this explosive language:

> Dynamite! A few years ago it was unheard of; now it is a household word. This new destructive agent is destined to revolutionize warfare... Dynamite! It is the fear of the oppressor, the hope of the oppressed, and their salvation if

> they will but use it. England especially, the hotbed of oppression, dreads it in the hands of a few determined Irishmen."[1]

The British Secret Service had also been watching the Dynamite Party, one agent complaining that its newspapers were published simply to incite "the commission of outrages of all kinds, by fire and dynamite on British property wherever found, and the assassination of her more obnoxious statesmen." These terroristic "doctrines" were a new phenomenon, the spy warned, as they represented "a departure from the original object of the conspiracy, which was obstensibly the establishment of an Irish Republic by open warfare." The new methodology of militant republicans was the result of their "adopting the teaching of O'Donovan Rossa," leading them "to use every means to strike terror into England." As proof, the agent included an excerpt from Rossa's paper, the *United Irishman*:

> Believing in every effort, of all unions of our nationality, we go further than all, in as much as we recognize the superior forces with which we have to contend, and are prepared to accept stratagem and enlightened science, to assist our weaker numbers... We want and must have that little Green Isle, no matter what agent may be employed so long as it promises ultimate success. [2]

Condemning Britain's "blood-and-murder law", the paper declared: "We say deliberately that if the English will not quit out of Ireland peaceably, every single one of them will meet the fate of Cavendish and Burke" (Lord Frederick Cavendish and Thomas Burke, the Chief Secretary and permanent Under Secretary to the Irish administration, were stabbed to death by a republican secret society in the Phoenix Park in Dublin in 1882). Another cutting called for the assassination of "William Ewart Gladstone, Prime Minister of England, and every member of his cabinet", adding: "We know that this is plain speaking. The squeamish will call it radical." Rossa also promised to destroy England completely, threatening in his most inflammatory statement to "reduce to ashes the principal city of England". Now that his followers were "at war with England," Rossa boasted, terrorism would become "the mode of warfare that strikes such terror into their mortal enemy."[3]

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[1] "A Press Organ of the Dynamite Party", *The Times*, March 24th, 1884, p.8.
[2] Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin, dated 1882, B 171, National Archive, Dublin.
[3] Ibid.

The Clan na Gael dynamiters were the first terrorists to systematically employ dynamite in a subversive campaign when, from 1883-1885 they sent cells of dynamitards to Britain, where they commenced a spectacular campaign of political violence during which public buildings, government offices, public services such as railway lines and stations, and even public monuments were targeted. Although the high explosive dynamite, or TNT, was primarily intended by Alfred Nobel to serve as an industrial commodity when he patented his invention in 1867 it was soon praised by these radical separatists as their weapon of choice in a new era of "scientific warfare". The Clan na Gael bombers used a variant manufactured by the Atlas Powder Company, a branch of DuPont, and by the Repauno Chemical Company in Philadelphia.[4] Packaged in slabs, Atlas Powder was remarkably stable and was used by the terrorists to create relatively crude yet signally efficient "infernal machines" that allowed the bomber enough time to withdraw from his target and melt back into the crowd while its timed detonator ticked along or its fuse burnt away to the moment of explosion. The "Scientific School of the Fenian Brotherhood"[5] manufactured bombs with this commodity, terrorizing British cities for almost two years, and its explosive devices, from time-bombs secreted inside Gladstone bags and suitcases, to less ingenious engines such as simple grenades, endowed the dynamiters with a degree of anonymity that captured the popular imagination. The dynamite campaign subjected the British public to the kind of political violence that had until this point been associated with continental anarchism: Britain had now entered the league of nations being plagued by terrorism, and was ranked alongside Russia, where Nihilists killed the Tsar Alexander II in 1881, the United States, where dynamite would become the radical currency of anarchist rebellion in the run up to the Haymarket Affair of 1886, and other European states such as France, Spain, Germany and Austria, where radical political thought was infused with the science of high explosives.

Sir Robert Anderson, an experienced fenian-hunter and senior counter-terrorism official at the Home Office, later described the Clan na Gael dynamite campaign as "formidable".[6] The high-profile attacks included a series of bombings that targeted the Admiralty at Whitehall, the Carlton Club and the London offices of *The Times* in March, 1883. These attacks were recycled as fiction in J.D. Maginn's 1889 novel, *Fitzgerald the*

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[4] Le Caron, *Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service*, reprinted from the 10th Heinemann Edition, 1893 (Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1974) p.243.
[5] "Irish Agitation in New York", *The Times*, Saturday, April 12th, 1884, p.11.
[6] Anderson, Robert, *Sidelights on the Home Rule Movement* (London: John Murray, 1906), p.125.

Fenian, when the Fenian leader, Brady, proposes an all-out dynamite campaign in Britain. His list of targets includes the Times, "(t)hat filthy and most-offensively conducted organ [that] has been opposed to the demands and wishes of the Irish people". Brady's desire to "shatter into fragments that abominable Bastille"[7] is a reminder of the Jacobin origins of modern terrorism, and of the antagonistic relationship between the dynamiters and the British press. In April 1883, the Special Irish Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department (known since as "the Special Branch") was established to counter the threat of terrorism and the Explosives Substances Bill was passed in the same month. This updated the Explosives Act, 1875, so as to prevent not only the illegal use of any "explosive substance" but also to proscribe "any apparatus, machine, implement, or materials used... or adapted for causing, or aiding in causing, any explosion... also any part of any such apparatus, machine, or implement." This bill specifically outlawed the possession of bombs and any material that might be considered bomb-parts and was also a political measure, as it made conspiracy to cause explosions a crime and, as the editor of the *Times* noted, was designed to "discourage the future visits to the United Kingdom of the disciples of O'Donovan Rossa."[8] The following October Clan na Gael bombers placed devices on the London underground and targeted the railway lines again the following January. The CID headquarters at Scotland Yard was destroyed in an explosion in May 1884 and in December one of the most committed bombers, the Irish American William Mackey Lomasney, was killed along with an unknown colleague in a premature explosion while trying to plant a bomb underneath London Bridge. The dynamite campaign finally came to a spectacular end in January 1885, with more attacks on the underground railway, the bombing of the House of Commons and an attack on the Tower of London.

Terrorism and Modernity

Thanks to dynamite, modern terrorism can be dated to this period, because it was at this moment that the Clan na Gael campaign introduced the British public to the figure of the terrorist and the subversive emblem of the bomb. Up until this point the idea of political terror was associated in the British political imagination with French Jacobinism and the

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[7] Maginn, J.D., *Fitzgerald the Fenian* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889), Vol. 2, p.224.
[8] "The Explosive Substances Bill", Editorial, *The Times*, Tuesday, April 10th, 1883, p.10.

revolutionary reign of terror, but the kind of terrorism associated with the French revolution (show trials, public executions, and so on) was the *modus operandi* of a political ruling class in control of a great state. While modernity proper can, as Marshall Berman argues, be dated back to the French Revolution and its awakening of "a great modern public", with its subsequent upheavals in causing personal, social and political life,[9] the late nineteenth century inaugurated a period of intensified modernization, characterized more by the unbridled circulation of commodities and capital than by the stirrings of political consciousness of the masses. From the 1880s onward terrorism became the method of choice for clandestine groups with access to high explosives and a permanent fixture in the wider cycle of metropolitan distractions, as it coincided with the opening decade of late Victorian modernity.

During this period the social and economic betterment of the middle classes was accompanied by technological developments. Since mid-century, competitive individualism had been on the increase and "the era of the triumphant bourgeois" - with its economic and technical advances such as apparently unstoppable industrialization, the development of the railways, the laying of transatlantic cables, and the opening of the Suez Canal – manifested itself. The progress of capital seemed "irresistible" during this period. [10] In this competitive atmosphere the city appeared to be the place where anything might happen. As Ben Singer has pointed out, these cultural developments reached a critical mass in the late nineteenth century, which was "an epoch of intense social dynamism" that occupied and entertained subjects to the point of "hyperstimulus". In this environment of hot-house capitalism and the saturation of the middle class sphere by the intense circulation of commodities, a sensation-linked flux of images, shocks and urban jolts were communicated by mass media such as sensational newspapers and popular fictions.[11] Always sensitive to and reflexive of the content of the popular press, those shilling shockers that dealt with terrorism, such as Robert Louis and Fanny De Grift Stevensons' *The Dynamiter* (1885), or its dime novel counterparts, such as Donald MacKay's *The Dynamite Ship* (1888) were no exception to this cultural rule. By adding their explosions to the panoply of urban spectacles, the dynamiters' brief engagement with the late Victorian public became a part of the wider cultural imaginary of urban

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[9] Berman, Marshall, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Ferguson, 1988), p.17.
[10] Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (London: Abacus, 1975), pp.15-17.
[11] Singer, Ben, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p.26, p.22, p.8.

modernity as they exploited the opportunities to cause chaos that were offered by the urban sprawl of London and its "new and artificial conditions".[12] In so doing they captured the imagination of the excitable population of the metropolis so that, aside from their political motivations, the dynamiters provided another urban spectacle with which they distracted the urban mass among whom they maneuvered. The free circulation of dynamite and of the terrorists who used it encouraged the writers of these popular novels, so that it became their imaginative *materièl*.

Society and the Terrorist Spectacular

Operating as they did during the high point of nineteenth century-capitalism, when the liberal state was at its peak, the dynamiters also operated against the backdrop of what Guy Debord terms the capitalist "spectacle". At its most basic, Debord's theory supposes that liberal economic and policing methods have combined to create an "integrated" spectacle, wherein perception has been transformed so as to allow society to "function as one bloc in a single consensual organization of the world market". Within this global praxis economics, politics and culture are fused, forming a dominant ideology in which capital is the supreme arbiter. Through a process of fusion, by which means the complicated, contradictory and unpredictable events of history are condensed into a series of simplified media events, Debord's theory of modern society presents a network of systems characterized by "spectacular modernization", in which perception is integrated with history, image with experience. Thanks to the modern media, historical events are no longer interpreted by individuals but are instead digested at first by the superstructure of commodity capitalism and are then reproduced as intelligible pieces of information. In this way modern society functions as "an immense accumulation of spectacles", all governed by the overarching system of twentieth-century capitalism.[13] The spectacle functions as "a social relationship between people that is mediated by images", a philosophical state of being in which text and image are not clearly separated from lived reality. The Debordian spectacle is the result of prevailing economic conditions, "the outcome and goal of the dominant mode of production", an omnipresent

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[12] Various, *The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of the Problems of Modern City Life In England. With an Essay on Imperialism* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), Preface, vii.
[13] Debord, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle* Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith from *La société du spectacle*, Buchet-Castel, 1967, (New York: Zone Books, 1999), pp.7-10.

system of complementary media and structures that lend themselves to "the prevailing mode of social life", so that "the spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image." Given the metaphysical nature of "our old enemy the commodity", the mass-produced and inherently unauthentic, unrealistic product that by its very nature must "shun" reality[14] and which lies at the heart of the spectacle, Debord's vision is of a resilient and absorbent system capable of absorbing and enduring the shocks and challenges of rival structures or even those of a direct attack.

The revenue raised from the sale of separatist newspapers helped fund the small cells of anonymous terrorists setting off explosions in Britain but as well as trying to create a violently political dynamic themselves, the dynamiters looked on as a literary phenomenon developed in the cultural space that existed between the mainstream newspapers and their own press. Consisting of such newspapers as *The Irish People*, *The United Irishman* and *Ireland's Liberation*, the dynamite press exerted considerable cultural influence. While serving to advertise the dynamiters' campaign, the rhetoric of chaos and destruction that appeared within the columns of these subversive newspapers also became part of the urban imaginary and was integrated within the Debordian spectacle of late nineteenth-century culture. The fact that, in order to have any kind of impact, terrorism depends upon media coverage was well understood from the outset by the dynamiters and by their Irish-American sponsors. That the report of an explosion was most effectively conveyed through the reports of newspapers was a fact that was not lost on them, and as one American subscriber to *The United Irishman* revealed, dynamite enthusiasts had difficulty in distinguishing their chosen revolutionary material from their favourite newspapers: "Dear Sir, Inclosed (*sic*) please find $3; $2 for my yearly subscription for the 'United Irishman', and $1 for dynamite. I think it is the most consistent remedy for old tyrant England."[15] As the bomb attack upon the offices of *The Times* indicated, the dynamiters extended their application of this remedy by directing it not only against buildings and symbols of government but also against their rivals in the mainstream press.

Such a vision of a world dictated as much by representation as by lived experience is as applicable to the media-saturated late nineteenth century as it is to our present environment of visual spectacles and sensory overload. As John Carey has

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[14] Ibid, p.12, p.23, p.26.

[15] Short, K.R.M., *The Dynamite War: Irish-American Bombers in Late-Victorian Britain* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1979), p. 104.

shown, the rise of "mass" culture towards the end of the nineteenth century saw a corresponding rise in levels of literacy that fuelled demand both for news and for popular fiction. The passing of the Education Act of 1870 was "a social revolution" that created a lower-middle-class reading public, transformed the function of literature and created a demand for fast, cheap and quickly digestible writing.[16] With its high levels of literacy and the concurrent spread of news media and popular fiction, the literary culture of the late Victorian period resembles our own when viewed through the lens of the spectacle. Bombarded by text from such sources as the dailies, advertising slogans and whatever light reading happened to be brought along for the commute to work, the reading practices and literary preoccupations of this new class of readers were not so imaginatively distant from those of our present day, with its digitised and quick access literacy of mobile telephone text messages and internet e-mail accounts. The dual popular texts of the daily newspaper and the cheap novel were particularly suited to the literary needs of this new reading public and they often intertwined in content and in form as information from newspaper reports made its way into the pages of shilling shockers while, as we shall see, the writers of these popular fictions often influenced popular opinion. Sharing subject matter, publicity and a high degree of circulation, both of these popular literary forms were suited to deal with the high profile political topic of dynamite.

In the case of *The Dynamiter*, the democratisation of literature afforded an opportunity for both of the novel's authors to reassure a politically anxious public that had been subjected to the explosive shocks and political jolts of the Clan na Gael campaign, allowing for the cultural absorption of terrorism. This act of literary containment occurred because dynamiting was a consciously modern practice dedicated to causing destructive spectacles that would, as its practitioners believed, lead to the granting of political independence to Ireland. But as this fiction insists, terrorism became another part of the cycle of urban modernity, and it was ultimately absorbed by the modern and imperial processes that it was designed to disrupt. While at first glance it might seem that, for late nineteenth-century British society, terrorism was an uninterpretable phenomenon that lay beyond the boundaries of social and political norms, political subversion was rapidly assimilated within the panoply of urban excitements, including that of popular fiction. As an early culture industry, popular fiction functioned as a part of the entertainment wing of the wider commercial culture. As one

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[16] Carey, John, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp.155-156.

American author of popular fiction put it, the writer of such novels was no more than "a manufacturer", and a staple of this literary culture was the appropriation of current events by these authors. In this way "the texture of everyday life"[17] became integrated within the popular novel and, as explained below, newspaper reports about violent political subversion were reprocessed as exciting and even pleasurable fictional events in dynamite novels. Reading about terrorism became a form of entertainment as the thrills and threats of actual explosions on the underground, at public monuments and even inside Westminster were reprocessed as a safe but nevertheless exciting series of literary adventures. Yet other novels, such as MacKays' and Tom Greer's *A Modern Dædalus* offered much less reassuring versions of Irish subversion, in which the dynamiters' might succeed in achieving their goal of Irish independence, while destroying much of London and Britain's military and naval pride in the process.

This process began in 1884-5, the year in which the dynamite campaign was ratcheted to its most ambitious pitch, and the moment when the *dynamitards* earned their place in the popular imagination. This was characterized by the series of explosions with which the dynamite campaign peaked on the morning of Friday, May 30th, 1884. The day began with two detonations that rocked the Junior Carlton Club, Adair House, which was occupied by the Intelligence Department of the War Office, and the Army and Navy Club at the entrance to St James's Square from Pall Mall. Within minutes, a third, larger bomb detonated inside Scotland Yard itself. This bomb was placed in a public urinal directly underneath the archival headquarters of the newly formed Political Investigation Department. This section, a branch of the Criminal Investigation Department, had been established to counter the activities of the dynamite party, and it was struck at its very administrative centre. But as the clearing smoke exposed the ruined CID office, the scene opposite the headquarters of the Political Investigation Department became the cause of even greater alarm. The bomb that had been left in the urinal had been placed between two iron screens that normally allowed for the modesty of patrons, but when the dynamite detonated the screens directed the force of the explosion out of the building, across the street and directly into the Rising Sun tavern, which was demolished. Ironically, while the dynamiters had struck very precisely at the very centre of the administrative effort to contain their campaign, they had also demolished the common space of a public house, and in doing so signalled the

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[17] Denning, Michael, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 3, and William Wallace Cook, quoted in Denning, pp.22, 24, 34.

double-edged, even contradictory nature of their methods. Although aiming at the administrative heart and intelligence centre of their foes in the Special Branch, the dynamiters caused a *spectacular*, an outrage that impacted upon the general public by the sheer scale of its destructive force. Even such a sharply focussed attack as this one, aimed against the dynamiters' foes in the Special Irish Branch, underlined how public involvement and interest in an explosion seemed unavoidable.

Along with other "spectaculars", such as the bombings of Westminster and the Tower of London, the attempt to blow up the headquarters of the new Special Branch underlined how publicity conscious Irish political subversion had become, a fact that was not lost on the popular press. *The Times* had already attempted to dismiss "the Dynamite Club" as "a society with a terrible name and object, which however, seems to satisfy all the requirements of its existence by expending its energy in talk."[18] But other papers were less circumspect and the dynamiters were described in the *Illustrated London News* as an "odious gang of criminals lurking in New York and in several cities of the United Kingdom, probably also in Paris, who trade upon the popular excitement kept up by vain and silly acts of mischief". The dynamite campaign was, declared the paper, "a conspiracy that makes war on humanity".[19] The relationship between terrorism and the newspapers was such that even a leading fenian and exponent of armed force like John Devoy could not condone dynamiting. Believing that the negative reaction from the British press was overwhelming, Devoy preferred to foment a widespread social revolution and agrarian unrest via the Land League's *New Departure* programme. As for terrorism, he condemned it as "useless", due to the British establishment's "having the ear of the world and control of all the agencies of news supply". In his eyes the dynamiter who took on the political and broadsheet colossi was "a fanatic of the deepest dye". But the small groups of dynamiters were not deterred by Devoy's reprobation. Instead, they thrived on the reports in newspapers like the *Illustrated London News* because, as one of them explained to Devoy, they "wanted simply to strike terror into the Government and the governing class".[20] For these terrorists, dynamite was its own message.

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[18] "Irish Agitation in New York", *The Times*, Saturday, April 12th, 1884, p.11.
[19] *Illustrated London News*, Vol. lxxxiv, Saturday, June 7, 1884, p.542.
[20] Devoy, John, Recollections of an Irish Rebel (Shannon: Irish Universities Press, 1968. Originally published New York: Chas. D. Young, 1929), p.212.

The Explosion at Scotland Yard, from "Crime and Criminals, No. 1: Dynamite and Dynamiting", *The Strand Magazine*, Vol.VII, January-June, 1894, p.130. The Rising Sun tavern is opposite the damaged police headquarters.

Dynamite Fictions and the Cultural Significance of Terror

Robert Louis and Fanny Van de Grift Stevenson's novel, *The Dynamiter*, was published on 5th April 1885. Appearing less than a year before the publication of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in January 1886 (when he began writing this literary classic Stevenson wrote to Sidney Colvin "I am penning forth a penny [12 penny]

dreadful; it is dam [*sic*] dreadful"[21]), Stevenson claimed that the novel was written "with the bailiff at my heels" and originally intended it for serialisation in a newspaper. When it was finally published copies were sold for one shilling. [22] Written in collaboration with Fanny, his "mercenary" wife,[23] *The Dynamiter* is considered a uniquely "low-brow" piece. A sequel to the 1882 collection, *New Arabian Nights*, the action of *The Dynamiter* shifts variously from Utah, to London and to Cuba and although the precise authorship of the entire piece is unclear, it is certain that Stevenson wrote the bulk of the novel's 'dynamite' scenes, while the tale of Mormon terror, "Story of the Destroying Angel", was, at the very least, influenced by Fanny.

As we have seen with the *Dynamite Monthly*, TNT had a subversive political intensity that seemed to short-circuit the radical writer's rhetorical ability and, in pointing to this characteristic of the dynamite press, mainstream newspapers such as *The Times* attempted to depoliticize and represent the *dynamitards* simply as "criminals".[24] In this way militant Irish republicanism could be criticized as a vacuous ideology and political violence be held up as an amoral phenomenon designed to cause fear and panic for its own sake. The Stevensons' novel repeats this claim and opens with a dedication, "To Messrs. Cole and Cox, Police Officers". Both men were badly injured on January 24th, 1885, while removing a bomb from the Crypt in Westminster Abbey that exploded in their hands. The pair immediately became the subject of widespread public sympathy and the Stevensons believed that the policemen were exemplary "in default of other great public figures", and compared their bravery to the "spectacle of Gordon", who had been killed at the Fall of Khartoum on January 26th.[25]

In dedicating their novel to the constables, the Stevensons attempted to underline its ironic purpose:

> Gentlemen,
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> In the volume now in your hands, the authors have touched upon the ugly devil of crime, with which it is your glory to have contended. It were a waste of ink to do so in a serious spirit. Let us dedicate our horror to acts of a

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[21] Letter to Sidney Colvin, late September or early October, 1885, *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson,* Vol. 5, July 1884-August 1887 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p.128.
[22] Letter to W.E. Henly, 6th November and 8th December, 1884, ibid, pp. 21, 44, footnote, p.77.
[23] McLynn, Frank, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), p.350.
[24] "The Dynamite Party Past and Present", The Times, April 24th, 1886, p.8.
[25] Stevenson to John Addington Symonds, *Letters*, ibid, 30th February, 1885, *Letters*, Vol. 5, p.81.

> more mingled strain, where crime preserves some features of nobility, and where reason and humanity can still relish the temptation.

In censuring the Irish parliamentary leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, for failing to quash the militants within his own political camp ("Horror, in this case, is due to Mr. Parnell: he sits before posterity silent"), the Stevensons coupled their conservative imperialism with self-reprobation for a collective failure to acknowledge the Irish threat:

> Horror is due to ourselves, in that we have so long coquetted with political crime; not seriously weighing, not acutely following it from cause to consequence; but with a generous, unfounded heat of sentiment, like the schoolboy with the penny tale, applauding what was specious. When it touched ourselves (truly in a vile shape), we proved false to these imaginations; discovered in a clap, that crime was no less cruel and no less ugly under sounding names: and recoiled from our false deities. (vii)

Yet beneath the conservative fastidiousness of the dedication lies an acknowledgement that the imagination is changed by terrorism. Despite its reputation as light parody, *The Dynamiter* opens only after formally and solemnly constituting itself as part of the wider effort against the bombers, thereby falling victim to what one expert has described as the terrorists' first objective: to "allow the imagination of the target community to do their work for them."[26] While terrorism's foremost function is to capture the public imagination through the incitement of fear, in so doing the terrorist also becomes the subject of a popular and particularly modern fascination. The rapid spread of information over telegraph wire services and its circulation by syndicated news agencies meant that dynamite explosions could be reported as quickly as possible, adding to the terror-effect. In so prefacing their novel, the Stevensons share the ideological and political platform of the conservative press. By dedicating their fiction to the injured constables, who happened to be objects of widespread public sympathy, the couple plugged their novel directly into the panicky *zeitgeist* of 1885 and the novel was reprinted in May and July.[27] The novel's ironic treatment of the Clan na Gael bombers owes much to the public reaction to their campaign and it was with this reaction in mind that the Stevensons

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[26] Ganor, Boaz, "Terror as a Strategy of Psychological Warfare", The International Policy Institute for Counter Terrorism, July 15, 2002. http://www.ict.org.il/, accessed 28th June, 2004.
[27] McLynn, ibid, p.114.

tailored their story. The couple safely produced an instant bestseller by placing their novel firmly within the conservative imagination of urban chaos, and their condemnation of dynamite "outrages", framed within the dedication to the two policemen, adds an immediacy – what Martin Heidegger terms a "datability"[28] - or an instantaneous moment of cultural reference to which contemporary Victorian readers could relate. In satisfying the popular demand for this kind of "immediate" fiction, *The Dynamiter* fulfils a similar cultural role to the "ideologically charged and fragmented images"[29] of the popular press. Therefore, while *The Dynamiter* is considered to be among Robert Louis Stevenson's least accomplished literary works, it should be treated as something of a cultural barometer, in that it is perhaps the most explicitly and publicly "involved" of his novels. Rather than considering *The Dynamiter* as one of Stevenson's least sophisticated pieces, we might do better to read it instead as a more culturally engaged fiction. Behind the tales that form the novel (including Fanny's Mormon yarn and a Caribbean adventure) its popular aesthetic and cultural purpose rests in its core tale of terrorism and in the central figure of Zero the Dynamiter, whose efforts to destroy London tell us something about how being terrorized has become a peculiarly modern experience.

Roland Barthes describes the interconnection between historical modernity and writing as "dramatic phenomena of concretion" that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, causing "the zero degree of writing... (or) a negative momentum" that "recounts stage by stage the disintegration of bourgeois consciousness." This amounted to a shift away from the classical, or "bourgeois tendencies" that had dominated writing since the seventeenth century and towards a more popular aesthetic tuned closely to "the spontaneous subjectivity of ordinary people". Barthes argues that the collapse of bourgeois literary ideology was the result of the French revolution of June 1848 as this outbreak brought about "the definitive ruin of liberal illusions", as it seemed that French society would be permanently riven by the cataclysm. Combined with the dual economic pressures of European demographic expansion and the spread of heavy industry, this political shift had a profound influence over what had previously been the dominant and genteel literary style. For Barthes, these changes heralded the emergence of French literary realism, expressed by writers such as Émile Zola and Guy de Maupassant, and their tougher stylistics. No longer dictated by a single ideological centre, literature, according to Barthes became more ambiguous after 1850 as "modes of writing began to

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[28] Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p.387.
[29] Curtis, L. Perry, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*, p.9.

multiply" with the popular "repudiation of the bourgeois condition."[30] While Barthes's theory applies largely to the French (as opposed to the British) tradition of literary realism, it does explain why the emergence of literary doubt in this period was expressed by fictions focussing on disaster, chaos and political terror. These writings reflected anxieties over the increasing trends towards political and literary democratisation both in France and in Britain. As the mid-Victorian period in Britain gave rise to unrestricted economic individualism and growing corporate (as opposed to state) power, mainstream readers became fascinated by the possibilities of urban crisis. As the Stevensons showed in their own popular novel, the threat of subversive political violence was just one of these.

Random Encounters

The novel hinges upon the discovery of a dynamite plot in London, "the city of encounters, the Bagdad of the West" (p.1), where three jaded idlers, Edward Challoner, Paul Somerset and Harry Desborough meet in a Soho club. They decide to relieve their boredom by answering a newspaper advertisement offering a reward for "information as to the identity and whereabouts of a man observed yesterday in the neighbourhood of the Green Park." Challoner complains that they are about to embark on the hunt for the anonymous suspect with "no plan, no knowledge", but Somerset holds that their adventure will form part of the continual cycle of urban spectatorship: "The world teems and bubbles with adventure; it besieges you along the street: hands waving out of windows, swindlers coming up and swearing they knew you when you were abroad, affable and doubtful people of all sorts and conditions begging and truckling for notice." (pp.5-6)

Their participation in a metropolitan mystery is inevitable and, on Somerset's advice, the trio step through "the doors of the great profession of intrigue", into the perilous, chaotic city. As "London roars like the noise of battle"(p.7), Challoner becomes the first to make his way into the urban "labyrinth" (p.8). The battle is also a political one, for the friends are about to come up against the Dynamiter, a figure from the political imaginary, and with whom middle class readers were fascinated. In setting young men

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[30] Barthes, Roland, *Writing Degree Zero*, translated from *Le degre zero de l'ecriture* (Editions du seuil, 1953) by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Cape, 1967), pp.5-6, pp.49-52.

of means against a dynamite conspiracy the Stevensons make a literary intervention in the realm of Victorian "counterplot"[31], or counter-terrorism, popularising its politics and methodology. This occurs as a series of random encounters in *The Dynamiter*, beginning with Challoner's adventure, which begins as he wanders through an anonymous, poor district of London. With its inevitable movement towards adventure, Challoner's *flâneurship* underlines Walter Benjamin's notion that "it takes a heroic constitution to live modernism". For Benjamin, such idle wandering and observation lead inevitably towards the discovery of urban thrills and amateur detection.[32] As we shall see below, the tropes of urban wandering and observation are central to popular fictions that address terrorism. Challoner's exercise in detection begins when, while gazing at a lodging house, he hears an explosion:

> he was startled by a dull and jarring detonation from within. This was followed by a monstrous hissing and simmering as from a kettle of the bigness of St. Paul's; and at the same time from every chink of door and window spurted an ill-smelling vapour... Within the lodging-house feet pounded on the stairs; the door flew back emitting clouds of smoke; and two men and an elegantly dressed young lady tumbled forth into the street and fled without a word. The hissing had already ceased, the smoke was melting in the air, the whole event had come and gone as if in a dream, and still Challoner was rooted to the spot. (p.9)

The novel posits the metropolis not so much as the site of objective spectacle as the locus of a conflict that involves the city's modern subjects, so that London demands more than to be simply surveyed by gallants like Challoner: it draws them directly into its political underground and involves them in the urban process of terrorism in which they are made complicit.

Challoner eventually recovers his senses and escapes, but takes a wrong turn and finds himself in a closed alley with a young woman. He apologises for having appeared to follow her, blaming the ghetto for having caused their encounter: "if I have appeared to follow you, the fault is in this street, which has deceived us both." She admits that she is also overcome: "at this hour, in this appalling silence, and among all these staring windows, I am lost in terrors – oh, lost in them!" (p.10) The encounter with

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[31] Anderson, ibid, p.127.
[32] Benjamin, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, pp.74, 69.

the young woman is anything but casual: their meeting owes its occurrence to the detonation of a terrorist bomb, presumably at the final stage of its development, within the lodging house. That most ambiguous of urban spaces, the lodging house, with its transient inhabitants, is the sufficiently grey area within which the terrorist bomb factory can function. And it is within the wider dubiety of the labyrinth, itself a retreat from the state of "battle" that constitutes the metropolis proper, that the young woman is "lost in terrors". Terrorism, then is a symptom of the metropolitan derangement induced by merely inhabiting "the Bagdad of the West". Sharon Marcus has explained how urban space functioned in the nineteenth century as "a fully... political dimension", its buildings serving "as both social products and conduits for social production". Contradicting the bourgeois ideal of a hermetically sealed domestic environment,[33] the lodging house is the most subversive of these spaces. With its fluid tenancy and ambivalent social status, it is the perfect location for a subversive's bomb factory.

As Challoner escorts the lady out of the "labyrinth", "both thrilling with incommunicable terrors", (p. 12) she narrates to Challoner a tale of Mormon terror (the "Story of the Destroying Angel"), in which she reveals her name to be Fonblanque, and that the explosion was caused by her captor, Dr Grierson, while attempting to develop an elixir of youth. Miss Fonblanque then asks Challoner to help her by taking "a pleasure trip... and to carry from one lady to another a sum of money!" (p.46) He agrees and immediately travels by train to Glasgow on her behalf to deliver seven hundred pounds. Before he departs, she buys Challoner a pair of periodicals to amuse himself *en route* to Scotland. On reaching Glasgow, he delivers the money to her mysterious contact, M'Guire, along with a note from the woman warning him to go into hiding. At this, Challoner's suspicions are raised:

> A great and troubled curiosity, and a certain chill of fear, possessed his spirit. The conduct of the man with the chin-beard, the terms of the letter, and the explosion of the early morning, fitted together like parts in some obscure and mischevious imbroglio. Evil was certainly afoot; evil secrecy, terror, and falsehood were the conditions and the passions of the people among whom he had begun to move, like a blind puppet; (p.55)

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[33] Marcus, Sharon, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 6, 7, 9.

Challoner's suspicions are confirmed when the police raid M'Guire's safe house, whereupon he is helped to escape by two of the dynamiter's associates. Challoner's clothes are ruined in the pursuit and he is given a cheap Ulster by the plotters, and, dressed like a tramp, he nervously wanders Glasgow until his train departs for London.

Fear and curiosity inform the cycle of urban spectacles within which the terrorist operates, but the ease with which Challoner slips into the dynamiters' conspiracy points to a more voyeuristic implication, akin to Jean Baudrillard's assertion that everyone is complicit in "the pure event"[34] of terrorism, and in the universality of "that (unwittingly) terroristic imagination which dwells in all of us". His essay, "The Spirit of Terrorism", which was originally published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* in the aftermath of the World Trade Centre atrocity of September 2001, could, despite the author's reputation as an exponent of high cultural theory, be considered as another newspaper discourse on the subject of political violence. In the essay Baudrillard points to way in which terrorism trades upon the popular imagination of disaster:

> The fact that we have dreamt of this event, that everyone without exception has dreamt of it - because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree, - is unacceptable to the Western moral conscience. Yet it is a fact... we can say that they *did* it, but we *wished for* it. If this is not taken into account, the event loses any symbolic dimension. It becomes a pure accident, a purely arbitrary act, the murderous phantasmagoria of a few fanatics, and all that would then remain would be to eliminate them. Now, we know very well that this is not how it is. Which explains all the counterphobic ravings about exorcizing evil: it is because it is there, everywhere, like an obscure object of desire. Without this deep-seated complicity, the event would not have had the resonance it has, and in their symbolic strategy the terrorists doubtless know that they can count on this unavowable complicity.[35]

Here, as everywhere, Baudrillard's mode is hyperbolic. While he overstates the case for large-scale, personal responsibility in terrorism, his argument does indicate how modern and postmodern society have been thoroughly taken by the *idea* of terrorism. The anticipation of destruction, with twenty-first century images of airplanes crashing into

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[34] Baudrillard, Jean, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, p.4.
[35] Ibid, pp.5-6.

skyscrapers, or nineteenth-century motifs such as the Gladstone bag containing an infernal machine, are as emblematic of modernity as those of space flight and the internet. Therefore Challoner's apparently random implication within the terrorists' "imbroglio", combined with Miss Fonblanque's attempt to pass off his role as bag-man as "a pleasure trip", periodicals and all, points to the Stevensons' quite modern sense of how terrorism functions. Involvement in terrorism occurs as a pleasure and amusement not only for the fictional protagonist but also for the reader, serving as a cultural excursion into the political underground that allows for a degree of entry within the plotters' circle that newspaper reports on their own can never fully create. The gulling of Challoner by the fugitive woman, and his ingress into the fringe of her conspiracy, does indicate a particularly modern predisposition not only toward *being* terrorised, but also toward being implicated with the terrorists themselves. This syndrome is repeated in Don DeLillo's 1977 novel, *Players*, in which a bored stockbroker, Lyle Wynant, become joins a terrorist cell after witnessing a murder at the stock exchange. As David Harvey advocates, we have inhabited an extended period of modernity, since the mid-to-late nineteenth century, within which "it is almost impossible to tell where the modernist impulse begins or ends",[36] rather than two clearly delineated eras of modernism and postmodernism. This period has been characterised by the Foucauldian notion of panopticism - the saturation of society by surveillant technologies and practices to which people are unavoidably attached, from the school room to the prison yard and the high-street security camera. Considered against this panoptical dialectic, terrorism offers a counter-strategy, as Baudrillard has explained, by means of which individuals might actually attack state power.

Subverting Suburbia

Paul Somerset's adventure, "The Superfluous Mansion", provides another point of contact with the dynamiters and suggests that advertising might be the means of enchantment and contact for both the terrorist and the terrorised. The story underlines Walter Benjamin's theory that advertising is symptomatic of "the advent of new

[36] Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 339.

velocities", giving life "an altered rhythm" and announcing its "new tempo" in "the most unforeseen ways",[37] bringing Somerset into contact with M'Guire, this time in London's suburbia. Equally bored by the city, Somerset also steps into the metropolitan swell at the same time as Challoner:

> In the continual stream of passers-by, on the sealed fronts of houses, on the posters that covered the hoardings, and in every lineament and throb of the great city he saw a mysterious and hopeful hieroglyph. But although the elements of adventure were streaming by him as thick as drops of water in the Thames, it was in vain that, putting fortune to the touch, he even thrust himself into the way and came into direct collision with those of more promising demeanour. Persons brimful of secrets, persons pining for affection, persons perishing for lack of help or counsel, he was sure he could perceive on every side; but by some contrariety of fortune, each passed upon his way without remarking the young gentleman, and went further (surely to fare worse!) in quest of the confidant, the friend, or the adviser. To thousands he must have turned an appealing countenance, and yet no one regarded him. (p.59)

Despite the romantic potential of the city and Somerset's hopeful faith in the urban "hieroglyphs" of people, architecture and advertisements, and despite his deliberate collisions with those he believes to be most desperate for help, his search for an adventure goes unfulfilled. In a city overflowing with secrets, affections and private despairs, Somerset is as anonymous and invisible as the rest of the urban crowd that he mingles with, and is himself yet another unreadable and unremarkable symbol in the urban graphology of London. But he is soon beckoned into a brougham by a mysterious elderly lady and is driven to a western suburb, where they stop "before a stately and severe mansion in a spacious square"(p.62). The lady asks Somerset to keep an eye out for her estranged runaway daughter ("Some whim about oppressed nationalities – Ireland, Poland, and the like – has turned her brain") who has assumed the pseudonyms Lake and Fonblanque. (p.73) She also tells him that, since an assassination attempt on her last tenant, Prince Florizel (the protagonist of "The Suicide Club" in Stevenson's prequel, *New Arabian Nights*), she has not rented her mansion. Somerset owns to having been tempted to join a conspiracy - "I held at one time very liberal opinions, and should certainly have joined a secret society if I had been able to find one"(p.87) –

[37] Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, p.65.

before the lady asks him to look after the mansion while she retires to the continental spas. Somerset agrees and advertises for tenants, placing a small bill in the window.

Somerset is answered by the suitably anonymous Mr. Jones, who, along with an Irish maid, rents the room. Jones appears as another unreadable urban hieroglyph, quickly arousing Somerset's suspicion. Among his visitors, he receives "a man of powerful figure, strong lineaments, and a chin-beard in the American fashion." As well as provoking suspicion by the Yankee cut of his beard, the stranger carries a heavy portmanteau. Suspicious that the visitor might be looting the house, Somerset plays drunk and knocks the bag from his shoulder, to which the stranger reacts in horror. As Somerset retires to bed, a deeper suspicion sets in: "What, he asked himself, had been the contents of the black portmanteau? Stolen goods? the carcass of one murdered? or – and at the thought he sat upright in bed – an infernal machine?" (pp.100-101) Later, Somerset takes advantage of Jones' absence to ply the lodger's Irish maid with drink, whereupon she reveals that the bearded visitor's name is M'Guire.

Somerset's innocent window dressing attracts both Jones the bomb-maker and the terrorist M'Guire. The dangers of the age of commercial proclamation and manifesto lie in the random appeal of the advertisement, which provides the dynamiters with the necessary means of entry into the suburban "palace of delight". In so advertising the mansion Somerset reveals the subversive possibilities inherent in such spaces of unbridled consumption as the suburb of Golden Square is suddenly made more urban, and the terrors of the seedy lodging-houses are introduced into a grander, bourgeois world of conspicuous display. The terrorist functions in the age of advertising and consumption and he is especially modern because of this: colour, language and design all also serve as the constituent parts of the corresponding "poetry" of his dynamite outrages. When Somerset inspects his lodger's room, it is completely transformed:

> Somerset mounted at once to the first story, and opened the door of the drawing-room, which was brilliantly lit by several lamps. It was a great apartment; looking on the square with three tall windows, and joined by a pair of ample folding doors to the next room; elegant in proportion, papered in sea-green, furnished in velvet of a delicate blue, and adorned with a majestic mantelpiece of variously tinted marbles. Such was the room that Somerset remembered; that which he now beheld was changed in almost every feature: the furniture covered with a figured chintz; the walls hung with a rhubarb-coloured paper, and diversified by the curtained recesses for no less than

> seven windows. It seemed to himself that he must have entered, without observing the transition, into the adjoining house. Presently from these more specious changes, his eye condescended to the many curious objects with which the floor was littered. Here were the locks of dismounted pistols; clocks and clockwork in every stage of demolition, some still busily ticking, some reduced to their dainty elements; a great company of carboys, jars and bottles; a carpenter's bench and a laboratory table. (p.103)

The transformation of a scene of suburban domestic familiarity into a bomb factory is the bourgeois nightmare come true, a subversion of British domestic ideology of enclosure and security from the perils of the city streets.[38] Immediately on becoming a lodging house the private home is transformed into a terrorist's nest. Like the lodging-house laboratory that Challoner stumbles across, the subversive's new suburban workshop threatens to introduce the bourgeois interior to the kind of chaos that characterises "the Bagdad of the West". In transforming the mansion into a transitory space Somerset has made the dynamiters' operation possible and as the site of manufacture of infernal machines, the twin symbols of Victorian bourgeois domesticity, the mansion, and suburbia, are subverted while inside the bomb factory, the components of the infernal machines are plain, domestic commodities such as clocks. The back drawing-room is also changed and the room contains "a whole arsenal of diabolical explosives":

> On a table several wigs and beards were lying spread; about the walls hung an incongruous display of suits and overcoats; and conspicuous among the last the young man observed a large overall of the most costly sealskin. In a flash his mind reverted to the advertisement in the *Standard* newspaper. The great height of his lodger, the disproportionate breadth of his shoulders, and the strange particulars of his instalment, all pointed to the same conclusion. (pp.103-104)

While examining the scene, Somerset is interrupted by his lodger, who reveals that he is the bomber, Zero. The terrorist explains his reliance upon anonymity:

> 'If you love romance (as artists do), few lives are more romantic than that of the obscure individual now addressing you. Obscure yet famous. Mine is an anonymous, infernal glory. By infamous means, I work towards my bright

[38] Marcus, ibid, pp.89-90.

> purpose. I found the liberty and peace of a poor country desperately abused; the future smiles upon that land; yet, in the meantime, I lead the existence of a hunted brute, work towards appalling ends, and practice hell's dexterities.' (p.106)

Zero's appreciation of the destructive power of his bombs is a politically subversive version of the aesthetic consciousness, as outlined by Walter Pater in his 1873 collection of essays, *The Renaissance*. Describing art ("music, poetry, artistic and accomplished forms of human life") as "receptacles of so many powers or forces", Pater represents the aesthete as "he who experiences these impressions strongly" and is tuned into these "powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations". Pater's theory of art as force fits into Zero's political requirement of "romance" and a "bright purpose", or cause. In *The Renaissance* Pater proposes that "the critic should posses ... a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects." The Stevensons ridicule aestheticism with Zero's romantic attraction to the purity and brightness of his revolutionary goal but in doing so *The Dynamiter* also points to what is inherently chic about terrorism: as the heat, or pure energy, of Zero's explosions can be compared to the aesthetic "heat of... genius" in which the artist's imagination is "wholly fused and transformed",[39] there is something stylish and particularly modern about his methods of causing explosions. Pater's own regard for aestheticism as an "outbreak" of "antinomianism", a "spirit of rebellion against the moral and religious ideas" that dominate any given epoch[40] adds subversive relish to matters artistic.

While explaining the aesthetic nature of his political violence Zero makes the crucial point that dynamite is both a novel substance and symbol:

> What with the loss of plant and the almost insuperable scientific difficulties of the task, our friends in France are almost ready to desert the chosen medium. They propose, instead, to break up the drainage system of cities and sweep off whole populations with the devastating typhoid pestilence: a tempting and scientific project: a process, indiscriminate indeed, but of idyllical simplicity. I recognize its elegance; but, sir, I have something of the poet in my nature; something, possibly, of the tribune. And for my small part, I shall remain

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[39] Pater, Walter, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Preface, xxix-xxxi.
[40] Ibid, p.16.

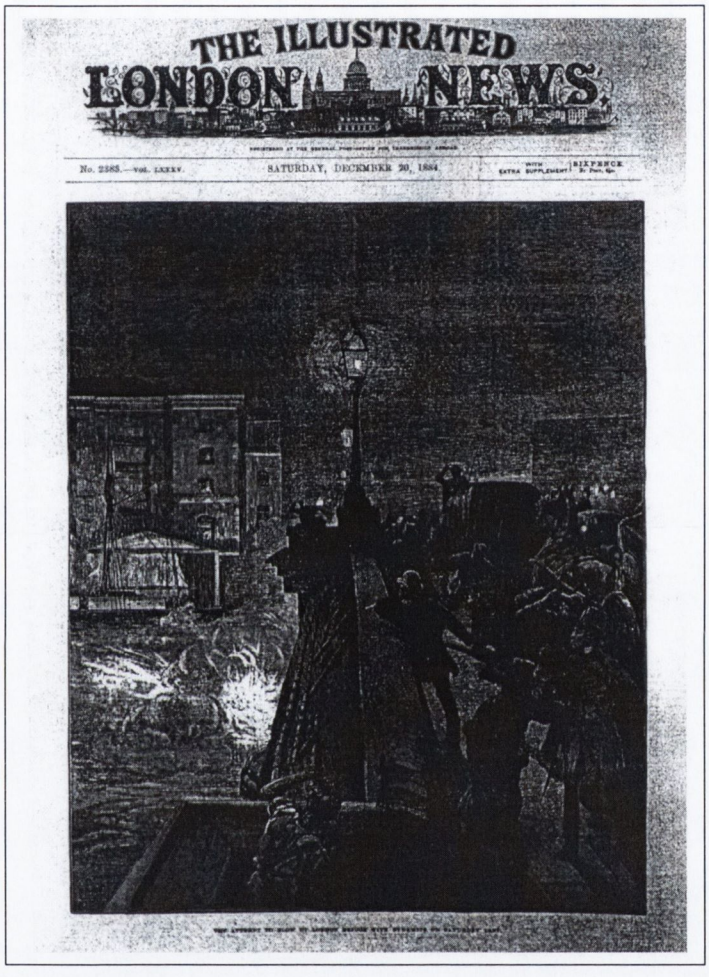
> devoted to that more emphatic, more striking, and (if you please) more popular method of the explosive bomb." (pp.107-108)

Zero links the poetry of the explosion to the poetics of the statement and to the striking rhetoric of subversive propaganda. Within this verbal matrix, wherein bombs are formed by language as much as by the scientific structure of the component chemical and mechanical parts discovered by Somerset in the back drawing room, terrorism becomes its own message as the line between political content (ie. the dynamiters' demands for Irish independence) and the spectacular nature of the terrorist's methods become blurred. The cultural imaginary from which the Stevensons wrote projected terrorism as the end symptom of uncontrolled language and bombing becomes a form of a linguistic avant-gardism. In Zero's words, "the star of dynamite... has risen for the oppressed" (p.106). Zero's proposal of an aesthetic function for his bombs suggests that there is something distinctly different, and peculiarly modern, about setting off infernal machines, and he gives the example of his accomplice, M'Guire's, attempt to set off a device inside a cab: "'he had engineered a striking act of dynamite; for what could be more pictorial, what more effective, than the explosion of a hansom cab as it sped rapidly along the streets of London?'" (p.116) But the cabman refuses to take the bag, and in desperation M'Guire throws it in the Thames, where it explodes: "a dull and choked explosion shook the solid masonry of the Embankment, and far out in the river a momentary fountain rose and disappeared." (p.117) As shown in the *Illustrated London News*' report, below, "striking" acts of dynamite did indeed have a very "pictorial" quality.

In order to reinforce this point, Zero then takes Somerset onto the roof of the mansion, in order to "behold the plain of battle":

> 'Here,' cried Zero, 'you behold this field of city, rich, crowded, laughing with the spoil of continents; but soon, how soon, to be laid low! Some day, some night, from this coign of vantage, you shall perhaps be startled by the detonation of the judgment gun – not sharp and empty like the crack of cannon, but deep-mouthed and unctuously solemn. Instantly thereafter, you shall behold the flames break forth. Ay,' he cried, stretching forth his hand, 'ay, that will be a day of retribution. Then shall the pallid constable flee side by side with the detected thief. Blaze!' he cried, 'blaze, derided city! Fall, flatulent monarchy, fall like Dagon!' (p.123)

Reminiscent of cliff-top revelation scenes, such as that with which Charles Maturin concluded his 1820 gothic novel, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, this moment in *The Dynamiter* underlines the demonic character of the political villain. As well as practising "hell's dexterities", Zero employs apocalyptic language that updates and politicizes Stevenson's


THE ILLUSTRATED
LONDON NEWS

No. 2385.—vol. LXXXV. SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1884 SIXPENCE

"a dull and choked explosion shook the solid masonry of the Embankment, and far out in the river a momentary fountain rose and disappeared." – An illustration of the explosion that occurred underneath London Bridge, from *The Illustrated London News*, December 20th, 1884.

childhood terror of the Satanic, as instilled by his nursemaid, Alison Cunningham, or "Cummy". A religious maniac "of the severest stripe"[41], Cummy told the young

[41] McLynn, p.13.

Stevenson morbid, Calvinist tales of terror and the author famously dedicated his collection, *A Child's Garden of Verses*, to Cummy, ("My second mother, my first wife, / The angel of my infant life"[42]) but her fanatically religious influence is also discernable in uncanny stories such as "Thrawn Janet" (1881). In this tale a young rustic woman is possessed by "the de'il", the "singular" and malevolent "Black Man" of Scottish superstition, and must then be destroyed by a righteous minister.[43] Zero shares the Black Man's devilish anonymity and his time is expended equally upon evading identification as it is spent on constructing bombs:

> 'Jones, Brietman, Higginbotham, Pumpernickel, Daviot, Henderland, by all or any of these you may address me,' said the plotter; for all I have at some time borne. Yet that which I most prize, that which is most feared, hated, and obeyed, is not a name to be found in your directories; it is not a name current in post-offices or banks; and indeed, like the celebrated Clan M'Gregor, I may justly describe my self as being nameless by day. But,' he continued, rising to his feet, 'by night, and among my desperate followers, I am the redoubted Zero.'

Despite his reference to rebels like the outlawed highland clan MacGregor (romantic Scottish highlanders are a Stevensonian staple, appearing in *Kidnapped* [1886] and *Catriona* [1893]), Zero's assumed identities, along with his anonymity (there is no more anonymous a title than Zero, which is also a pun on Rossa's *nom de plume*, "Number One") points to a persistent theme that has always characterised terrorism.

The Dynamiter is situated at the threshold of modern terrorist fiction. Stressing the mutuality that is shared between the terrorist and the terrorized, within which terrorism becomes a self-valorizing process of setting off explosions, which themselves function as urban spectacles, the novel ends with the terrorist's auto-destruction by a newspaper stand on a railway platform:

> 'This is a very cold parting,' sighed the dynamiter; and still followed by Somerset, he began to descend the platform. This was now bustling with passengers; the train for Liverpool was just about to start, another had but recently arrived; and the double tide made movement difficult. As the pair

[42] Stevenson, Robert Louis, "To Allison Cunningham", *A Child's Garden of Verses* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2000), p.5.
[43] Stevenson, "Thrawn Janet", *The Body Snatcher and Other Stories* (London: Phoenix, 1999), pp.26, 30.

> reached the neighbourhood of the bookstall, however, they came into an open space; and here the attention of the plotter was attracted by a *Standard* broadside bearing the words: "Second Edition: Explosion in Golden Square." His eye lighted; groping in his pocket for the necessary coin, he sprang forward – his bag knocked sharply on the corner of the stall – and instantly, with a formidable report, the dynamite exploded. When the smoke cleared away the stall was seen much shattered, and the stall keeper running forth in terror from the ruins; but of the Irish patriot or the Gladstone bag no adequate remains were to be found. (p.182)

With the final ironic vaporization of the bomber by his own device, an explosion caused by Zero's hasty reaction to a newspaper report of his latest bombing, the Stevensons' suggest that terrorism is self-reflexive. The terrorist's addiction to media coverage serves as a means of reflection, and one that is self-perpetuating, since for Zero, and indeed for Rossa, causing explosions becomes its own reality. This is what makes terrorism a "truly all-purpose and value-free"[44] phenomenon: promising to avenge Ireland by making Britain "a smouldering ruin of ashes",[45] Rossa's (and Zero's) radical language depends more on its shock-effect rather than on any political content. The rhetorical stance of "Number One" and his fictional counterpart, Zero, explains why other Irish republicans such as John Devoy could not support the dynamiters. Zero is killed within the circulation of modernity and its media, where the train platform, bustling crowds and newspaper stand converge. The final explosion marks terrorism's absorption within the schema of urban modernity, so that instead of ending the city's cycle the terrorist is appropriated by it. Exploding upon the platform and amid the moving crowd, Zero is atomised, fusing with the scattered remains of the daily papers and achieves, with his final explosion, not the destruction of the system that he opposes but a literal synchronicity with it; rather than disrupting the metropolitan rhythm the terrorist is instead "processed" within it. Zero's end is modelled on the fate of William Mackey Lomasney, the prodigious dynamiter and veteran of the fenian uprising of 1867 who, along with an unknown colleague, was killed in a premature but "tremendous" explosion while trying to plant a bomb underneath London Bridge on December 13th 1884. With Mackey's death, noted the *Times*, Irish republican subversion became "of merely historical interest", adding: "there is something reassuring in the demonstration that the criminals who act –

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[44] Laqueur, Walter, *The Age of Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1987), p.5.
[45] Chief Secretary's Office, Dublin, dated 1882, B 171, National Archive, Dublin.

whatever may be the case with those who merely plot – do not work with impunity... and that two, literally hoist with their own petard, lie dead at the bottom of the Thames." With more than a hint of satisfaction, the paper noted that although two lives were lost in the London Bridge attack, "they were the lives of the miscreants themselves."[46]

Stevenson and Political Chaos

Almost three years after the publication of *The Dynamiter*, Robert Louis Stevenson provided another insight into his political imagination and the conservative context that led him and Fanny, to write the novel. During his 1887-1888 winter convalescence at Lake Saranac in the Adirondack Mountains in New York State Stevenson accepted an offer from Scribner's Magazine to write a series of twelve monthly essays on any subject of his own choosing.[47] One of these, "Confessions of a Unionist" was returned by Charles Scribner in proof and it lay in obscurity until it was auctioned for $11.00 by Fanny's daughter, Belle Strong, in 1914. It remained unprinted until the moment of Irish independence in 1921, when a private publisher finally felt that Stevenson's views on matters Irish had become current again.[48]

Already outraged at the treatment of the family of a County Kerry farmer, John Connolly Curtin, who were being boycotted by the Land League after he had repulsed a midnight attack by "Moonlighters", Stevenson had toyed with the notion of travelling to the victims' farm, so as to "throw a bulls-eye light upon this cowardly business" and end the "scaffolding of oppression", as he described the boycott, and he asked: "is not excitement the proper reward of doing anything both right and a little dangerous?" However Stevenson quickly abandoned the idea, and later added that "Ireland as a place on the map, as a spot to go, has always been with me the object of an unending repulsion, like what one feels about touching toads." This distaste for things Irish is amplified in "Confessions..." and the hard-hitting essay, intended as "a talk on things

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[46] "The Dynamite Party, Past and Present", *The Times*, April 24th, 1886, p.8.
[47] McLynn, ibid, p.280.
[48] Stevenson, Robert Louis, Prefatory Note, *Confessions of a Unionist: An Unpublished 'Talk on Things Current'* (Cambridge, Mass.: Privately Printed, 1921.).

current",[49] recommends that agrarian rebellion and dynamite terrorism be suppressed by the application of American-style lynch-law. The article begins by criticising the US press for not adequately condemning such incidents as the Curtin boycott and for leading the average American to believe that Irish agrarian unrest was just "some 'job about landlords'". The Irish, he claimed, were not the victims of landlords but of "their own inertia", while "coercion acts... should be called protection acts" as they are "directed simply against crime", or "the Jacobin system" in Ireland. Here, "the scum of a nation" were rebelling with the support of authors like Grant Allen, who criticised Stevenson (he replies to Allen with the riposte, "*et tu brute*!") "because I take the side of the police against the dynamiter".[50] Allen had objected to the Stevensons' portrayal of the dynamitards in a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* and found the dedication to the injured policemen to be particularly offensive ("a passage of whose tone and moral feeling I distinctly disapprove"). The novelist rounded on the couple's "violent condemnation... (of) a body of misguided Irish patriots, goaded by English injustice and landlord misrule into a mode of retaliation in some respects unworthy of their laudable object." Allen concluded by recommending that an author's "fiery indignation" would be better aimed "against the wicked and cruel system which drives brave and resolute men to such desperate means of righting their ill-used country."[51]

Criticising Allen for his "perversion of mind", Stevenson points to innocents like the Curtin children and "the poor little sight-seers at the Tower" (the armoury at the Tower of London was blown up by the dynamiters), and recommends an anarchic, paramilitary free-for-all as the only possible remedy for Irish disobedience: "if we cannot have law effectual, we want none of it. Drop the farce, give us an equal chance, and do not bind the honest man and set the bully free. In other words, give us law, or let us have open war". Without these measures Ireland will provide another example of "the Girondin playing once more... with the Jacobin tiger". Although Stevenson acknowledges centuries of misrule in Ireland he insists that the country's "chief wrong" has been "the want of firm authority": "in a country ruled by violence, by tumultuary movements, the fear of midnight murder and the pressure of boycotting, votes have no significance" and "only a majority of fists" can prevail. In the face of this chaos, unionists

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[49] Stevenson, Letters to Anne Jenkin, (undated) April, 1897, *Letters,* Vol. 5, pp.390, 397; letter to Edward L. Burlingame, 6 January, 1888, ibid, p.100.
[50] Stevenson, "Confessions of a Unionist", pp.9, 11-12.
[51] Allen, Grant, latter to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5th August, 1887, reprinted in *Letters*, Volume 5, footnote, p.439.

and conservatives can only stand their ground: "until the whole machinery of terrorism is destroyed, and coercive political crime a thing of the past, we refuse to begin to consider an organic change."

Stressing to the American reader the necessity of such action, Stevenson compares the action necessary in Ireland to the hard-line stand taken against Irish agitators by the authorities in San Francisco, during the "sand-lot troubles" of 1879-1880. These disturbances were the culmination of anti-Chinese agitation led by the labour leader Denis Kearney and with Kearney's imprisonment and the suppression of his movement. Stevenson praises the California authorities for answering "the Irish lawlessness, the Irish helplessness, the Irish appeal to violence" with merciless force: "the weapons were burnished in the armories, and the gatling guns rattled on the street." Such draconian countermeasures are required in Ireland:

> A vigilance committee, an appearance of Judge Lynch, are things to be deplored; but there are worse alternatives. They tell of the defeat of the law; but they represent the victory of the class of law observers. It was by similar means that law first triumphed and... even to-day, when the bully takes to his club, it may be the best and shortest way to meet him upon equal terms.

Stevenson praises vigilance committees as "the mark of a people with some lively and enviable virtues" and reminds his intended American readers that "with the pulse of the law beating so feebly in the huge body of your continent, a certain semi-barbarous self-reliance remains to you." Returning to the theme of middle-class counter-insurgency that is showcased in *The Dynamiter*, Stevenson also criticises the British middle class for their inaction: "You have no idea what sheep the middle class tends to become, what sheep they are in England, how difficult to rouse to any masculine resolve, how prone to maudlin sentiment and... easy generosity at the expense of others."

Repeating the condemnation for inaction with which the dedication to the injured constables Cole and Cox opens *The Dynamiter*, Stevenson complains that the middle class suffer from "a strange frame of mind... a form of mental paralysis, in which we love to coquette with the wolf while the sheep are scattered, in which we love to dangle in our Girondin lap the Jacobin tiger."[52] Hatred for the middle class and detestation at their "dishonour" and lack of "manly sensibility" seems to have been a constant with

[52] Stevenson, *Confessions of a Unionist*, pp.11-12, 14-16.

Stevenson. In 1885 he wrote to J.A. Symonds in 1885, complaining, "We believe in nothing... you don't and I don't".[53] Calling on Americans to ignore "the stump oratory of the Irish" and instead "conceive of Ireland as a country groaning for a vigilance committee", Stevenson claims to be proposing "to do what you would do yourselves, and that with startling promptitude and vigor, if the affair was yours and the stars and stripes floated to-day over that isle of turbulence." The essay concludes with a final complaint against "the insidious influence of all the favourite catch-phrases of the period, 'oppressed nationality,' (which, claims the mysterious elderly lady who dupes Somerset, has "turned" her daughter's brain) 'tyranny,' 'the interest of the poor,' – all of which may be invoked against us." The polemic ends with one final warning to Americans to resist "the prestige of the name of Mr. Gladstone".[54] Unsurprisingly, Charles Scribner declined to publish the essay in his magazine and, anxious not to alienate many of the American readers who had found *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* so enjoyable, Fanny advised her husband not to pursue the matter. Even though Stevenson's gothic masterpiece had brought him fame and success in the United States he still had to tread carefully over the political sensibilities of his hosts. [55]

Fictional Dynamite

As outlined above, as well as expressing the Stevenson's political conservatism, *The Dynamiter* also reflects a wider cultural preoccupation that was initiated by the dynamite campaign. What makes *The Dynamiter* such a modern novel is its amalgamation of terrorism with modernity's other phenomena. Despite Robert Louis Stevenson's declared support for the unionist and conservative cause, which even led him on one occasion to offer to place his own family as a buffer between Land Leaguers and recalcitrant landlords in the west of Ireland, *The Dynamiter* is not just concerned with the politics of republican terrorism: it is equally concerned with its sensation-effect. This sensation-effect is reproduced in the Stevensons' fiction so that despite their ironic treatment of the ineffectual terrorist the novel still underlines the novelty of terrorism,

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[53] Stevenson to John Addington Symonds, 30th February, 1885, *Letters*, Vol. 5, p.80.
[54] Confessions of a Unionists, pp.16-20 and "The State of California has provided a surprise...", Editorial, *The Times*, Friday, May 23rd, 1879, p.9.
[55] See Stevenson's letter to Edward Burlingame from Saranac Lake, c. 15th February, 1888, in *Letters*, Vol. 6, pp.114-115 and McLynn, p.280.

revealing how different it is from other forms of political protest, and how it contributes to "the noise of battle" (p.7) that is the aural backdrop to the metropolitan experience. *The Dynamiter* is concerned with the complexities and enchantments of the dual phenomena of urban space and modernity and the most fascinating of their attractions is terrorism. The peregrinations typical of the *flaneur*, and enacted by bohemian layabouts such as Somerset and Challoner, inevitably conclude in a series of encounters with terrorism so that, aside from the Stevensons' opening claim to irony, the novel manifests an examination of the modern metropolitan ferment of which political subversion is a central, and even necessary, element. The inevitability of encountering terrorism amid the urban tangle is a consequence of the three protagonists' attempts to decipher London's hieroglyphs, and its lure is another constituent part of the process of urban unfamiliarity; it occurs within "that great bazaar of dangerous and smiling chances, the pavement of the city" (p.67).

As Theodor Adorno has stressed, "mass culture itself stands under the sign of terror." According to Adorno, popular anxieties over the possibility of disaster are exacerbated by the communication of stories about such events by the mass media, as "the urgency of delivery imparts the shock of immediate domination in the form of immediate horror." Newspapers and other media are "only a mantle for the fear of the omnipresent disasters that can overtake us at any time." [56] This model of modern panic explains the effect of the kind of political violence that is described in *The Dynamiter*, and elaborated upon by Baudrillard's theory of complicity. If popular mass media can contain the power to terrify, the relationship between the terrorist and the press is commensal. As we shall see in the final chapter of this thesis, the rhetorical logic of this relationship underpins the literary modernism of Wyndham Lewis and the Vorticists, who modelled their hyperbolic literary style on contemporary, subversive polemics and used experimental typography to express their radical aesthetic. A modern character, Zero is a fictional exponent of the principle of élite terrorism, which is what connects the bomber to the press and, hence to literary Modernism. As the French terrorism expert, J-L Marret, explains, "The explosive attack – its spectacular aspect, without taking into

[56] Adorno, Theodor, "The Schema of Mass Culture", in *The Culture Industry* (Routledge: London and New York, 1991), p.96.

account its political result – is a priori a satisfying method for the terrorist." As Marret suggests, the terrorist's bomb is indeed a "veritable cultural implement".[57]

Captain Shannon

Other popular fictions point to the cultural role of the terrorist, and as Michael Denning has pointed out, these novels had a journalistic role.[58] While the Stevensons' novel certainly follows the conservative pattern of the *Times'* journalism and ends upon a note of imaginary containment in which the terrorist is blown to pieces in a clumsy act of auto-destruction, the theme of uncontrolled terrorism was resurrected in a less reassuring manner by another popular author. John Coulson Kernehan wrote his equally newspaper-inspired novel, *Captain Shannon*, over a decade after the publication of *The Dynamiter*, when public anxieties over dynamiting were reawakened by an explosion that occurred on an Inner Circle train on the metropolitan railway on April 26th, 1897. First serialised in the *Windsor Magazine*, Kernehan's fantasy teems with uncontrolled imaginings of urban destruction, popular hysteria and political chaos.

Kernehan revisited the theme of the railway platform explosion, but in a much less restrained manner than the Stevensons had done in *The Dynamiter*. The explosion that inspired him occurred after a porter noticed dense smoke pouring out of a first class carriage as it pulled out of Farringdon Street Station on the London underground. He tried to open the door and remove what he thought must have been a burning mat but, owing to the increasing speed of the train as it pulled out of the platform, he was unable to do anything. He then shouted a warning to the rear guard as the train made its way to the next stop but when the train pulled in to Aldersgate Street Station at 7pm the platform was rocked by a huge explosion. The first-class carriage was flung onto the platform by the force of the explosion and another train that had just arrived at the station was also badly damaged. All of the windows in the station were broken and a large piece of the carriage was lodged in the iron and glass work of the ceiling. The explosion was heard at the Farringdon Street and Moorgate Street stations, between

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[57] Marret, J-L, "Bomb Attacks as an Example of Terrorist Techniques", The International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, March 27, 2002, pp3, 5. http://www.ict.org.il/articlesdet.cfm?articleid=435, accessed 29th March, 2002.
[58] Denning, ibid, p.119.

which the Aldersgate Street Station was situated. Ten people were injured and one, Henry Pitts, a thirty-five year old engineer from Tottenham, died from his injuries three hours later.[59] The injured also included a detective, John Sutton, who was at the station "in the ordinary course of his duties as a plain clothes officer". The explosion, which occurred in the central compartment of the carriage, was initially attributed to defective gas cylinders that were a part of the carriage's lighting system but on examination the gas fittings were found to be intact. The next morning the wreckage was examined by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Explosives, Sir Vivian Majendie, who ruled out the possibility of a gas explosion and concluded that "some wretch or wretches had perpetrated a gross outrage." The forensic evidence suggested to Majendie that an infernal machine had been placed underneath a seat and detonated as the train approached the platform since, not only had smoke been seen billowing from the carriage, but a huge hole had been blown in the floor while its entire roof had been blown off. His conclusion was that "a powerful explosive had gone off, driving in the floor of the carriage" while the "strong angle-steel framing of the carriage" was also "driven downwards, and the explosion had altogether a downward tendency." Majendie's pronouncement led to rumours that a bomb had been set off in order to disrupt the approaching Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The suspicions of the Chief Inspector of Explosives were confirmed at Henry Pitt's inquest, where he gave evidence that someone must have lit a bomb fuse on the carriage and then left the train at Farringdon Street Station. Majendie's declaration that the case "was really a very simple one", that it was caused by an explosive device, caused a public uproar. Accepting Majendie's evidence, the jury returned a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown.[60]

One reviewer thought that readers would find the novel to be very up-to-date: "The 'reflective reader,' so often remonstrated with by authors, will be unable to resist the suspicion that Captain Shannon owes his title to the recent explosion on the underground railway". That the recent outrage would register upon the literary imagination was obvious, stated the reviewer, who believed that "the catastrophe in Aldersgate will revive the recollection of other dynamite outrages, and consequently cause people to read the book." The review added that Kernehan's terrorist, like Zero,

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[60] "Explosion on the Metropolitan Railway", *The Times*, Tuesday, April 27th, 1897, p.9; "The Explosion on the Metropolitan Railway", *The Times*, Wednesday April 28th, 1897, p. 12; "The Explosion at Aldersgate-Street Station", *The Times*, Tuesday, May 25th, 1897, p.15.

also practices terrorism-for-its-own-sake: "the captain is a dynamiter of the first water, entirely given up to that exciting calling, which he pursues as much for the love of the thing as from hatred of tyrants."[61] Like the Stevensons, Kernehan also portrays counter-terrorism as a *dilettante* hobby as the bomber faces his nemesis in Max Rissler, an amateur detective and man about town who sets off on a private pursuit of the Irishman: "I undertook my search for Captain Shannon to please myself, and in search of excitement", he tells the reader, adding that the resulting book "is not a literary study, but the plain story of the adventures which befell me, that is here set forth."[62] The excitement enjoyed by the private gentleman who engages in the pursuit of a dangerous fugitive results in literary thrills for the popular reader.

The novel begins with the recollection that a "series of infamous outrages and diabolical murders" have occurred in Ireland where, after every crime, the police find a note:

> That they had one common origin was clear from the fact that on the scene of each crime the same inscription was found. This inscription, which was sometimes scrawled in plain rough capitals upon a piece of paper, pinned to the body of a victim, and at other times was rudely chalked in similar lettering upon a door or wall, ran as follows:-
>
> "BY ORDER, CAPTAIN SHANNON." (p.1)

The mere sight of Captain Shannon's signature is enough to paralyse the Irish with fear and guarantees that no-one will collaborate in his capture: "so dreaded was the miscreant's name, and so swift and terrible had been the fate of those who, in the past, had incurred his vengeance, that neither offers of a reward nor threats of punishment could elicit information which might lead to his arrest." (p.2) His campaign of agrarian terror is modelled on the rural unrest that gripped parts of Ireland throughout the nineteenth century, when threats were issued and murders were often claimed under the sobriquet of Captain Moonlight. In his 1824 novel about Whiteboy violence, *Memoirs of Captain Rock*, Thomas Moore describes the "eternal struggles" of the Irish rural poor and their resistance to landlordism. In this fiction, the "abuse of Government" by

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[61] "Recent Novels", *The Times*, Wednesday, June 9th, 1897, p.11.
[62] Kernehan, John Coulson, *Captain Shannon* (London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1897).

agrarian rebels amounts to political "terror"[63] and their methods are updated in Kernehan's novel. Captain Shannon's *nom de plume* also hints at Britain's period of rural unrest during the 1830s, when protestors resisted the automation of traditional rural labour by attacking threshing machines and burning farm buildings. The spate of machine breaking was characterised by the issuing of anonymous, threatening letters written under the pseudonym of Captain Swing ("swinging" being the epithet for smashing machines with hammers).[64]

The modernisation of Irish rebellion occurs when, in a change in tactics, Captain Shannon commences a bombing campaign in England. With this transformation, Kernehan points to the shifting terms of Irish political violence, as agrarian rebellion in Ireland is abandoned in favour of urban terrorism carried out in the metropolis:

> when the conspirators carried the war into the enemy's country, and successfully accomplished the peculiarly daring crime which wrecked the police headquarters at New Scotland Yard, the indignation of the public knew no bounds. If the emissaries of Captain Shannon could successfully convey an infernal machine into New Scotland Yard itself, the whole community was – so it was argued – at the mercy of a band of murderers. (p.2)

With its description of England as "the enemy's country" and the "peculiarly daring crime" of blowing up the CID headquarters, *Captain Shannon* offers a more subversive literary take on dynamite terrorism than the Stevensons' novel, with its respectful dedication to the plucky Constables Cole and Cox. A band of murderers these dynamiters might be but, unlike Zero and his men, they are effective and succeed in forcing emergency legislation through the House of Commons:

> The Chief Secretary for Ireland declared, in a memorable speech, that the purpose of the crime was to terrorize and to intimidate. No loyal English or Irish citizen would, he was sure, be deterred from doing his duty by such infamous acts, but that they had to deal with murderers of the most determined type could not be doubted. The whole conspiracy was, in his opinion, the work of some half-dozen assassins, who were probably the tools of the monster calling himself "Captain

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[63] Moore, Thomas, *Memoirs of Captain Rock, the Celebrated Irish Chieftain, With Some Accounts of His Ancestors* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1824), ix, xi.
[64] See Hobsbawm, Eric and Rudé, George, *Captain Swing* (Originally published 1969, London: Phoenix Press, 2001), esp. pp. 239-249.

> Shannon," in whose too fertile brain the crimes had, he believed, originated, and under whose devilishly planned directions they had been carried out. (pp.2-3)

The bomb in England represents a break in form from "the earlier crimes" committed in Ireland. Terrorism, announces the Chief Secretary "amid ringing cheers" from the House, is the expression of "the disloyal attitude of a section of the Irish people", "the infamous conduct of the disloyal Irish", making anyone who might sympathise with Captain Shannon "nothing less than a murderer in the eyes of God and of man." A month later, the "disloyal Irish" strike back by causing "the wholesale murder of hundreds of inoffensive people against whom, excepting for the fact that they happened to be law-abiding citizens the followers of Captain Shannon could have no grievance." (pp.3-.4) After the atrocity, Kernehan's hero and narrator, Max Rissler, learns of what has happened:

> All that was known was that a respectably dressed young man, carrying what appeared to be about a dozen well-worn volumes from Mudie's, or some other circulating library, had entered at Aldgate Station an empty first-class carriage on the Underground Railway. These books were held together by a strap – as is used when sending or taking volumes for exchange to the libraries – and it had occurred to no one to ask to examine them, although the officials at all railway stations had, in view of the recent outrages, been instructed to challenge every passenger carrying a suspicious-looking parcel. The theory which was afterwards put forward was that, what appeared to be a parcel of volumes from a circulating library, was in reality a case, cunningly covered with the backs, bindings, and edges of books, and that this case contained an infernal machine of the most deadly description. The wretch in charge of it was supposed purposely to have entered an empty carriage, and, after setting fire to the fuse, to have left the train at the next station. (pp.4-5)

Concealed inside what appears to be a parcel of books, the underground railway bomb points to the self-relective nature of the novel. While the plot is concerned with terrorism, the opening scene, with its exploding books, is also a commentary on literature and modernity. The predominant motif here is of that of circulation: the circulation of bombs, of books and of the subversive individual. Exploding at Blackfriar's Station, the experimental bomb has a devastating effect and all of the passengers on the

train in which it has been deposited are killed, along with everyone travelling in a train passing by it, as are all of the commuters waiting on the station platform. The underground railway employees are also killed but a group of Smith's bookstall boys make a "miraculous" escape. By featuring a bomb hidden inside a parcel of books, *Captain Shannon* comments upon the expansion of popular literary culture that appeared to reach saturation point at the end of the nineteenth century, and was embodied by the presence of W.H. Smiths' bookstalls on railway platforms. Selling cheap novels and newspapers at these sites since 1848, Smiths' embodied the process of expansion that culture had undergone since the closing decades of the eighteenth century. The spread of literacy and the widening consciousness of culture had created a process of profound and general intellectual change that was linked, as Raymond Williams has pointed out, to the progress of democracy: as democratic discourses developed, so too did reading practices throughout this period.[65] Ironically, Kernehan juxtaposes the spread of popular literacy and political subversion by having Captain Shannon conceal his bomb inside some popular volumes, and the relationship between politics and culture receives a self-knowing nod.

Above ground the destruction is just as devastating and New Bridge Street and a section of the Thames Embankment are destroyed: "The buildings in the immediate neighbourhood, including part of St. Paul's station on the London, Chatham and Dover railway, the offices over Blackfriars station, and De Keyser's Hotel on the opposite side of the way were wrecked, and the long arm of Blackfriars Bridge lay idle across the river, like a limb which had been rudely hacked from a body." The authorities declare that no known explosive substance could have caused this kind of destruction and it is suggested that the bombers must have smuggled their bomb into Britain from the United States. (pp.5-6) The new strain of high-explosives and the inevitable American connection suggest that a new Irish American bombing campaign has begun.

While Zero ends up killing only himself on the railway platform at the end of *The Dynamiter*, *Captain Shannon* opens with a much bloodier account of terrorism, as Rissler describes the carnage:

> I have no intention of sickening the reader by giving a realistic description of the awful sights which were witnessed when, after the first paralysing moment

[65] Williams, Raymond, *Culture and Society* (First published, 1958, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), pp.13-19.

> of panic was over, the search for the injured, the dying and the dead was commenced. The number of lives lost, including those who perished in Blackfriars station, in the two trains, in the street, and in the surrounding buildings, was enormous. (p.7)

And despite the indiscriminate nature of the attack it succeeds in its purpose of neutralising Captain Shannon's most dangerous enemy. The next day the newspaper columns are filled with lists of those killed in the explosion, including that of the Chief Secretary of Ireland. (p.7) Zero's comical death and disintegration upon the railway platform reassured the Stevensons' readers, who sympathised with the unfortunate constables injured in the Westminster explosion. This kind of literary-political containment is reversed by Kernehan, as it is the Chief Secretary who is blown to atoms upon the railway line along with a vast number of uninvolved civilians caught up in the "terrific"(p.5) blast. And, like Zero, the Chief Secretary's body is never recovered from the scene of the explosion.

The same day in Downing Street, the Prime Minister receives a lengthy communication from Captain Shannon, a "manifesto", addressed "TO THE PEOPLE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND", in which the bomber outlines his demands. His ideology is a combination of anarchism and Irish republicanism and, while acknowledging the repeated failures of "Anarchistic, Nihilistic, Fenian, and similar movements of the past", he also condemns the capitalist system and those "who yawn as they seek to devise some new vice on which to squander the wealth which has become a burden to them, grind down and sweat the poor, setting one starving man to compete against another for a wage which can scarce find him and his dry bread." All of society "is blood-guilty," and Captain Shannon promises to wage war against everyone who gets in his way. He also points to the example of earlier outrages in England, Ireland and Europe:

> But for the justice which was executed upon the arch-tyrant Alexander of Russia; the blow which was struck at English tyranny by the destruction of Clerkenwell prison; the righteous punishment which befell those servants of tyrants and enemies of freedom, Burke and Cavendish – but for these and other glorious deeds, the bitter cry of the oppressed all over the world had passed unheard and unheeded, Ireland had not wrung from reluctant England

> the few paltry concessions that have been made, and the dawning of the great day of freedom had been indefinitely postponed. (pp.8-9)

From the outset of this fiction political violence is not presented as a hopeless method that is doomed to failure. Instead, like the real actions of Dynamiters, Invincibles and Russian Nihilists of the 1880s, it appears to Rissler and his contemporaries that this campaign might succeed as Captain Shannon announces the formation of a new revolutionary movement. Up until the underground bombing nihilists, anarchists, and fenians have fought separately, but, he warns, "let those scattered forces combine into one organised and all-powerful Federation, and mankind will be at its mercy." These groups have combined to form "The World Federation for the Advancement of Freedom" (p.11), an amalgamation of "the whole of the secret societies of the world" (p.15). The underground attack is claimed as their first strike in an international campaign "to rid mankind of the monsters of Monarchy and Imperialism, and with them of the whole vampire-brood of Peers, Nobles, and Capitalists". United by "one common and supreme organisation, with one common enemy and one common purpose", (p.10) the Federation's ideology is a combination of socialism, anti-imperialism and all-out anarchism:

> Its object is to declare that all things are the property of the people. To wrench from the greedy maw of landowners and capitalists their ill-gotten gains, and to make restoration to the rightful possessors. To sweep from the face of the earth the fat priests, ministers, and clergy who batten and fatten on the carrion of dead and decaying religions. To preach the gospel of the Happiness of Man in place of the worship of God, and to declare the day of the Great Republic, when the many millions who have hitherto been ruled shall become the rulers. (p.11)

The Federation's policy will be to kick-start a series of local revolts that will pave the way for a worldwide revolution, a process that will begin on England's doorstep "by emancipating Ireland from the English yoke":

> the members know well that the greatest enemy with which they have to contend – the last country to be convinced of the righteousness of their cause – will be England, that prince-ridden, priest-ridden, peer-ridden nation of

> flunkeys and enemies of freedom, a country which shed the blood of her own children in America rather than grant them their rightful independence, and now seeks in a similar way to keep Ireland, India, Canada, and Australia under the cruel heel. At England, then, it is right and fitting that the first blow should be struck. (pp.11-12)

Ireland has been chosen because "as a vantage ground from which to commence operations against England, her position cannot be bettered" and upon liberation, the country will become a base for future operations, serving as "the key to Europe", which is already "undermined to the very core by Socialism and Anarchy." These revolutionary ideologies are the explosive charges that have been laid under the surface of the modern capitalist states: "The mines which are to destroy society, as society now exists, are laid, though they are out of sight, and at any moment the opportunity may come to fire the train." (pp.12-13) Compared to this outbreak, what "once occurred in France", by which Captain Shannon means the Revolution of 1789, will appear "a mere accident":

> if an accidental outbreak like the French Revolution could set rivers of blood running in France, what may we not expect from the Great Revolution, which, when it comes, as come it must, will be the result, not of chance, but of long years of systematic propagation of socialistic principles among the masses, - which will be the outcome of the most subtly-planned and gigantic cheme [*sic*] for the liberation of mankind which the world has ever known! (p.14)

Europe's modern political systems, and especially Britain's highly industrialised society, are vulnerable and about to be transformed:

> There are people who will say that what happened on the other side of the Channel can never happen on this. But those who know what is going on in London, Manchester, Birmingham, and all the largest towns, know that we are living on the edge of a volcano; that England is (*more?*) ripe for revolution to-day than France was in 1789... It must be remembered that in England we have had, for more than half a century, a Queen who does not forget that, during that time, a complete revolution has taken place in many previously existing beliefs and systems... (p.14)

After Ireland, Britain's cities will provide a second platform for the revolution. Captain Shannon claims that modernity is on his side and that the process of political and cultural reform that has occurred during Victoria's reign has left the British system balanced on a knife's edge, the slightest tilt of which will cause a political meltdown. The Queen "has wisely avoided everything which can put royalty on its trial, or the temper of the people to the test... But the account, too long overdue, will soon have to be settled." Instead of loyalty and deference, the working class will display its hatred for the establishment:

> The poor shall arise in their might and their right to claim as their own the riches which their labours have accumulated. In whose hands are those riches now? For answer let them look to the words which are written in the very heart of their seething, starving London, over the portico of the Royal Exchange: 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.' Yes, the lords' – this duke's, that earl's – but not God's – if a God there be – or the peoples. (pp.14-15)

Republican, anarchic and agnostic, the World Federation for the Advancement of Freedom will provide the poor with a revolutionary vanguard so that they "should be made to see the terrible power which, if only by virtue of their swarming millions, lies at their command." Captain Shannon then makes an ultimatum to the entire population of Great Britain, who must choose "whether they will throw in their lot with the winning side, while yet there is time to make terms, and whether they will sacrifice their lives and the lives of their wives and children to support a system by the destruction of which they will be the first to profit." (p.15) The manifesto concludes by promising that the Federation will make an example of the British capital:

> The people of England, and especially of London, will know, before the morrow, how far-reaching is the arm of the Federation, and how pitiless its vengeance. Let them be warned by what will occur this day on the Underground Railway, and let them beware lest, by hindering either actively or passively the work of the Federation, they incur that vengeance. – By order,
>
> CAPTAIN SHANNON. (p.16)

The atrocity draws the wrath of the popular press and three days after the explosion the *Daily Record*, "which had, from the first, given exceptional prominence to everything

connected with the outrages," stages a counter-measure by offering a reward for the capture of Captain Shannon and his lieutenants. The bounty is advertised in "a special supplement" which includes an editorial in which the paper reveals that it has been investigating Captain Shannon: "the *Daily Record* had, some months ago, decided to concentrate all their resources, capital and energy upon the discovery of the promoters of the conspiracy." Having engaged the best English and foreign detectives the editor decides to publish the names, personal descriptions and portraits of seven men he believes to be leading conspiracy, although he is still unable to identify Captain Shannon. (pp.17-18) Offering a reward of £3,000 per head for the arrest of any of the men on its list, and a further amount of £20,000 for any information that should lead to the capture of Captain Shannon, the newspaper creates "a profound sensation" across the globe. By pitting mercenary anarchy against subversive anarchy, with the intention of having bounty hunters scouring the streets of Britain for the terrorists (in terms that might have pleased Robert Louis Stevenson), the *Daily Record* is criticised by "a well-known Conservative organ", presumably *The Times*, for using the occasion to indulge in "an advertising dodge" and the rival paper declares "that such a direct insult to the authorities was calculated seriously to injure the national prestige of England." This measure, it complains, is a "rash and ill-advised procedure" that will "stultify the action of the police and... defeat the ends of justice."[66] This radical step expands counter-terrorism beyond the remit of the CID and Scotland Yard and instead makes it possible for men of wealth and leisure to engage in an unlegislated pursuit as they go about hunting down the villains. The *Daily Record* is supported by the *Dublin News*, a "consistently loyal" and "fearlessly outspoken" Irish newspaper, which reprints the descriptions and portraits of the suspects from the *Daily Record* and offers its own reward of £5,000 for the capture of Captain Shannon.

The excitement dies down after several months and during the lull the bombers begin to eliminate their enemies in the press. On a quiet morning when "the newspaper world was sadly in want of a sensation" they provide yet another. (p.21) Since the *Daily Record* editor's threat to expose the dynamiters, the Federation has gone underground, causing a depression in the newspaper market:

> one among many results of the sudden cessation, three months since, of every sort of Anarchist outrage, had been that the daily journals could not seem other

[66] Ibid, p.19.

> than flat and tame to a public which had previously opened the morning papers with apprehension and anxiety. Though the rigorous action taken by the editor of the Daily Record in London, and of the Dublin News in Dublin had not, as had been expected, led to the arrest of Captain Shannon or his colleagues, it had apparently so alarmed the conspirators as to cause them to abandon their plan of campaign. (p.23)

The newspapers are shocked back into action by another atrocity as Rissler himself witnesses the next newspaper sensation. Walking along Fleet Street he stares at the placards displayed in the windows of the *Daily Chronicle* office: "I could not help contrasting in my mind the unimportant occurrences, which were there in small type set forth, with the appalling announcement which had leapt to the eye from the same window three months hence." When he reaches the *Daily Record* office he is met by "a man, wild-eyed, white-faced and hatless," who "rushed into the road shouting 'Murder! Murder! Police! Murder!'." The panic-stricken man is quickly engulfed by "the human streams that ebb and flow ceaselessly in the narrow channel of Fleet Street" and is halted by a police constable, whom he tells that "'The editor of the Record had been murdered by Captain Shannon himself or by one of his agents!'" The editor is found stabbed to death in his office and when someone suggests that the murderer might have "had in his possession an infernal machine with which it would be possible to wreck half Fleet Street", the "report" has "the effect of causing a temporary diversion in favour of the side streets." (p.25) As the crowd lingers a doctor arrives and is mistaken for W.T. Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and pioneer of "New Journalism". With its sensational headlines and shocking style, New Journalism was a perfect medium for the scandals and scare stories of the *fin de siècle*, and Stead, having earned notoriety for his exposé of child prostitution, "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon", published in the Pall Mall Gazette in 1885, came to personify its methods. With another reflexive touch, Kernehan adds that the latest terrorist outrage also has implications for the market in popular reading because, even though the murder has only been discovered, it immediately brings the moribund newspaper industry back to life:

> no sign that anything had transpired within the building was to be seen, and people were beginning to get impatient, when, from somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Thames Embankment, came that sound so familiar to Cockney ears – a sound which no true Londoner can hear with indifference –

> the hoarse vociferation of the newsvendors proclaiming some sensational news. At first it was nothing but a distant babel, like the husky barking of dogs, but, as it drew nearer, the shouts became more distinguishable, and I caught the words, "'Ere 'yare, sir! *Sun*, sir! Murder of a heditor this mornin'! 'Ere y'are, sir!"
>
> "That's smart, that is!" said a fellow who was standing next to me in the crowd. "Tay Pay won't let no grass grow under 'is feet, 'e don't. Why, the murdered man ain't 'ardly cold, and 'ere it is all in the *Sun*!" (p.27)

"Tay Pay", or T.P. O'Connor, editor of *The Sun* newspaper, established in 1893, was another founder of New Journalism. His paper is the first to publicise the story of the editor's murder and it also conveys bad news from Dublin: "'Ere y'are, sir! *Sun* sir! Murder o' the heditor o' the *Dublin News* this mornin'. Capture o' the hassassin, who turns hinformer. Captain Shannon's name and identity disclosed. The 'ole 'ideous plot laid bare. 'Ere y'are, sir! (pp.27-28) The newspaper reports that the Irish editor has been stabbed and his killer captured. The story creates "the wildest excitement", while the *The Sun* also reports that the London editor was killed by a gentleman presenting himself Mr. Hiram B. Todd of Boston. (pp.29-31) Like the attack on the underground railway, the editor's assassination favours cheap, popular publishing. While W.H. Smith's young booksellers have survived the explosion to continue selling their fare on the railway platforms, the popular press is revived by the killing and more copy is provided for the news-hungry public, addicted to the "sheer entertainment value"[67] of the news. As the 1897 reviewer of *Captain Shannon* in *The Times* joked, journalists and editors would find this new development in political violence to be very unsettling, as "the blowing up of quite humble individuals and the destruction of public buildings" was of little consideration compared to the killing of the editors, acts that are "really serious (as affecting indirectly the safety of reviewers)".[68] As with Edgar Allan Poe's short story of 1842, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", in which the murder of a young Parisian girl is examined by the press, so as to "produce intense excitement in the minds of the sensitive Parisians." Here, a "mass of information" is processed and coloured by the "suggestions" of popular journals. As Poe explains, "it is the object of our newspapers

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[67] Curtis, L. Perry, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*, p. 56.
[68] "Recent Novels", *The Times*, Wednesday, Jun 09, 1897, p.11.

rather to create a sensation – to make a point – than to further the cause of truth."[69] As in Poe's day, the press fulfils a sensational role in this novel, but the political character of the terrorist intensifies the shocking nature of his crimes and stimulates the press's response to them.

The captured Irish assassin reveals to the police that Captain Shannon is one of the men named by the *Daily Record*, a middle-aged Irish American called James Mullen, and he surrenders a portrait of the terrorist. Rissler, reads the report and is suddenly reminded of a man that he met in a third-class smoking carriage on the London, Tilbury, and Southend Railway. (p.37) Like Stevenson's terrorist-hunters, Rissler is also a man of means who is bored by his routine and, eager to win the reward for the bomber's capture, he begins his own pursuit. The subsequent chase underlines Walter Benjamin's theory that "In the *flâneur*, the joy of watching is triumphant. It can concentrate on observation; the result is the amateur detective."[70] Rissler also has an artistic temperament not dissimilar from that of Zero and Kernehan's hero serves as a literary double to the figure of the political subversive: "the restlessness that is so often associated with the artistic temperament was upon me. I craved change, excitement, and adventure, and all these the following up of the clue which I held to the identity of Captain Shannon promised in abundance." (p.39) Rissler begins by questioning the ticket inspectors at Euston Station and then traces a salesman, whom he finds on the Southend platform, with whom he had travelled when he first saw the dynamiter. He reveals that he has seen the suspect on several occasions, noting that "when he got into Southend he vanished into space". As Benjamin has stressed, "The harder a man is to find, the more suspicious he becomes",[71] and, as Rissler reflects, anonymity is a politically suspicious condition.

As we shall see in a later chapter on H.G. Wells' novel, *The Invisible Man*, political fugitives are countered in *Captain Shannon* by an amalgamation of the forces of the state and of the press, and the bomber is challenged by "the vast network of police organization which is spread over the country, and of the co-operation which is accorded by the press, the public, and the police of other nationalities, as well as the facilities for communication and identification which the introduction of telegraphy and photography now afford,", so that "the only wonder is, not that so many criminals are captured, as that

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[69] Poe, Edgar Allan, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (London: Dent, 2000), pp. 448, 450, 455, 460.
[70] Benjamin, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, p.69.
[71] Ibid, p.48.

any should escape the meshes of the law at all." (pp.52-53) When Rissler hires a captain, Hardy Muir, and his skipper, Quickly, to compile a list of the shipping in the area he is reminded of the dynamite hulks moored off Canvey Island at the mouth of the Thames. These "nests of devilry" serve as "dynamite magazines". (pp. 59-60) Rissler investigates one, The Cuban Queen, and instructs Quickly to follow the keeper's wife, whom he knows to be regularly boarding and disembarking the vessel and whom he believes to be James Mullen in disguise. After decoying the keeper, Rissler searches the hulk but finds nothing and when he returns to shore he finds that his sidekick has disappeared: "Quickly never returned from the quest upon which I had despatched him. From that day to this no word of him has been received. He simply disappeared as completely, as if the earth had opened and swallowed him." (p.87)

At this point Rissler receives a communication from a professional private detective, James Green, whom he hired at the beginning of the hunt but has failed to mention until this point in the narrative. Green writes to tell Rissler that he now wishes to disengage his services as he has discovered new information and wishes to capture Mullen himself so as to pocket the £25,000 reward, "not to mention the kudos". (p.93) When Rissler visits Green's seaside home in order collect his expenses he makes a gruesome discovery:

> With hands scarcely warmer than his, I drew the dead man up upon the sands, and turned him upon his back, that I might see his face. It was the face of Green, the Inquiry Agent, and in his clenched fist he held a small green bottle, which was lashed to his wrist by a handkerchief worked with his own initials, "J.B.G." "Suicide!" I whispered to myself, as I stooped to untie the handkerchief and bend back the unresisting fingers. (pp.97-98)

Rissler opens the bottle and finds that it contains a note, reading "BY ORDER – CAPTAIN SHANNON", takes documents from the body and, fearing the possibility of his own implication in the detective's death he quickly dumps the corpse:

> Anything else in his pockets that I might require? No. Then I'll slide the body back into the water. He's evidently been dead many hours, and it can't make no difference to him, poor fellow. That's it. He's just as he was when I found him. Now I'll be off. Good-night, Mr. James Bakewell Green. I won't press you for that IOU. (p.101)

The papers include a copy of a letter from Norway, written to Mullen by his half-sister, who simply signs it "F." This document reveals something of the dynamiter's background, and Rissler learns that his quarry is a bastard: "I remember your wild talk about society having conspired to rob you from before your birth; - of your being denied the right to bear your father's name, and of your mother's name being a dishonour to you." The letter reveals that Captain Shannon is the son of a "villain", (p.106) "the famous, and also infamous" Viscount Dungannon, "shot in U.S.A. in 1881" and of Mary Hatherwick Coyne, "the daughter of an Irish gentleman." (p.116) Offering to help him escape England, "F." reveals that she has also suffered at the hands of her wicked brother and tells him that news of the railway massacre made her ill: "It is right to tell you that the terrible shock I received when I saw the Daily Record, and knew that my half-brother was Captain Shannon, brought on hemorrhage of the lungs afresh, and so badly that my life was at first despaired of." (p.109-110) Once more, this very reflexive "newspaper" novel presents a fantasy wherein the literary shocks of the press exercise a physical effect on readers. Unlike the news-stand boys who survive the underground railway bomb, newspaper readers, like the commuters and patrons of Smiths', suffer physical damage from exposure to this explosive literary material. For "F.", just reading about the atrocity is enough to cause her a physical injury: the spreading of news about terrorism is another of its political effects. Just as the explosion of the book-bomb has ripped apart the contained space of the underground station the terror-effect is spread further and even abroad to "F." in her home in Norway by the press reports.

Rissler deduces that since it is unlikely that a private detective like Green would have the means of intercepting the post (a privilege, he notes, that is enjoyed exclusively by Scotland Yard investigators), they must have been sent via one of the private postal services organised by tobacconists' and hairdressers' shops. Rissler visits a local barber's shop that takes letters, steals one with a Norwegian postmark addressed to one Henry Jeanes and acquires an original samples of F's handwriting. The trail of letters finally leads to London and the search for "Henry Jeanes, *alias* James Cross, *alias* James Mullen, *alias* Captain Shannon" (p.157) almost succeeds when Rissler spots the fugitive, who escapes by boarding a train. Even when he is caught up with Captain Shannon still proves elusive because, like Benjamin's *flâneur*, he is skilful at erasing any traces of himself: "Carefulness in effacing his footmarks was indeed the key-word to his

criminal code, and perhaps was the secret of the success with which he had hitherto carried out his designs." (p.167)

Returning to Canvey Island, Rissler enlists the help of a friend, Grant (another character whom Kernehan conveniently inserts into the plot), and they watch a bearded man leaving the boat with a leather bag. (p.182) Rissler follows him to Liverpool Street station and on to New Broad Street, and into the City towards the General Post Office. Rissler watches as he lights a bomb-fuse at the back of the building:

> The next instant there was the spurt that told of the striking of a Lucifer match. Then he stooped again over the object he had taken from the bag, and I saw a tiny point of light, which, as I stood looking on, half paralysed with horror, increased visibly in size and in brightness. That he had fired the fuse of an infernal machine I could not doubt, and, for one moment, my limbs absolutely refused to obey my bidding. I tried to call out but gave utterance only to a silly, inarticulate noise... (p.193)

Rissler gives chase and catches up with the "hell-miscreant and devil", but is prevented from exacting revenge by the explosion of the bomb:

> the solid ground seemed to stagger and sway beneath me, and, from the neighbourhood of the General Post Office, came a sudden blaze of light, by which I saw a tall chimney crook inwards at the middle, as a leg is bent at the knee, and then snap in two like a sugar-stick. There was a low rumble, and a roar like the discharge of artillery, that was followed by the strangest ripping, rending din, as of the sudden tearing asunder of innumerable sheets of metal. I was conscious of the falling of masonry, of a choking limy dust in my eyes, nostrils and throat, and then a red darkness closed in upon me with a crash, and I remember no more. (p.195)

Three weeks later, he awakes from a coma, having suffered "a blow in the head from the fall of a chimney" and "a touch of concussion of the brain". He learns from Grant that the explosion was catastrophic, wrecking the General Post Office, leaving Cheapside "pretty near blown away", and killing a "good many" passers-by on the street. (p.198) Having used the mystery bombing of the underground railway of April 1897 as source material, Kernehan now turns to more familiar historical territory as Captain Shannon targets

public buildings, as the Clan na Gael dynamiters did during their campaign of 1883-1885.

Right away, Rissler's selfish nature comes again to the fore. Having already inadvertently led Quickly and Green to their deaths, he now reflects on whether he should reveal any of his information on Captain Shannon to the police. Fearing that he might then be considered "a scoundrel" for not having done so sooner, and perhaps allowing the police to prevent the explosion, he decides to tell them nothing. Unconcerned that sharing his intelligence with Scotland Yard might reduce the ongoing body count, Rissler remains a morally ambivalent figure:

> The motives which had caused me to keep silent would be open to the worst interpretation. I should everywhere be denounced as an enemy of society, whose contemptible vanity had made him think himself capable of coping, single-handed, with the greatest artist in crime of the century, and whose yet more contemptible greed had led him – in order that he might secure the whole of the reward for himself – to withhold from the proper authorities the information by means of which the capture of the arch-murderer might have been effected, and the last dreadful outrage prevented.
>
> Knowing, as I did, to what a pitch public feeling had risen in regard to the outrage, I could not disguise from myself that a man who made such a confession as I contemplated would – should he be recognised in the streets – stand a very good chance of being mobbed, if not lynched. (pp.200-201)

Fearing that the outraged "public feeling" aroused by newspapers like *The Sun* at the beginning of the novel might turn against him, Rissler is anxious that he should not be turned upon "by the mob, "the one wild beast which Civilisation has given us in exchange for the many she has driven away", adding: "I would rather fall into the clutches of the wild beast of the jungle, than into the clutches of the wilder beast of the city and the slum." (pp.201-202)

As well as "the possibility of being mobbed", Rissler fears an even worse fate: "the certainty of being held up, in many quarters, as an object for public odium and private scorn" terrifies him. He decides not to "acquaint New Scotland Yard with what had come to my knowledge" and continues with his personal campaign, driven by "the loathing which I entertained for the monster whom I had, with my own eyes, seen at his hellish work". There is also the £25,000 reward to consider: "Into the question whether

the decision, to which I came, was right or wrong, and whether the arguments with which I sought to square my decision with my conscience and my sense of duty, were founded on self-interest and inclination, rather than on reason, I will not here enter." (pp.202-203) However, Rissler does explain his selfish interest in the case:

> Had I, as matters then stood, given information to the police, I could only claim to have been the means of accomplishing his arrest, whereas if I could once obtain satisfactory proof of his identity, my chain of evidence would be complete. After having spent so much time, thought and money on the enterprise, I preferred to carry it through myself, rather than hand it over to some one else at the last moment. (p.223)

Rissler returns to Southend-On-Sea where he discovers that he is being followed by "one of the cleverest officers of the detective force, and one, moreover, who had been specially told off to effect the capture of Mullen." (p.206) However the Scotland Yard man's presence causes Captain Shannon to avoid Southend Pier and Rissler quickly evades the "shadow" (Kernehan does not explain how he does so, but decides at this point to justify inserting such momentary characters, anomalies and convolutions by claiming that they appear "for several reasons, one of which is that this story would then have been shorter, and perhaps less interesting" without them [p.222]). Returning to the dynamite hulk, *The Cuban Queen*, he is allowed on board by the keeper, Hughes, where he finally meets Captain Shannon. As well as being an artist, the terrorist is also a sexual deviant, and when Rissler finds him in the cabin, he is wearing a dress and paring his nails: "Chafed at his insolence as I was, I could not help noticing how small, white and beautifully shaped his hands were, and that he had the long tapers of the artists, and pink, carefully trimmed nails." Rissler is mesmerised by his feminine, aesthete-like behaviour and appearance (see illustration overleaf):

> The bright, prominent eyes, beautiful as a woman's, the delicately clear complexion, the straw-coloured hair, the acquiline nose with the strange upward arching of the nostrils, the curious knitting of the brows over the eyes, the full lips that spoke of voluptuousness, unscrupulous and cruel, the firm, finely-moulded chin – all these there was no mistaking, in spite of his woman's dress. (pp.228-230)

As well as feminising the terrorist, Kernehan stresses that his novel does not feature "that sickliest of subjects – the New Woman." Instead, "it tells of one of the few pieces of mischief that have happened in this world, since the days of Eve, concerning which, it may, without fear of contradiction, be affirmed that no woman ever had a hand in". But despite its absence of female subversives (the offstage "F" is motivated by compassion for her madly wayward brother) and its promise of "a story without a woman in it" (pp.172-173), Kernehan's dynamite novel stresses the villain's transvestism. The femininity of the terrorist is stresses further when, enraged that Hughes has brought a stranger whom he does not know into his hideaway, Captain Shannon attacks Rissler and fights "like a drunken, screeching, hysterical Jezebel".

"He was dressed like a woman, and was whistling softly to himself while paring his nails with a pearl-handled knife." (p.226)

When he calms down, the bomber admits that his nerves are shattered from "this being hunted down, day and night, until I get to start at my own shadow." (pp.235-236) After the encounter Rissler examines a note that has fallen out of Mullen's dress and discovers that it is another manifesto, this time "an attempt to stir up, for his own ends and purposes, the disloyalty of the discontented Irish". The document declares that Ireland is on the brink of revolution and will rise up "to prove herself... (Britain's) deadliest and bitterest enemy." (p.243) With the evidence in hand he finally decides to capture the bomber before he is able to escape to a nearby yacht sent by his sister. When Rissler apprehends him he notices "a look of fiendish triumph on his face", and the detective realises that the dynamiter has fired another fuse below deck:

> there came, from the space where the dynamite was stored, a tiny splutter, not unlike the sound which is made by a badly trimmed lamp... catching sight of the horror in my face as I leapt to my feet, he raised himself on his arm and glared at me with a countenance contorted out of all human likeness by devilish hate and exhultation.
>
> 'You're too late, you ---!' he shrieked. 'You're too late! We're going to hell together, and if there's a deeper hell there, I'll seize you with a grip you can't shake off and leap with you into the eternal fire. You shan't escape me there any more than you have here. We'll burn together! You're too late! You're too ---'
>
> this voice died away in the distance, for I was by this time in the dinghy and rowing as man never rowed before. (p.257)

Rissler puts a quarter of a mile between himself and the hulk by the time that the dynamite explodes:

> Suddenly sea and sky seemed to open in one sheet of purple flame before me, and I was knocked backward out of the boat as if by a blow from a clenched fist. Then I felt as if the sea had picked me up in her great arms – as I had once seen a drink-maddened man pick up a child whom he afterwards dashed head foremost against a wall[72] – and had flung me away and away, over the very world's edge. (p.258)

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[72] In the same year that *Captain Shannon* was published Kernehan also wrote a short cautionary novel on the perils of drink, entitled *A Literary Gent: A Study in Vanity and Dipsomania.*

The explosion creates a tidal wave that washes Rissler onto the beach at Southend-On-Sea. Although he fails to apprehend the terrorist, and has no chance of collecting the reward, he is satisfied that the adventure has concluded with the terrorist's final arrest by "Detective Death". (p.258)

As the *Times* review concluded, "'Captain Shannon' is full of dramatic – we had almost written melodramatic – interest."[73] Drawing directly from newspaper discourses about the mysterious unclaimed underground railway explosion of 1897, Kernehan's literary fantasy offers a much darker vision of political violence than does the Stevensons' novel. While Kernehan also resorts to the familiar formula of a personalised pursuit, entered upon by a young *flâneur* which ends with the destruction of the terrorist, his representation of dynamite bombings is unique in that it explores all the possibilities of political terror – hundreds of civilians are ruthlessly killed, entire sections of the centre of London are demolished and the villain is not just politically perverted, but also sexually deviant. While Zero destroys his own laboratory, recounts the tale of M'Guire's ineffectual attempts to blow up a hansom cab, and finally blows himself up, Captain Shannon is a far more dangerous literary character. Even Rissler's own moral ambivalence and mercenary motivation adds to the novel's darkly popular aesthetic, while Captain Shannon's campaign causes a series of atrocities that provides the reader with the voyeuristic pleasure of observing terrorism. Captain Shannon was such a popular novel that three editions were published by Ward, Lock & Co. in Britain, while it stayed in print in the United States until 1901, where it was published by the International Association of Newspapers and Authors. The popularity of such a novel, in which pleasure is provided to the reader by the prospect of terrorism run rampant, points to Baudrillard's theory of popular complicity in political violence. As with the September 11th atrocity, dynamite terrorism's symbolic value lies in its ability to capture the imagination: the railway bombing is followed up by several murders, including that of a newspaper editor, the indiscriminate bombing of the General Post Office and the wholesale destruction of Cheapside. The novel also ends with the bomber's self-destruction, which causes a massive tidal wave caused by the detonation of his entire explosives stash. Refusing to run out of imaginative steam, Kernehan's tale of uncontained terrorism draws its inspiration from another brand of 1880s dynamite fiction, usually written for an American or Irish readership: the sub-genre of the successful terrorist campaign.

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[73] "Recent Novels", *The Times*, Wednesday, Jun 09, 1897, p.11.

When the Dynamiters Win

As we have seen, dynamite became a form of literary capital for popular authors who used fiction to express the popular preoccupation with the new but difficult to fathom phenomenon of terrorism. However this literary phenomenon also served the political imagination of authors who actually sympathised with the Irish republican cause. While Kernehan and the Stevensons tried to counter the impact of terrorism, other novels added technological and political relish to the subversive possibilities of Clan na Gael's bombing campaign. These included Donald MacKay's *The Dynamite Ship* and Tom Greer's techno-fantasy, *A Modern Dædalus*, whose fictions combine subversive Irish nationalism with technological fantasy in their stories about rebellion. The fantasy of technological terrorism is showcased in MacKay's novel *The Dynamite Ship*, published simultaneously in London and New York in 1885. The novel draws on anxieties over the development of new ordnance using pneumatic pressure to launch dynamite explosives by the American Navy. These "dynamite missiles", *The Times* warned, threatened to leave ironclads "out of fashion" and render cities defenceless:

> The fearful ravages wrought by the explosions of dynamite leave no one unable to conjecture what might be the consequence of a bombardment in which missiles charged with dynamite should be employed... The prospect of such a change in the condition of warfare is appalling... comparatively small gunboats carrying one large gun might approach by night or even by day, near enough to a seaport to throw several dynamite shells into an inhabited city, and with a devastating effect which recent events can suggest...[74]

As well as providing bombers with the means of terrorising British cities dynamite technology also threatened to provide hostile governments with the means of defeating the British navy. Such fears of a British defeat on the high seas are combined with the terror-effect of political subversion in *The Dynamite Ship*, which opens with the near future setting of June, 1889. The novel begins with a discussion among three men – Heyward, an American, Alexander, an Englishman, and Lubin, an Irishman – about the failure of a recent bombing campaign in Britain. Sitting in New York's Battery Park, the trio discuss how British rule in Ireland might be overthrown. Despondent, Alexander

[74] "The Dynamite Gun and Shell", *The Times*, Tuesday, August 18th, 1885, p.13.

argues with the American, who suggests that it is time to up the *ante* in the struggle for independence:

> "There is not much hope. Everything has been tried – rebellion, moral suasion, parliamentary tactics, protests from the people, murders, fires, explosions. Famine has been of no avail, and dynamite bombs have only irritated the English authorities to measures of greater severity. What is there left?"
> "Force!"
> "Has force not been tried, time and again, without result? Have not Irish patriots died on their own green fields, pike or musket in hand, and with their faces turned toward the foe? Can Ireland raise an army large enough and strong enough to stand before the practised troops of England? What can be done with force?"
> "It can be applied in a new way." (p.13)

Heyward asks his friends to recruit twenty trustworthy volunteers for a secret mission and then travels to Mexico City, where he begins work on a secret project with which he intends to change the course of Irish history: The Dynamite Ship, a boat fitted with a pneumatic dynamite gun. With this weapon, pikes and muskets, the traditional weapons of Irish insurgency, are about to be replaced with a weapon the technological superiority of which the British will have no hope of matching. One rebel remarks on the novelty of the project by noting that the three scientists, Mellerkoff, Blackburn and Redfern, who design and construct the craft are not Irish: "They care no more for the freedom of Ireland than for three straws. Give them their invention and they are happy." (p.39) The ship, a petroleum-powered vessel, is secretly built on a coral island in the Florida Keys, where the scientific work is carried out while pointless dynamite clubs and their orators make "dark threats of secret murders, and circulated vague rumours of plots to undermine and blow up the entire British island." (p.61)

Heyward inspects Mellerkoff's progress on the pneumatic firing mechanism: "'You are satisfied?' he, at length, asked. 'Satisfied? Yes,' said Mellerkoff, throwing his arms over the cylinder, with a caressing gesture. 'Why should I not be satisfied? It is nearly perfect.'" (p.105) MacKay's fictional scientist, Mellerkoff, is based on an actual scientist, the Brooklyn-based Professor Mezzeroff, who lectured Clan na Gael dynamiters on chemistry and the use of explosives. Reputed to have been a Russian Nihilist, Mezzeroff was paid by the Irish Americans to lead "the Scientific School of the

Fenian Brotherhood". "With dynamite," he told a meeting of Irish exiles in New York "the ironclads and army of Great Britain could be destroyed, and other immense damage done." The Russian urged Irish revolutionaries to "employ the best weapon obtainable for freeing Ireland from tyranny, and sweeping every British vessel from the sea." The freelance scientist proposed that Irish expatriates should build a set of fast cruisers that would destroy the British navy "by throwing burning fluid and torpedoes at the ships." Mezzeroff's ambitious plan to sink the British navy, turn on London and leave the metropolis "in ashes"[75] is inspired by the dynamiters' own "Fenian Ram" project, an unsuccessful experiment in developing a submersible craft capable of firing torpedoes (funding was withdrawn and research abandoned after the prototype sank in the East River in 1883).[76] The idea provided imaginative writers like MacKay and propagandists like Mellerkoff with the motif of futuristic marine warfare, and fantasies about submarine warfare persisted into the early twentieth century in science fiction, such as George Griffith's short story of 1901, "The Raid of the *Le Vengeur*", which features a French submarine attack on the British fleet. As one of the crew of the Dynamite Ship explains: "This is a scientific expedition, and there are no chanting sailors with slow-moving oars. That sort of thing may do in the regular navy, but we're somewhere in the next century." (p.129)

MacKay's fictional scientist loves his machine and is convinced that it will "'revolutionise a few things in this world'":

> "Just think! With that small air compressor, I can generate a power of three thousand pounds to the square inch. That pressure, admitted into this cylinder, will throw a projectile about eight miles. And the beauty of it – the whole principle of it – is that the projectile receives but very little shock until it strikes the ground. The compressed air is infinitely slower in its action than gunpowder, but just as serviceable for long distance throwing, as it acts as a sort of cushion to the projectile, and so prevents a sudden or violent shock... To come to the point at issue," said Mellerkoff, "this cylinder, by means of compressed air, will, with perfect and unvarying certainty, throw a dynamite explosive – bomb, cartridge, or shell – eight miles so accurately that it will hit the object aimed at. The projectile will then explode with dreadful force. In

[75] "The Trial of O'Donnell", *The Times*, December 31st, 1883, p.6; "The Invincibles in Paris", ibid, Saturday April 12th, 1884, p.5; "Irish Agitators in New York", ibid, p.11; "Foreign News: American Dynamiters in Ireland", ibid, Friday September 23rd, 1887, p.3.
[76] "The United States", *The Times*, Wednesday April 18th, 1883, p.7.

> fact, it will kill a man at the rate of two hundred thousand miles a minute!" It was the dynamite gun.

Heyward is taken by the dynamite gun but is also worried about its capabilities, and, depressed by Mellerkoff's love for his invention, wonders whether mankind is becoming less human:

> "It is a cruel thing" he, at length, said, laying his hand upon the grim cannon. "Science is dreadful in its teachings, when it places such a gun as this in the hands of men swayed by the passions of hate or revenge. It seems to me that the world is growing more bitter; that men are becoming less human toward one another."
>
> "The gun's all right," ventured Mellerkoff. "The gun is not to blame." (pp.91-92)

Mellerkoff, appears to be in love with his gun, and defends it against Heyward's soliloquy on the folly of war. As well as showcasing his new imaginary dynamite weapon, MacKay uses this moment to reflect upon the dehumanising effect of military technology. But as well as providing a moral commentary, the scene also points to the technological cyborg-effect of such weapons, as the terrorist's hardware begins to take hold of his imagination, and even of his biological being. Like Joseph Conrad's terrorist, The Professor, who appears in his 1907 novel, *The Secret Agent*, Mellerkoff has an inhuman attachment to his weapon. While the Professor is literally hard-wired to his device and ready to explode, Mellerkoff hugs and caresses his dynamite gun. He reminds Heyward that it is not to blame for man's ever-increasing inhumanity; instead, the weapon is "all right", a product of scientific objectivity that promises to do its job without considering the kind of moral implications that make Heyward uncomfortable. Mellerkoff's affection for his machine is an early formulation of the body-machine interface seen in later terrorist fictions, such as Conrad's novel, in which the anarchist bomb-maker has almost fused his body with a personalised bomb that he calls a "perfect detonator"[77]. Concealed inside his coat, the device is a "variable and yet perfectly precise mechanism. A really intelligent detonator":

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[77] Conrad, Joseph, *The Secret Agent* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 93.

> With a swift, disclosing gesture he gave Ossipon a glimpse of an indiarubber tube, resembling a slender brown worm, issuing forth from the armhole of his waistcoat and plunging into the inner breast pocket of his jacket... 'The detonator is partly mechanical, partly chemical,' he explained with casual condescencion. (pp.91-92)

In contrast to the Professor, Heyward is sceptical about this kind of secret warfare and prefers open combat to terrorism: "Used secretly, dynamite, or even gunpowder, is not a legitimate article of warfare. Used openly, and in sight of all men, it is as fair as the sling of David."[78] Therefore the dynamite gun, if brandished in all-out war, will legitimise the republican cause: "we take it gladly, and go forth to let it do its work openly, honestly, and fairly in the sight of all men." (p.96) Heyward's "legitimate article" is prepared by Redfern, an explosives expert and ex-journalist: "I used to be a staff writer on a London comic paper", he tells his leader, but "(t)hat was before I went into the manufacture of explosives". He prepares the nitro-glycerine mix for the shells on his own:

> Redfern was well satisfied to be left to his own devices. It has become a matter for comment with chemists that in preparing for market explosives of a highly dangerous nature the manufacturer prefers to work entirely by himself. Whether this arises from a desire to shield disinterested persons from the chances of death in probable explosions, or whether the character of the work breeds suspicion and habits of seclusion, is an open question. The fact remains, however, that, except in commercial establishments, the bulk of high explosives is prepared by individual manufacturers. (pp.105-106)

Despite the more open and corporate character of dynamite, exemplified by Alfred Nobel's model TNT factory in Fife in Scotland, Redfern's secretive preparation of his explosive mix endows the Dynamite Ship with some of the chic enjoyed by the solitary terrorists of Clan na Gael. While he prepares enough dynamite "to blow the island of Cuba out of water" (p.110), Heyward's men strip a luxury yacht, named "The Atlantic", and fit it with dynamite guns, a petroleum engine and a propeller. Finally, the crew is recruited from "The Irish League", a US support group. Heyward, by now infected with Mellerkoff's desire for the mechanical, announces his wish to "know" the Dynamite Ship: "When the different parts of the machine – animate and inanimate – are come

[78] MacKay, Ibid., p.95.

together... I must learn the touch, the mood, and the capacity of the new machine." With its near-emotional state, the ship is not, in the imaginative terms of its owner, very far from the almost-intelligent condition of The Professor's bomb. (p.123)

Heyward's first action is to abduct two popular English royals, who are known to the British public simply as Prince Jack and Prince Jo (their proper names are never given) and he forces the princes to watch the subsequent campaign of destruction. Alexander stresses that this is to guarantee that what the rebels are about to do "will be in the way of fair, open and legitimate warfare" (p.154) and the dynamite ship then sails into the Thames. It moors at London Bridge, which was itself the target of Clan na Gael bombers in 1885: "Like an unchangeable decree of fate, and with the unrelenting grimness of death, the Atlantic dropped anchor just below London Bridge, shortly after midnight on the night of July 3, 1889. The next day would be the undying and forever glorious Fourth of July. There was something peculiarly suggestive in the coincidence."[79] Alexander then brings Prince Jack to the House of Commons, where he presents an ultimatum to the speaker. The speaker summons the cabinet and relays the threat to the government:

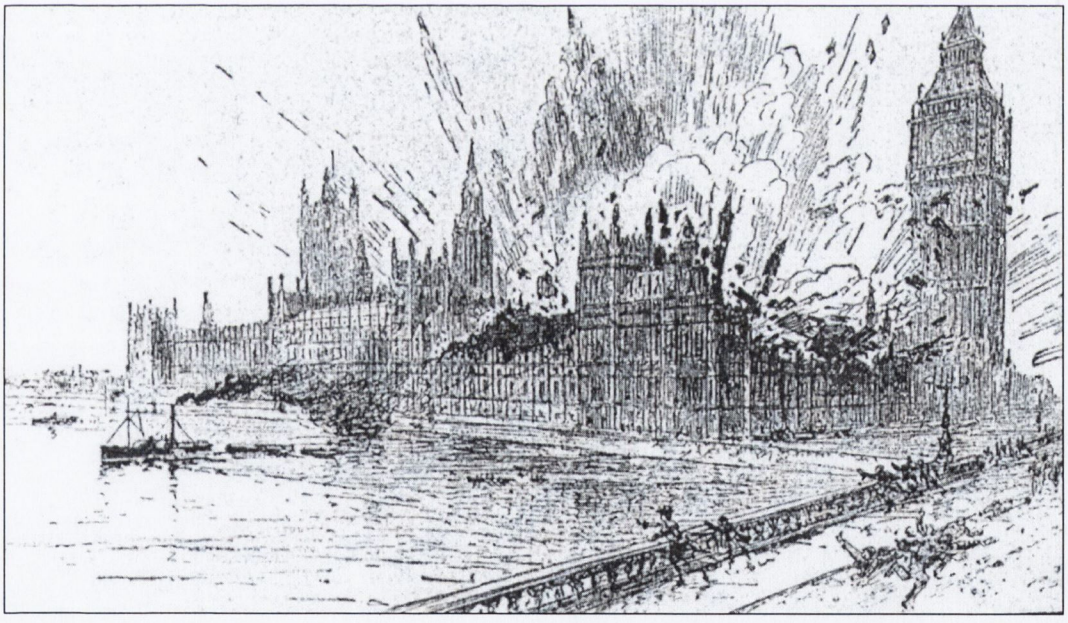
> "What I have feared," he continued, "has occurred. The growing discontent of the Irish in Ireland as shown, coincidentally, in the debate this evening, long since raised the question in my mind whether some disinterested person, moved to pity by fancied distress, would not organize an expedition, armed with the most scientific of modern weapons, and seek to gain by force the independence of Ireland. It was my belief that this expedition would be fitted out in the United States, and would be led by a native-born American. (p.171)

Realising that "(t)his house in which we sit may be blown to fragments at any moment", the MPs fall silent and "at the dread word 'dynamite' an irrepressible shudder ran through the closely crowded rows of men that thronged the members' benches." The Speaker announces that "'this expedition has no connection with the skulking, secret-killing dynamiters that have infested the British kingdom for years'" but is instead designed "'to meet us openly and above board, face to face. They will meet us like Englishmen, in a fair field, and with no favour.'" (p.178) With the acquisition of the dynamite gun, MacKay's fictional fenians are distinct from the real-life bombers who declared that "(t)alk about

[79] Ibid., p.158.

civilized warfare is trash" and who wanted, according to *The Times*, to "kill on business principles and save expense."[80]

The next morning the shelling begins and London is "shaken to its outermost rim by quickly-following waves of anxiety and fear." (p.180) The attack begins at 7.00 am and the city is rocked by explosions as the House of Lords, and the Bank of England, London Bridge and the Custom House are reduced to rubble by dynamite shells. After "Dynamite had done its usual work, in its usual relenting way", Britain capitulates by granting independence to Ireland, and the novel ends with the establishment of "the Great Irish Republic". (p.208) Ironically, it is only by abandoning subversive methods of dynamiting in favour of open warfare that the Irish rebels can win in MacKay's fantasy. While the novels present a sympathetic account of Irish republicanism, in which the motif of subversion is updated, allowing the dynamiters access to unlimited and futuristic technological advances. In attempting to legitimate their political cause MacKay felt compelled to present dynamite as the means of an open and fair fight, and it is used by Heyward as "a legitimate article of warfare... in the sight of all men" (pp.95-96); instead of secretly depositing bombs in public buildings, he and his crew sail up the Thames, publicly announce their political intentions, and then shell London.



From MacKay, *The Dynamite Ship* (frontispiece)

[80] "The Trial of O'Donnell", *The Times*, ibid.

A Modern Daedalus

Tom Greer's 1885 novel, *A Modern Daedalus*, offers another technologically-focussed version of the possibilities of political terror. An unsuccessful Liberal Home Rule candidate for North Derry in the election of 1892,[81] Greer also used science fiction as a means of furthering his nationalist ideology. The title of the novel has a modernist resonance in the correlation between Greer's "Dædalus" character, Jack O'Halloran, and James Joyce's modernist hero Stephen Dedalus, who appears in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922). Combining the popular literary fantasy of flight with the contemporary phenomenon of political subversion (an idea also entertained in E. Douglas Fawcett's 1893 novel, *Hartmann the Anarchist*, in which Hartmann, an anarchist and "a dynamitard" deploys the "incalculable force" of his "aeronef", or flying ship, *The Attila* against the population of London[82]), Greer presents aerial dynamite bombing as "a new and unprecedentedly destructive method of warfare". (p.233) Although he takes care to distance himself from the methods of the dynamitards, stating that, "(f)or the objects, and still more for the methods of the so-called 'dynamite party,' I have the deepest abhorrence", Greer's political sympathies lie firmly with their cause. As in *The Dynamiter*, the author's preface opens with a formal denunciation of the bombing campaign but Greer, like MacKay, also warns of the new technological developments that have made dynamite terrorism possible:

> Is it necessary to point out to any candid reader how widely different is the employment of dynamite in open war from its use as the instrument of secret murder and assassination, and of the destruction of public monuments which are a heritage and possession, not of the English people alone, but of mankind? The incidents of this story are purely imaginary; but the ideas and forces with which it deals are real, and may at any moment be brought into active play by the inevitable development of the 'resources of civilisation.' Such development is certain to take place; it is in rapid progress at this moment... Come it will in some form as little expected, as impossible to control. (v-vi)

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[81] Brown, Stephen J., *Ireland in Fiction: A Guide to Irish Novels, Tales, Romances and Folk-Lore* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1916), p.98.
[82] Fawcett, E. Douglas, *Hartmann the Anarchist; or, The Doom of the Great City* (London: Edward Arnold, 1893), pp.42, 12.

Despite the conciliatory tone of the preface the novel expresses a consistently anti-imperialist ideology and its hero, Jack O'Halloran, is transformed from a liberal unionist with middle-class aspirations into a radical Irish republican and separatist, who abandons the "selfish" (xiii) British to support the rebellious Irish. Like MacKay's fantasy, the novel is also set in a slightly futuristic date, 1887, when, Jack adds, "the performance of my machine are now as much matters of history as those of the steam engine". (xv)

After graduating from a Belfast college Jack returns home to Donegal where he develops a commercial machine that will enable humans to fly: "an apparatus in the highest degree simple, portable, and inexpensive" that will "put within the reach of every one who will devote to the task of learning to use it half the skill and courage which thousands cheerfully expend in learning the use of the bicycle". The apparatus will give its user the ability to fly "with a speed equal to that of the eagle, and far surpassing our swiftest railway trains." (xiv-xv) The machine is a light apparatus, with a pair of canvas wings supported by steel rods which endows the wearer with "a form almost exactly resembling that which the popular mythology attributes to angels". (p.66) Jack never explains precisely how his invention works because, "for the present (it must) remain my own exclusive property." (xi) He soon finds that his family and neighbours have been transformed in his absence by political events, as a recently elected conservative government has begun to reverse the previous liberal administration's Irish policies, alienating the peasantry: "Rents rose above their old figure, evictions were of daily occurrence, capital was attracted in abundance, and the Tory millennium of wealthy landlords and a starving peasantry began to be realised." (pp.8-9) His formerly loyal family have become seditious:

> I had left them cheerful, busy, and contented, diligently cultivating the little holding which the industry of their forefathers had reclaimed from the waste bog and heath of the mountain side, of which they looked forward to becoming the proprietors after a few more years of labour and frugality. I returned to find them gloomy, idle, suspicious, filled with a literature of whose very existence I was previously unaware, but of which they were as keen students as I myself was of mathematical and physical science. The whole history of Russian Nihilism, of German Socialism, of the Italian Carbonari, of the French Commune, was at their fingers' ends. (pp.6-7)

As well as keeping a library of subversive literature, Jack's father and brothers have an arms dump on their little holding which contains "an immense armoury of modern weapons, including dynamite bombs of New York manufacture." (p.10) Jack regards their political beliefs as hopeless, continues with his research into mechanical flight and finally test-flies his machine.

While soaring over Donegal, he notices the ruined cottages and roofless cabins and also witnesses an eviction:

> I actually caught sight of the smoke rising from the still smouldering thatch that had been stripped off by the 'crowbar brigade,' and saw the houseless wretches who had lived under it standing like statues of despair upon the roadside among the broken and worthless furniture... I gave way to feelings unworthy of a philosopher, and cursed the proprietors of the soil in language borrowed from the vocabulary of my brothers. (pp.14-15)

After another flight Jack witnesses the assassination of Tom Crawford, the agent of the local landlord on his way from another eviction. As he watches the eviction party passing by below, Jack witnesses an ambush by two men armed with modern Metford rifles and Crawford is killed "with a shot that might have won the Queen's prize at Wimbledon". (p.29) When he returns to his father's cottage, Jack argues with his brother, Dick, about the morality of political violence, to which Dick responds: "The Boers taught us a lesson at Majuba Hill that hasn't been thrown away, and there's a thousand lads in Ireland who could hit an officer between the eyes at a thousand yards, and never throw away an ounce of lead." (pp.31-32) Jack then reveals his invention to his father, who is delighted:

> 'This will ensure the triumph of Old Ireland. You must keep it a secret; you must set yourself to train your brothers and other young men, till we have a flying brigade that can go anywhere and do anything! Nothing will be able to stand against it, and you will have the glory of delivering your country and striking the chains from her hands! Oh! Jack!, I am a proud man to see this day!'
>
> 'Oh, father,' I answered, 'how can I make the first use of my discovery in causing war and bloodshed? It is not for war, it is for peace! it is not for one

people only, it is for all the world! I would rather bury it in the sea than that one life should be sacrificed, much less a bloody war provoked.'

'You talk like a silly girl,' said he. (p.36)

This time it is the pacifist who is feminised by a nationalist author. Disgusted by his son, the old man calls for a total war with the British: "the only way is to exterminate them from the face of the earth, and then there will be peace worth talking about." (p.37) As they argue, another brother, Dan, returns with a Metford rifle that he has nicknamed "my dark Rosaleen", and boasts: "they have to reckon with a different sort of weapon now". Determined to add the flying machine to his armoury, Jack's father announces that it will make "an armed rising possible which would not have been thought of without it", (pp.40-41) and he reveals that an underground army has been raised across the country. (pp.48-49) Jack is disowned by his family for refusing to teach the rebels to use the apparatus, and by Dan, who complains: "'Didn't I tell you he was English at heart? the spawn of those accursed Government colleges always are.'" (p.53) His father keeps the flying machine and Jack begins work on a second model; meanwhile, an "epidemic" of agrarian violence breaks out. Several landlords are shot by skilled marksmen using "a small-bore muzzle-loading match rifle of the most modern make, furnished with patent wind-gauge, telescopic sights, micrometer screws, and 'all the latest improvements'" is found (pp.60-61), and when Jack finishes his second flying machine England erupts with "public excitement" over events in Ireland. Coercion bills are passed in at Westminster, (p.64) but Jack decides to advertise his invention to the government in London, which he regards as the natural centre for political and scientific progress.

He flies to London and causes "a little sensation" by flying down Piccadilly, St. James' Street, Pall Mall and then on to Trafalgar Square, "where I made two or three circles in the air, and finally alighted on the top of Nelson's Monument." (p.75) The sight of a flying man causes mass hysteria: "the crowd poured in a solid mass down Whitehall, and I heard shouts and screams, not all of wonder and amazement, but of anger and terror as well." Jack flies toward St. Paul's Cathedral so as to "lay the devil I had unintentionally raised" and, after landing, learns about the chaos he has caused from the paper boys: "'*Globe* or *Echo*, sir! last edition! full description of the flying man!! sixteen people trampled to death in the streets!!! great dynamite plot to blow up St Paul's!!!'" Again, in a very reflexive way that is similar to that which appears in *Captain Shannon*, but delivered from a nationalist position, this dynamite novel integrates press-scares and

the issue of media-consumption into its plot, as Jack complains that "the inventive genius of the writers had no difficulty in discovering the motive that had prompted me. Undoubtedly it was part of a dynamite conspiracy, and the police were at that moment on the roof of St Paul's, searching for the infernal machine I had been seen to carry there." (pp.81-82) Determined to tell his own side of the story, Jack confronts the editor of the *Echo* and is invited to write a series of articles describing his invention and his plans for its use. The editor brings Jack to Westminster, where MPs are debating the threat posed by the flying machine, and he listens as the Home Secretary reinforces the panic: "He did not wonder that the popular instinct, which was always a more reliable guide than the theories of philosophers or the shifty explanations of politicians, connected this incident with the machinations of that party from whose ingenuity the country had suffered so much, ie – dynamiters." (p.91) Jack is introduced to the politician and reluctantly agrees to give the government a demonstration, but when a detective tries to arrest him the next morning, he dons his wings and flies off:

> I felt a proud and exhilirating sense of freedom as I surveyed the city spread like a huge ant-hill beneath me, and tried to make out the exact position of Whitehall and Downing Street. 'That is where a dozen crawling insects are sitting at this moment,' I soliloquised, 'to determine whether they will allow me to give these powers to men, or even to exercise them myself at their beck and call?... I will trust them no further, I laugh at their puny authority... I may remember I am an Irishman still.' (pp.130-131)

Jack returns to the *Echo* office and tells the editor that he will return to Ireland with his invention, and the newspaper man sympathises with him in his encounter with "'the high-handed tyranny and general profligacy and corruption of the Tory Government." (p.134) Here he learns that the Irish rebellion is gaining momentum, particularly in County Donegal, where a large eviction party of soldiers, policemen and magistrates have been decimated by sharp-shooting guerrillas. But when he returns to Westminster he sees an angry lynch mob attacking the Irish members and is caught up in a crowd surge and captured.

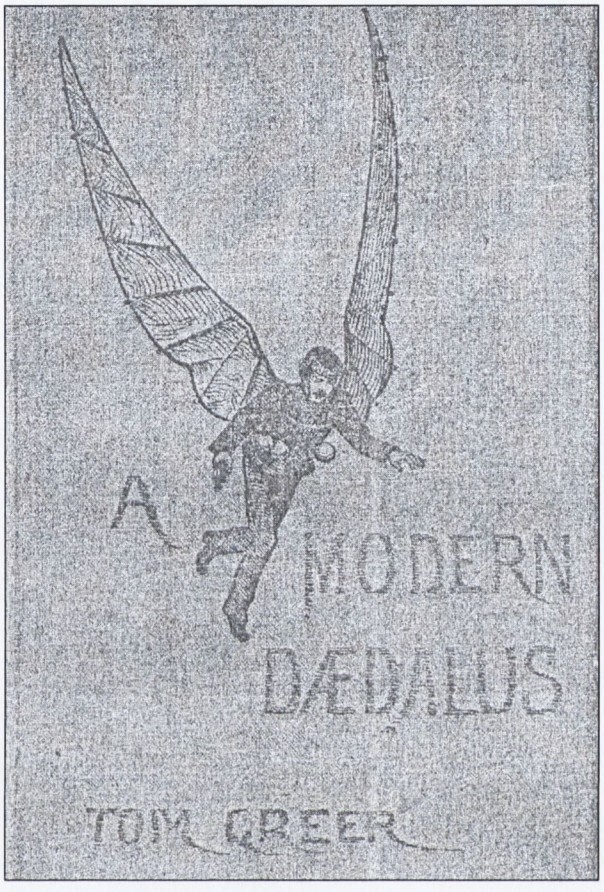
Jack is imprisoned in St. Stephens' Clock Tower, while the Irish rebellion escalates into a national revolt with risings in every district excepting Belfast. An Irish Republic is declared in Dublin and the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, who escapes from London, is appointed president. (pp.152-159) Jack is soon rescued by his

brother, Dick and joins the effort "to sweep the English into the sea": "'what a benefit we'll give to the enemy when we've a hundred or two fellows able to fly like this! Just fancy the effect of a shower of dynamite bombs dropped among the main body of an army, or on the deck of a ship.'" (pp.181, 185) He is introduced to the General commanding the Irish national army, an Irish American fenian: "a man of decidedly American appearance and accent, who was, nevertheless, we were given to understand, a native of Ireland", who asks Jack to lead an attack on the heavily defended Dublin Castle, as he is anxious to see "'the effect of a few dynamite bombs dropped from a height'" upon the garrison stationed there. (pp.194-195) Jack produces more machines, trains a batch of troops, "the flying brigade of the Irish army" (p.242), and leads the aerial attack:

> I balanced myself above them for a moment, and dropped a bomb, which struck the pavement close to their feet and burst with a loud report, enveloping the entire party in smoke and dust.
>
> It was perhaps well that the immediate effects were thus concealed from our eyes. Shell after shell dropped in quick succession, and in a moment nothing was visible but a dim rolling cloud of dust, momentarily torn asunder by the quick flashes of the explosions ... When the infernal rain was over, we remained for a long time hovering in the air, waiting for the vast cloud to settle. As it slowly cleared away, a scene of desolation met our eyes... Broken roofs and shattered walls stood up in ghastly nakedness under the glare of the electric light; below heaps of bricks and mortar, plaster and broken glass, and bodies of men in uniform half buried among the ruins. (pp.201-202)

The troops in the Castle are helpless against the bombardment and the garrison surrenders. Like the other novels examined in this chapter, *A Modern Daedalus* again shows how politically reflexive dynamite fictions can be: with this scene of merciless aerial destruction, it seems that Greer is answering, in fictional terms, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa's call for "(a) few active, intrepid and intelligent men (who) can do so much to annoy and hurt England." The Irish cause, Rossa claimed, required "Skirmishers", or "a little band of heroes who will initiate and keep up without intermission a guerrilla warfare – men who will fly over land and sea like invisible beings

– now striking the enemy in Ireland, now in India, now in England itself, as occasion may present."[83]



"...men who will fly over land and sea like invisible beings – now striking the enemy in Ireland, now in India, now in England itself, as occasion may present."

Jack also leads a night-time raid on the ironclads blockading Dublin Bay. Amid the explosions, flares and mortars, he watches the "brilliant display" below: "No grander or more striking spectacle could be imagined than met our gaze; the quick flashes of the mortar, the intense blaze of the bursting shells, the quivering light reflected from the illuminated circle of sea; and, in the distance, the rockets which the [ironclads] continued to throw up." (p.212) Having sunk the ships, the squadron returns to Dublin, where he learns that the Irish fighting in the north are copying the Boers' tactics: "'Ah! Majuba Hill!' exclaimed Dick. 'Do you know the Boers fought for the independence of Ireland

[83] The Irish World, December, 1875, quoted in Short, K.R.M., *The Dynamite War: Irish-American Bombers in Victorian Britain* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1979), p.38.

that day? They showed what could be done against the British army by really good shooting, and set Irish men to work to organise the body that has done good service since.'" (p.216) Armed with Dick's rifles and Jack's flying machine, the separatists appear set to outmatch British weapons and threaten to end British rule. Their counter-technology promises a victory as significant as that enjoyed by the Boer snipers whose long-range sniping outgunned Gatling guns and inferior Martini-Henry breech-loading rifles during the Transvaal's war of independence of 1880-1881, when Boer marksmanship and guerrilla tactics culminated in the British defeat at Majuba Hill in northern Natal. Despite the fact that the British actually won the first Boer War of 1880-1881, for nationalists like Greer there was plenty of excitement in the prospect of the British army suffering heavy casualties in the field, as happened in this battle, and his novel serves as a political fantasy based on this kind of possibility. Ulster becomes the theatre for this final stage of the Anglo-Irish conflict as Jack and his men fly there to support the national army under the command of his other brother, Dan. Here, while surveying the battlefield, Jack realises that the Irish, with their irregular tactics, have changed the face of warfare:

> of the imposing effect of heavy masses, or even of continuous lines of men, there was not a trace. The roar of regular volleys, the thunder of the charge; everything that I had associated with the idea of a pitched battle in the field, was conspicuous by its absence; and I now realised for the first time what a change the introduction of arms of precision, and of the modern breech-loader, had forced upon military tacticians. I was now to study how I could myself best contribute to a further alteration; (p.228)

Jack is ordered to "make short work of them" (p.232) and arms his men with dynamite cartridges and cans of petrol. Jack recalls "the hellish phantasmagoria" of the final attack and the complete destruction of the British expeditionary force (pp.235-236) as his men douse the British camp with petrol and bomb the magazine:

> hell at once burst forth. First, with a shattering crash, the line leaped into the air. Then the wagons caught fire, and a succession of deafening explosions announced that the stores of cartridges had been blown up. Vast showers of sparks, fragments of blazing wood, and sheets of flaming canvas and tarpaulin

were hurled in all directions. In a moment the tents were involved in the conflagration, and a roaring sea of flame spread over the entire site of what had been the English camp.

It lasted only a minute, but what a minute! I have not the imagination of Dante, and I cannot picture to my readers a scene such as even the author of the 'Inferno' could not have painted, although it has never ceased to haunt my memory since. I still seem to feel the hot and suffocating rush of smoke and vapour that swept upwards to the very heavens, forcing us to fly wildly to windward to escape its scorching breath. I still seem to see hurrying crowds of figures, some shining like red-hot metal under the fierce glare, others black like stage devils against a background of raging flame, which leapt out and vanished into the surrounding darkness. I heard, thank Heaven! no human voice to haunt me in the after years; every cry, if there were time to cry, was drowned in the crackling roar of the sudden conflagration, and the crash of the explosions, as magazine after magazine went up in smoke and thunder. (pp.237-238)

In a moment of Miltonian contemplation, Jack remembers the "the infernal roar" of the battle:

I remember remarking with a certain feeling of amusement how like huge bats were the figures that flitted round me in the gloom, and remembering that the wings they used were of the form attributed by superstition to devils, rather than to angels. I did not forget, however, that even among devils discipline is supposed to exist; and with a shrill note on my whistle I called my imps around me, marshalled them in order, and gave the word for a return to our quarters. (pp.238-239)

With the British troops reduced to "dark and shapeless heaps", Belfast is captured and a fleet of ironclads are sunk in Belfast Lough; British jingoism is finally checked by "the loss of thousands of picked soldiers, of the most renowned general in England, of three of the most magnificent ships in the world, to say nothing of two scions of the royal house". (p.249)

By using irregular methods and Boer tactics, and combining these with Jack's futuristic "wings", the Irish win the war and force a British withdrawal. The novel closes with Jack reflecting on the morality of the victory:

> It was asked, on every side, What disgrace can there be in accepting the inevitable? Why not recognise the fact that the Irish have a weapon against which it is vain to fight – a weapon by which we are placed at as great a disadvantage as were the Zulus, with their assegais and ox-hide shields, when compared to our battalions with Martini-Henry rifles and Gatling guns? (p.250)

While Greer's novel describes a large-scale war of national liberation it combines several motifs of individualised political terror (dynamite bombs, long-range sniping rifles and agrarian violence, or "moonlighting") with the apparently limitless subversive potential of flight. While it draws on the tradition of the popular invasion story, *A Modern Dædalus* reverses the political position of the narrator and reader, offering an anti-imperialist fantasy of unstoppable rebellion and republican victory, so that it appears like an Irish separatist version of George Tomkyns Chesney's 1871 novel, *The Battle of Dorking*. The novel was written as a response to the conservative and imperialist response to the dynamite campaign, which Greer found hypocritical, as he makes clear through Jack's reaction to the British press reports about the flying machine. Although the novel opens with a condemnation of the actual Clan na Gael bomb attacks, it closes with Jack reflecting upon the morality of his success:

> I have no pride in victory. But when men do make war they ought to be in earnest. Their weapons should be the deadliest they can use; their blows the heaviest they can deal. To say that they must make war, indeed, but that they must not make it too effectively; that to kill a man with a solid bullet is legitimate, but to wound him with an explosive one is atrocious; that to blow your enemy to fragments with gunpowder is civilised warfare, but to employ dynamite for the same purposes is worthy only of savages; is a species of cant born of the idea that war is a magnificent game for kings and nobles, and must be carried out under rules that disguise its essentially revolting nature, and prevent it from being too dangerous or disagreeable to them. (p.247)

Greer's point – that regular warfare is as brutal as the methods of terrorism – criticizes what he considered to be the hypocrisy of the imperial system. The Clan na Gael dynamite campaign transferred the focus of separatist violence by shifting attention away from Ireland, where rural insurrection, resistance to landlordism and

"moonlighting" were the norms (forms of political violence that fed the metropolitan imagination of Ireland as the site of "provincial" political troubles), and making terrorism a feature of the metropolitan political and cultural experience; for Greer, this provided an opportunity to speculate about what might happen if these methods were made more widespread, and more effective. Greer compensates for the transference of Irish subversion away from the island of Ireland by providing a fantasy of large-scale revolt in which the new technologies of dynamite terrorism are fused with more traditionally Irish forms of subversion such as ribbonism and mass mobilizations, along with the relocation of dynamite bombing back to Ireland. Even the Irish-American role in events is downplayed, and the officer commanding the national army plays a subordinate role to Jack's aerial exploits. Greer transforms contemporary terrorists into a more conventional army of airmen who, although a feature of scientific fantasy, fight the British in the open, like MacKay's naval dynamiters. Their feat is to confront Britain directly and, with the aid of superior weapons technology, defeat the British. While this feature of MacKay's and Greer's bombers distinguish them from the underhand activities of Captain Shannon and Zero, all of these revolutionaries make use of dynamite. While the Stevensons and Kernehan represent their bombers as morally corrupt subversives, both MacKay and Greer reveal their nationalist sympathies very plainly. Yet what all of these fictions do share is their complicity in the pleasure-effect of observing terrorism: as with Greer's final destruction of the British army in Ulster, each of the novels also offer extended descriptions of scenes of destruction.

Conclusion

John Littlechild, the detective who headed the Special Irish Branch in 1883, noted that "the patriotic element which no doubt animated the '67 rising was absent from the dynamite campaign... Terrorism was the object of this later movement".[84] By pointing to what he claimed was the more pure, and therefore honourable, earlier Fenian rebellion of 1867, Littlechild explains what was novel about the Clan na Gael bombing campaign: even though conservatives liked to point to the more understandable motives of the

[84] Littlechild, John, *Reminiscences of Chief Inspector Littlechild* (London: The Leadenhall Prefs, 1894), p.12.

earlier separatists (made all the more easy by the fact that their campaign was defeated and safely in the past), they felt a need to contain the very idea of dynamite bombing. With the underground railway bombing of April, 1897, and the publication of *Captain Shannon* in the same year, it became clear that the figure of the lone bomber was still a dangerous historical and fictional character (as we shall see in the next chapter, dynamiting had become a universal form of political protest, as it was also used by anarchists throughout the 1890s).

Dynamite appears as a highly malleable political material in these fictions, serving to underline conservative anxieties over terrorism or underpinning efforts to establish an independent Irish republic. While novels such as *The Dynamiter* served the conservative and unionist cause by intervening against the nationalist cause, the Stevensons' novel nevertheless portrays the terrorist as a new character operating within the urban spectrum and goes some way in order to represent the "aesthetic" priorities of people who were "infatuated" with the idea of "blowing up ships, buildings, and people with infernal machines."[85] *The Dynamiter* is certainly the kind of cultural response to terrorism that bears a direct relationship with the *Times*' political attempts to do the same, yet such fictions also present a clearly modern consciousness of terrorism as an almost politically value-free, yet aesthetically loaded phenomenon. When considered alongside novels that actually sympathise with dynamite terrorism, novels which also describe the sensation-effect of this new form of political subversion, the political messages of both conservative and radical texts is subsumed beneath the grander thrill of the dynamite fiction itself.

While newspaper reports are transcribed as fictional discourses in these novels, the grander political message is, in *The Dynamiter*, either relegated to the authors' dedication to Constables Cole and Cox, or, at face value, reduced to representations of incapable, auto-destructive terrorists. Nevertheless, the conservative novels examined in this chapter play their own part in the imperial, anti-nationalist cause and build upon the journalistic and political efforts of conservative organs such as *The Times*. Christy Campbell has pointed to "the utility of journalism in counter-revolutionary warfare" in his study of the bogus 1887 "Jubilee Plot", when the C.I.D. released scare stories about a Clan na Gael attempt to kill Queen Victoria during a thanksgiving service in Westminster

[85] "Dynamite Operations in the United States", *The Times*, Wednesday July 5th, 1882, p.4.

Abbey.[86] Such phantom plots and the actual, unclaimed bombing of the underground a decade later in 1897 point to the blurring of distinctions between political realities and modern literary fantasy.

Although *The Dynamiter* treats Irish republicanism in an ironical register, its literary and cultural value lie in its treatment of the aesthetics of terrorism. Modernity's destructive potential was first realised by the Clan na Gael dynamitards, who illustrated just how modern the blowing up of buildings could be. They were among the first western terrorists to take advantage of the modern, drifting urban scene and its labyrinthine geography so that their strategy of concealing themselves within what one Edwardian critic of the urban spread described as "the new city race"[87] enjoyed considerable cultural purchase, as their outrages were transformed, from functioning as factual fodder for the newspapers to serving as grist for the fictional mill of popular novelists. But the transformation was not fully achieved by these novels on their own: dynamite fictions are very self-reflexive texts that mirror many of the concerns of the popular culture out of which they emerged. This feature of late-Victorian terrorism, alongside the wider imagination of urban chaos and hysteria, continues to inform popular cultural forms, particularly film. If, as David Harvey advocates, we inhabit an extended period of modernity, within which post-modern and modern sensibilities are fused to the extent that "it is almost impossible to tell where the modernist impulse begins or ends",[88] then these popular novels, and their function as narratives of modernity, exercise a profound bearing upon contemporary sensibilities. Rather than considering terrorism as straightforwardly "criminal Irishness",[89] these novels examine terrorism as a modern phenomenon, although one that is linked to atavism, as the condemnation of underhand dynamiting in Tom Greer's preface illustrates. While, politically, dynamite terrorism was unreadable to the police, it was analysed in a cultural register by the authors of dynamite novels. Their attempts to describe the culture of terrorism invented the popular terms by which this type of subversive political violence could be imagined. This particularly modern sensibility is adumbrated through the characters of Zero and Captain Shannon whose explosive declarations and rhetoric are mirrored by the heroic and reflective insurrectionist, Jack O'Halloran. While Zero is largely concerned with upsetting private,

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[86] Campbell, Christy, *Fenian Fire: The British Government Plot to Assassinate Queen Victoria* (London: HarperCollins, 2002), p.38.
[87] Anon, *The Heart of the Empire,* Preface, ix.
[88] Harvey, ibid, p.339.
[89] Wynne, Catherine, *The Colonial Conan Doyle* (Westport, Connecticut: The Greenwood Press, 2002), p.22.

bourgeois and domestic life, Captain Shannon is let loose upon the metropolis, and Jack O'Halloran's rebellion finally succeeds in breaking Ireland's political connection with England. In these fictions, causing explosions becomes an entirely modern phenomenon, and their appeal lies in the public's enjoyment of this kind of political subversion. The political situation in which these terrorists find themselves lies somewhere between the Benjaminian notion of the free, modern man at large and the popular contemporary fascination with what the Stevensons termed "the ugly devil" of political crime.

Chapter Two

"The Science of Chemistry is Stronger than Popular Opinion": Anarchist Writing and "The Voice of Dynamite"

Everything is at an end.
Do what you choose.
Everything is Everybody's.
"The Anarchist Doctrine"[1]

For the truly committed anarchist, writing has always been a revolutionary exercise. As the father of French anarchism, Joseph Pierre Proudhon pointed out in 1840, "equality failed to conquer by the sword only that it might conquer by the pen." If his writing failed to live up to what the revolution demanded of it, "(i)f I fail to win my case," Proudhon told his readers, then "there is nothing for us proletarians but to cut our throats."[2] In 1907 the Italian anarchist, Errico Malatesta, voiced his frustration at the widespread perception of anarchism-as-terrorism that had taken hold of the popular imagination. Despite decades of campaigning for his cause, Malatesta had come to realise that his political philosophy had become bogged down in images of political violence and rhetorical extremism. But anarchism, he argued, was far more meaningful than this popular misunderstanding and Malatesta complained that "philological discussions" had led to confusion over the meaning of the ideology:

> The common interpretation of the word does not misconceive its true etymological significance, but is derived from it, owing to the prejudice that government must be a necessity of the organization of social life, and that consequently a society without government must be given up to disorder, and

[1] Quoted in Dubois, Félix, *The Anarchist Peril*, p.177.
[2] Proudhon, Pierre Joseph, *What is Property?*, translated from *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* by Donald R. Kelley and Bonnie G. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 34, 36.

> oscillate between the unbridled dominion of some and the blind vengeance of others. [3]

For Malatesta, it was "this prejudice",[4] along with its influence on the popular meaning of anarchism that was responsible for the conflation of libertarian discourse with political violence, and not his movement's association with the rhetorical violence of writers like Proudhon. That anarchism had come to mean mayhem was not due to subversion carried out by the anarchists themselves but was instead the result of discussion over the meaning of a word, and of widespread misunderstanding of the meaning and function of government. Yet despite Malatesta's claims of innocence, the fusion of anarchist thought with terrorist action within the popular imagination was the result of a process that was more complicated than the philological confusion that he pointed to. This chapter will argue that, rather than trying to appear reasonable or peaceful, many of the most vocal anarchists responded to state violence by writing newspaper articles and making public declarations in which political violence was celebrated. The political scare caused by anarchist terrorism in the 1880s and 1890s owed something to the anarchists' publicization of their ideology in their own presses, in anonymous pamphlets and even in speeches made from the dock. Therefore, despite pronouncements to the contrary by some of its leading figures, anarchism was characterised by what one of its most notorious exponents described as "the voice of dynamite", which lauded the detonation of bombs and other acts of political violence in the most explosive language possible: as late as 1896, one London newspaper, *The Anarchist*, called for "War to the Knife", praised "the immortal bomb", and demanded that anarchists "terrorize the tyrannical administrators of the law".[5]

The international anarchist movement was, in terms of its political structure, at least, a decidedly homogenous affair. While moderates like Malatesta campaigned peacefully for the utopian "equality" mentioned by Proudhon, more extreme anarchists advocated a different path toward revolution. These revolutionaries celebrated political violence whilst rubbing shoulders with their more cautious colleagues in the offices and garrets within which their radical newspapers were published. This chapter will examine how their extremist writing reflected the state of *fin-de-siècle* anarchism, and will argue

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[3] Malatesta, Errico, from *Anarchy*, quoted, Woodcock, George (ed.) *The Anarchist Reader* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), p. 63.
[4] Ibid, idem.
[5] "War to the Knife", *The Anarchist*, London, No. 19, September 1896, p.1.

that this shocking literature, published alongside the occurrence of acts of terrorism during the 1880s and 1890s, influenced popular perceptions of libertarianism in the late nineteenth century. In turn, these negative perceptions exercised a wider and more enduring cultural influence than Malatesta's calls for reason as they filtered into popular fictions about anarchism, such as H.G. Wells' 1897 novel, *The Invisible Man* in which, as argued in the next chapter, the destructive potential of anarchist terrorism is examined in the science fiction mode, presenting a particularly violent version of political chaos. While only a minority of activists within the European anarchist movement committed themselves to terrorism, the radicals' belief in the primacy of the act of revolt became a staple feature of their newspapers, which in turn fed the fictional fantasies that gave them such a bad press. Two former anarchists, Helen and Christina Rossetti, reflected on this process in their 1903 novel, *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, examined below, which described the relationship between physical force anarchism and the underground presses that popularised the methods of militants such as the French terrorists, Émile Henry and Ravachol.

THE EDITORIAL OFFICE OF THE *RÉVOLTÉ*.

The Editorial Office of the *Révolté*, from Dubois, *The Anarchist Peril* (frontispiece)

The lasting perception of anarchism, in which young bomb-throwing revolutionaries appeared to rub shoulders with older moderates, remained popular; while Malatesta belonged squarely within the philosophical school of anarchism, by the mid-1890s his more measured beliefs had become subsumed beneath the widespread belief that anarchy meant nothing more than political chaos and unpredictable violence. As James Joll has argued, the optimistic but academic tones of the moderates amounted to a form of "unorthodox speculation" that was countered and undermined throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the violent rhetoric of anarchists who were committed to (or were supporters of) "propaganda by deed".[6] Unlike other forms of terrorism that had made newspaper headlines throughout the 1880s, such as the dynamite campaign of the Irish separatists, anarchism was unique in that it appeared to be a strange mixture of the political and the criminal, never quite wholly belonging to either sphere and, as such, occupying a vague position within the political imaginary. While anarchism was a politically unreadable phenomenon, the unpredictability of its violence came to mirror the bourgeois ethos that underpinned nineteenth century liberal capitalism.

As well as writing for their own journals and newspapers some anarchists, such as Helen and Olivia Rossetti, wrote their own fictions about the anarchist movement. *A Girl Among the Anarchists* is an almost autobiographical account of their experiences of editing the anarchist journal, *The Torch*. The novel examines the contradictions that were inherent in a movement that, while it followed the libertarian philosophical tradition, also provided a journalistic platform to the terrorists, and their supporters, who advocated "propaganda by deed". As well as providing a rare insight into the workings of the anarchist press, the Rossetti sisters also used the novel to offer their own opinions on the most famous anarchists of their day, including the French Café-bomber, Émile Henry. But anarchism did not just criticise society from the margins: Oscar Wilde presented an equally stinging critique from inside the literary mainstream. His 1891 essay, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" castigated the destructive characteristics of modern capitalism, urged resistance against the system and recommended that, rather than starve, poor people should go out and steal. This chapter will explain that Wilde's position as an aesthete was influenced by the radical politics of the extreme left.

With the Haymarket explosion of 1886, when a bomb was set off during a labour demonstration in Chicago, anarchist terrorism *par excellence* appeared to pose a real

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[6] Joll, James, *The Anarchists* (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 326.

threat in the United States and Britain. Although Russian Nihilists had been practicing political terrorism for years, and had most notably scored a spectacularly violent success with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, when a mine was detonated in a St Petersburg street as his carriage passed by, Nihilism was viewed as an essentially 'eastern' European affair, or as the political 'stuff' of the Russias, as it is portrayed in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911). Equally, despite the opprobrium visited on the dynamitards of the Irish-American Clan na Gael organisation, whose bombs had exploded intermittently in British cities throughout the mid-1880s, nationalist dynamiting could be rationalised by contemporary observers such as Robert Louis Stevenson due to the separatist aspirations of the Irish terrorists. Anarchism, however, was different.

Chicago: The Haymarket Affair and the Anarchist Press

Mainstream anarchists were not as hermetically sealed from their more violent counterparts as they tried to make out in hindsight. For example, during the 1890s, writers and distributors of moderate British anarchist newspapers like *The Torch* circulated back-issues of the notorious German-language paper *Die Freiheit* (*Freedom*). Ironically subtitled "An Organ of Social Democracy", *Die Freiheit* was perhaps the most unapologetically violent newspaper of the 1880s and it exercised a profound influence over subsequent anarchist journalism in English. Edited by the Bavarian-born Johann Most, the paper gave German anarchists in Britain a bad reputation for "their wild talk".[7] Most, an anarchist, agitator and "propagandist-of-the-word",[8] was a devout believer in the connection that bound language to violent revolution. Banished from Austria in 1871 after serving a prison sentence for his radical activities, Most became the most notorious anarchist writer in Europe. He returned to Germany where his *Freie Presse* was suppressed in 1878, and in the same year he emigrated to London where he immediately took advantage of Britain's liberal political atmosphere to publish *Die Freiheit*. However the paper even tested the boundaries of British tolerance and the government moved against Most after the infamous issue of March 19th, 1881, in which

[7] "Notes on the News", *The Commonweal*, Vol. 5, No. 160, February 2nd, 1889, p.33.
[8] Trautmann, Frederic, *The Voice of Terror: A Biography of Johann Most* (Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press, 1980), xxi.

he celebrated the assassination of Tsar Alexander II as "Sterling propaganda-by-the-deed!" and declared "Let more monarchs be killed!". In a column framed in red and headed "AT LAST", "Triumph!, Triumph!",[9] the anarchist wrote: "One of the vilest tyrants corroded through and through by corruption, is no more." The bomb that had killed the Tsar "fell at the despot's feet, shattered his legs, ripped open his belly, and inflicted many wounds... Conveyed to his palace and for an hour and a half in the greatest of suffering, the autocrat meditated on his guilt. Then he died as he deserved to die – like a dog."[10] Most called for assassinations to continue "until the last tyrant, the last plutocrat, and the last priest are dead."[11] Calling for similar attacks on every head of state "from St Petersburg to Washington",[12] Most had finally outraged British sensibilities and was sentenced to sixteen months hard labour. However, the prison sentence did not bring *Die Feiheit's* rhetoric under control and in 1882 the paper was again applauding assassination. This time the bloody killings of the Lord Lieutenant, Frederick Cavendish and Thomas Burke, his Chief Under Secretary, in Dublin's Phoenix Park by the "Invincibles", a splinter group of the Irish Fenian movement, were praised as an "heroically bold act of popular justice" that "splendidly annihilated the evil representatives of a malignant government". Cavendish, explained the paper, was "only a poor simpleton" but this "in no way diminishes the significance of the admirable deed."[13]

On release from prison Most emigrated to the United States where his writing found a new audience among immigrant anarchist circles and in July 1885 he published a practical handbook for revolutionaries in German, entitled *Science of Revolutionary Warfare*. Less than a year later American political attentions were focussed on class struggle by the Haymarket explosion in Chicago on May 4th, 1886, in which a bomb was thrown at a police line during a protest meeting of 1,200 strikers and anarchists. Seven officers were killed and the subsequent police charge caused the deaths of ten demonstrators. According to Most's biographer, the German agitator had exercised considerable influence over the Chicago anarchists, whom he advised and corresponded with:

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[9] Ibid., p.50.
[10] Ibid., p.52.
[11] Ibid., p.44.
[12] Oliver, Hermia, *The International Anarchist Movement in England*, p.18.
[13] *Die Freiheit*, 13th May, 1882, quoted, Trautmann, Ibid., p.70.

> He gave speeches, wrote articles, and distributed pamphlets urging violence; he published a manual on how to arm and fight; and his exhortations and instructions could have inspired the idea, informed the making, and prompted the throwing of the bomb. Chicago orators, urging arming, had said "Read Most."[14]

The official hysteria that followed the explosion reached a crescendo with the trial of the 'Haymarket Martyrs', four anarchists – Albert Parsons, August Spies, George Engel, and Adolph Fischer - who were convicted and hanged "for incendiary writings and inflammatory speeches that could have provoked the bomb." [15] A fifth, Louis Lingg, committed suicide in prison by exploding a cartridge inside his mouth.

While it was the detonation of a bomb that had brought tensions in Chicago to a particularly violent conclusion, the explosion itself was a result of a political conflict in which anarchist writers, including Albert Parsons, had directly confronted the state and employers, using their newspapers as a means of spreading propaganda-by-word. Parsons was editor of the Chicago anarchist organ *The Alarm* and had used his paper to highlight the state of virtual warfare that existed in the city between those in political power and striking workers:

> According to "law" there is no violence employed when employers starve the workmen into subjection, but it is "unlawful and disorderly" for the worker to resist the starvation process known as the lock-out, discharge, etc. To resist these compulsory methods is what the law terms "violence," and the authorities are called upon by employers to suppress it. The police, guardians of law and order, are set upon the unarmed people to quell the disturbance, the militia being held as a reserve to reinforce them when necessary. Workingmen are thus driven to the choice of quiet submission or cracked heads, broken bones and slaughter. In such cases arms become a necessity.[16]

The Chicago anarchists were not prepared to suffer broken bones passively. In the same issue, Parsons advertised a "GREAT CAMP AND PRIZE SHOOTING!" organized by "The Workingmen's armed organization":

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[14] Ibid., p.130.
[15] Ibid, p. 131.
[16] "The Police" *The Alarm*, Chicago, Vol. 2, No. 1, August 22, 1885.

> It is needless to say that nothing is more important to the wage-slave than a knowledge of how to handle the rifle, pistol and bomb. Recent attacks of the authorities upon defenceless working people makes such a knowledge the prime necessity for self-preservation. A pleasant time is expected. Bring your families.[17]

Clearly, Parsons was advocating defensive action before the Haymarket trial and executions, and his writing points to the state of emergency that pertained to both sides of the labour dispute in the city. But the Haymarket crisis permanently polarised American anarchists and mainstream political opinion. "Not because you have caused the Haymarket bomb," the judge told Parsons and his co-accused, "but because you are Anarchists, you are on trial."[18] After sentencing Parsons called on his comrades to continue publishing his paper: "Though fallen, wounded perhaps unto death, in the battle for liberty, the standard – the press- which my hands bore aloft in the midst of struggle is caught up by other hands". He also gave a defiant oration from the dock which, soberly noted *The Alarm*, failed to win any favour with the judge: "Parsons' eight-hour speech of defiance when called up for sentence banished the last ray of hope." That Parsons' journalism was a critical factor in the Chicago political scene is evidenced by the fact that, shortly before the execution, he was visited by Melville E. Stone, editor of the mainstream *Daily News*, who asked him to sign a retraction, which he refused to do. Instead, Parsons called on activists to continue with their propaganda:

Albert Parsons and the other Haymarket Martyrs went to the gallows because the authorities were determined to contain the threat posed by anarchist writers, and their executions "shaped the radical conscience of a generation".[19] In the heated aftermath of their deaths, Johann Most's brand of extreme rhetoric became normalised within some anarchist newspapers. The affair provided the American and British left with plenty of rhetorical material while bitter feeling over the executions alienated radical political opinion on both sides of the Atlantic for years. As if they too had come under Most's influence, anarchist newspapers and journals outside Chicago made sure that it was for the bomb itself that Haymarket became remembered and when their immediate shock at

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[17] "The Military Organization", ibid.
[18] Quoted in Marshall, Peter, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (London: Fontana, 1992), p.397.
[19] Ibid.

the executions had subsided radical writers began to focus on the issue of offensive political violence.

Emboldened, subsequent issues of *The Alarm* pointed to what it considered to be the inherent weaknesses of modern society and suggested that it contained the very "elements" of its own destruction:

> It seems absurd to suppose a civilisation so great, so universal as ours could ever die out. Yet unless the elements of progress within it are strong enough to carry it beyond the point of receding, it can die. The very grandeur of its factors make them more powerful for destruction if they work the wrong way. A rich and powerful class, with all the earth to revel in, will the sooner burn and wither itself to destruction. A huge mass of humanity, knowing many wants and capabilities, yet deprived of the very means of life and development, and weakened by apathetic helplessness will sink an easy prey to death, disease, ignorance, slavery – and then comes to ruin... We may be factors in the great whole, atoms working toward a grand upheaval as really as the symptoms themselves are resolving into elements of their own destruction.[20]

The sheer "grandeur" of modern capitalist society, on the one hand, and the position of the "mass of humanity" as mere "atoms", on the other, made the existing social order all the more vulnerable to a "grand upheaval" of revolutionary action, argued the paper. The grander and more totalising the effects, or "factors" of the era, the more open these systems become to the actions of its smaller parts – the anarchic atoms. As attitudes hardened during the years following the Haymarket affair, *The Alarm* began to find inspiration in recent technological and scientific breakthroughs, showing that modernity had a political underground, within which the anarchists celebrated such developments and recommended that they be used to their advantage. And some found comfort in the simple destruction wrought by such devices: although five anarchists died as a result of the Haymarket explosion, it was reasoned, the bomb did, after all, strike at the state and kill seven police officers. Therefore the familiar socialist model of a relentless capitalism hurling itself toward its own inevitable destruction, in which "the symptoms themselves are resolving into elements of their own destruction", was accompanied by a proactive terrorist ideology. Post-Haymarket, an anarchist discourse of terrorism was developed

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[20] "Rebellion as a Sacred Duty as Well as a Right – Our Duty as Revolutionists", *The Alarm*, Chicago and New York, Vol. 1, No. 15, June 23, 1888.

in which popular socialism was combined with rhetorical praise for the development of modern explosives. The lone terrorist could put these "factors" to use, making them "more powerful for destruction" by making them "work the wrong way". In the situation of apparently open class warfare that existed in Chicago, militant anarchists who wrote for newspapers such as *The Alarm* were delighted by the rapid development and easy availability of high explosives such as TNT. The explosive potential of the bomb appeared to compensate anarchists for their lack of political power and, even more importantly, it invested their very ideology with a new rhetorical power: Most's political "wild talk" had at last found expression in English. For those desperate enough to use it, dynamite represented a new evolutionary stage of anarchism as it promised to allow the lone terrorist even greater power than that enjoyed by the combined agencies of the state. For those anarchists who wrote about it, dynamite provided plenty of copy with which to taunt corporate and government power while at the same time impressing their readers. So, *The Alarm* celebrated dynamite as the symbol of a new kind of political equality:

> Dynamite has come and our proud chevaliers and dainty dames hold up their hands in pious horror, and exclaim: "What! Our institutions are at stake, our privileges endangered, our very lives rendered insecure!"... But this has been the work of slow evolution? Yes, because the bullet could reach but one individual. The new factor is far more powerful in its effects and in just so for far more rapid will be its work. Governments have no monopoly of it. One small bomb has already shaken the world. Will it be the last? Even the most vindictive opponent of the proletariat dares not wish the assertion, and while he rejoices in governmental experiments by which one gun can devastate a whole city, there still lurks in his mind at times the thought of the humble bomb. [21]

The article's claim that one bomb has already been heard around the world is an appeal to the popular memory of the first skirmish between American revolutionaries and the British at Lexington, Massachussetts, which became known as "the shot heard 'round the world" in Ralph Waldo Emerson's song "Concord Hymn" (1837). After the Haymarket crisis, many anarchists in British and American cities began to believe that the terrorist with his "humble bomb" could now go about undermining the state by setting off TNT at its weakest blind spots.

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[21] "The Resources of Civilisation", *The Alarm*, Chicago and New York, Vol. 1, No. 16, June 30, 1888.

Even before the explosion at Haymarket, British anarchists were advocating dynamite and one London journal, *The Anarchist*, praised it as the great leveller. Drawing inspiration from the recent bombings that had been committed by Clan na Gael dynamiters and by Russian Nihilists, this paper predicted further attacks from anyone willing to copy their methods. In an article that hoped for the kind of action about to happen in Chicago, the paper declared that:

> this new agent has shifted again the balance of power, reducing still further the supremacy of brute force and mere number. Great armies and vast cities are, indeed a source of weakness in dynamite warfare, furnishing, as they must, the most vulnerable points of attack for its wholesale destruction... At this moment a single wayfarer, with dynamite in his pocket, throws the cities of England in greater terror than would an army of a hundred thousand men landing at Dover... A handful of hunted homeless Nihilists are, able to terrorize all of the Russias, forcing its Emperor to live the life of a fugitive, and making his very coronation a problem of chance. Jupiter with his lightnings was scarcely more a master of the ancient world than is *the mob with its bomb of dynamite, the avenging Fate of modern monarchies.*[22] [My Italics]

Viewing armies and cities as equally legitimate targets, in that they provided the roaming subversive with perfect stress points at which to plant bombs and undermine the apparently tottering state, *The Anarchist* believed that a single device concealed in a pocket had more potential to cause terror than the kind of large-scale invasion of England that had been prophesied in popular fictions such as George Tomkyns Chesney's 1871 serialisation, *The Battle of Dorking*. For this paper dynamite and desperation combined to produce the ultimate revolutionary weapon in the figure of the lone, unpredictable bomber, or in the image of TNT-wielding revolutionary masses, "the mob with its bomb of dynamite". For anarchists who were completely alienated from the state, recent technological advances in the development of high explosives, such as the invention of TNT, meant that science did have a practical application:

> All triumphs of science and invention work inevitably in the end for the people... Every advance in science has given the people an additional hold of the sceptre of power... Every increase in the destructiveness of weapons of war has

[22] "Dynamite: The Modern Agent of Revolution", *The Anarchist*, London, No. 1, March, 1885, p.4.

> brought increased importance for the individual war-maker... This consummation can evidently be achieved most directly by some agency like the perfected dynamite bomb and electrical battery, which will make great armies useless, make them mere targets for destruction en masse, instead of reserves of strength.[23]

Ironically, then, anarchists who were as opposed to corporate capitalism as they were to any form of government announced in their newspapers that they were comfortable with the very technological breakthroughs that had been achieved by companies such as Alfred Nobel's.

Like *The Alarm*, *The Anarchist* used Haymarket to popularise its dynamite ideology and immediately after the explosion the paper lauded "The Doctrine of Dynamite" on its front page:

> Dynamite will be a doctrine to be proclaimed from the housetops ere long, and even journeymen and judges in their abuses of power may well tremble at an outraged and maddened movement, for the science of chemistry is stronger than public opinion, and can readily adapt itself to the open street.[24]

In the now-hardening political atmosphere *The Anarchist* also proposed dynamite not just as a scientific breakthrough for subversives, but as an ideology, and as one that could cause havoc in "the open street". Its adaptability made it the perfect weapon of choice for the urban terrorist which, claimed the paper, was proven by the bomb that was thrown in Chicago with the effect of chastening the city's police force: "They can never know but some individual in a crowd has a bomb ready for use, for they are easily made. No accomplices are necessary, consequently the danger to the police is very great."[25] By the 1890s, the possibilities of causing political chaos would also become a staple of British anarchist discourse. Despite the fact that throwing a bomb at police lines in Haymarket had proven to be politically disastrous for Chicago's anarchist movement and had resulted in the deaths of several leading figures, including the writer and editor, Albert Parsons, it is clear that high explosives added an even more violent edge to anarchist discourse. After the Haymarket tragedy, Johann Most's influence

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[23] Ibid.
[24] "The Doctrine of Dynamite", *The Anarchist*, London, No.17, July 1st, 1886, p.1.
[25] "Beware", Ibid, p.3.

quickly spread from Chicago to other cities and the political spectacle caused by the Haymarket bomb, trial and executions contributed to a consciously violent brand of anarchist rhetoric.

The radicalisation of anarchism by the Haymarket affair even spread overseas as British anarchist journalists also began to exhibit their belief in the virtue of modern explosives. Their writings, in which the universal appeal of dynamite was lauded just as uncompromisingly as it had been in the US papers, fuelled popular fears over the possible outbreak of a grand anarchist conspiracy in Britain. Paranoia at anarchy reached such a pitch by the early 1890s that some writers for the anarchist press were to be found offering their own tongue-in-cheek political theories, so that in 1892 *The Commonweal* stressed, rather facetiously that TNT was not the sole preserve of radical anarchists. In a report entitled "Dynamite Versus Dollars" the paper recounted that:

> On Friday the 4th of November the world was startled by an attempt upon the life of Russell Sage, the well-known millionaire, by an unknown man who entered in his office and demanded 1,250,000 dollars. On the refusal of the banker, the visitor exploded a dynamite bomb which created wide-spread havoc, killing the intruder and one other man and severely injuring several clerks and visitors. Mr Sage, with the true instinct of his class, escaped serious injury by clutching hold of another person, a clerk, who happened to be in the office, and keeping him between himself and the threatened danger. The identity of the dynamiter who was blown to pieces by the explosion was for some time doubtful and conjectures concerning a conspiracy of anarchist desperadoes to blow up millionaires were ventilated by the press and accepted by the New York police authorities. Latterly, however, the victim of his own desperate deed has been identified as Henry L. Norcross, a Boston broker, whose mind had become unhinged owing to losses in stock speculations. The affair has, of course, created a wide-spread sensation...[26]

The Commonweal's complaint is that the anarchist is aligned with the frustrated middle-class professional. Despite the lack of any evidence as to the person who committed the crime, blame was immediately placed on the libertarian movement, yet it is not difficult to appreciate how a value-free phenomenon like terrorism could lead to such confusion as anyone, even an unhinged stockbroker, could cause a political sensation.

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[26] "Dynamite Versus Dollars", *The Commonweal*, Vol. 7, No. 296, January 9th, 1892, p.5.

Nevertheless, during the decade that followed the Haymarket affair writers for *The Alarm*, *The Anarchist* and *The Commonweal* revelled in the notion that "a single wayfarer" armed with a dynamite bomb might thwart the resources of the state. Dynamite, it seemed, had just about democratised the methods of revolutionary warfare. According to these papers, the simple explosive means of a lone revolutionary could outstrip the grandeur of modern society, along with its totalising formations such as the army, the city and even modern, large-scale weaponry. Modern capitalism, believed the anarchists, had at last left itself vulnerable to the unpredictability of the random terrorist armed with a home-made dynamite bomb, producing not so much its own gravediggers, dedicated to "the inevitably impending dissolution of modern bourgeois property"[27], as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels predicted, as its own demolitionists.

Terrorism and *The Torch*

The most noted British anarchist newspaper of this period was *The Torch*, which was edited from 1891 until 1896 by Helen and Olivia Rossetti, daughters of W.H. Rossetti, nieces of the Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti and granddaughters of Ford Madox Brown, painter of the mid-Victorian classic, *Work*. The first issue was written when the precociously politicised Helen Rossetti was aged only thirteen and her sister, Olivia, sixteen. T*he Torch was* established in particularly bohemian circumstances in the basement of the Rossetti family's Primrose Hill home and the paper first went into print in July 1892 (prior to this it was handwritten and reproduced by hectograph). It survived until 1897, collapsing less than a year after the Rossettis' abrupt departure from the anarchist scene. Despite its initially moderate, though indulgently juvenile tone, *The Torch* quickly fell in with the more excitable style of the other anarchist papers: by the time that it had gone into print it was aligned alongside the other, established radical journals and very soon the paper was also providing anarchist terrorism with a voice. The consequence was not just its assimilation within the extreme school of anarchist writing but the elevation of the Rossettis' own position within the anarchist scene as *The Torch* actually came to dominate radical journalism in London. Yet here too moderate

[27] Marx Karl and Engels, Friedrich, *The Communist Manifesto*, Preface to the Russian Edition of 1882 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.56.

anarchists, such as the famous Russian anarchist, Peter Kropotkin, contributed to the paper, whilst, at the same time, trying to dissuade the Rossettis from becoming acquainted with the "desperate characters"[28] whom they encountered during their political and journalistic endeavours.

In its "Statement of Principles", *The Torch* describes itself "as a journal advocating International Revolutionary Socialism" and condemns "the present division of Society into rich & poor, oppressors & oppressed" for "every evil under which we now labour". Criticising previously failed insurrections as hopeless attempts at "Revolution from above", the paper instead "strongly advocates education, the only means by which the people can be brought to a true understanding of their wrongs, their duties and their rights." The purpose of *The Torch*, then, was the dissemination of propaganda:

> "As a means of bringing about this renovated society it proposes propaganda of every description, journals, pamphlets, the translation of foreign works which have been written in favour of socialism, lectures..."[29]

Imitating the methods of Christian pamphleteers, distributors left copies of *The Torch* in railway carriages, waiting rooms, tramcars and cafés. Given some of its more 'explosive' content, the Rossettis' practice of anonymously leaving copies in these places can be read as a form of 'literary' terrorism. Indeed, some of the paper's contributors were uneasy at its support for political violence, so that although the anarchist memoirist Olive Garnett praised *The Torch* staff for "inking their fingers in the cause of freedom",[30] she was uncomfortable with its increasingly radical tone and was worried that hardened French anarchists were influencing the young Rossettis. Nevertheless, Garnett, like Kropotkin, continued to help with the printing and distribution of the paper, even while Olive Rossetti wrote pamphlets "recommending the use of bombs".[31] *The Torch*, then, embodied the radical chic of the teenage Rossettis and that of their foreign anarchist comrades then at large in London. It represented the duality of the wider anarchist movement as it was characterised by its content that called attention to, and voiced support for, anarchist political violence, whilst at the same time enjoying

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[28] Garnett, Olive, *Tea and Anarchy! The Bloomsbury Diary of Olive Garnett, 1890-1893*, ed. Barry C. Johnson (London: Bartlett's Press, 1989), Saturday, February 25th, 1893, p.155.
[29] "Statement of Principles", *The Torch*, Vol. 2, No. 2, February 1892, p.1.
[30] Ibid., p.5.
[31] Garnett, ibid, p.209.

the cautious support of celebrated and more moderate anarchists whose contributions, in turn, added to its authority as a radical paper.

Late in 1892, the newspaper carried a report that typified its practical, rather than theoretical brand of anarchism, in which it described a rally at which a contingent of London anarchists carried a banner that read "To be Free is to dare and do."[32] One speaker told the anarchists that "the present society, unless quickly changed for the better must unavoidably bring its results in the shape of Ravachols." Ravachol, also known as François-Claudius Koeningstein, was a poacher, burglar, murderer and grave-robber who had become the ultimate poster boy for the anarchist cause when he went to the guillotine in France in 1892, after having set off a series of bombs in Paris. Serving as "the incarnation of the revolt of the individual"[33], he even provided the French language with a new verb, *ravacholiser*: "to blow up".[34] The moderate, Tochiatti, then

The Anarchist Martyr: François-Claudius Koenigstein, also known as Ravachol, from Dubois, *The Anarchist Peril*, p.245.

[32] "Chicago Anarchist Commemoration", *The Torch*, Vol.2, No.11, November 15, 1892, p.5.
[33] Dubois, p.238.
[34] Marshall, Peter, *Demanding the Impossible*, p.438.

addressed the crowd, stressing that "Anarchists advocate protective force, but not Paris dynamite outrages." Another speaker proposed an end to arms manufacturing, including the production of dynamite, as the best way to bring an end to anarchist terrorism.[35] Kropotkin then praised the Haymarket Martyrs and repeated the socialist mantra about the inevitability of the oncoming revolution:

> He said we were to remember Chicago not because it was a large town, not because the World's Fair was going to be held there, not because it was one of the richest cities in the world, but because the first sign of the rebellion, which is now breaking out everywhere, occurred there.[36]

Kropotkin also shared the platform with the markedly militant French anarchist and survivor of the 1871 Paris Commune, Louise Michel. She compared the plight of the Chicago anarchists to the destruction of the Commune and asked: "How, indeed, should one not wish for Anarchism when one has seen Paris red with the blood of the Communards, when one has seen old men homeless and starving lie down on the cold pavement to die?"[37] Michel's warning about poor people succumbing on "the cold pavement" configured revolt in relation to urban space and alienation. Should the city continue to serve as the focus of human abandonment, she warned, then further violence would be inevitable. The city was precisely the place wherein the anonymous bombers of *The Alarm* were roaming and Michel's words reinforce the concept of the city as an urban battleground where any kind of revolutionary outbreak could occur. The uprising of the Paris Commune, in which Michel took part, was the most enduring anarchist revolt in European history, lasting three months from March until May and ended with the destruction of swathes of Paris by military artillery and the burning of public buildings by the revolutionaries. Her concern about urban abandonment and the wreckage of people at the hands of an indifferent capitalism is another typical trope of anarchist speeches but the connection between the elemental structure of "the streets" and the outbreak of political revolt also appeared in the Chicago paper. It appears from such statements as these that were carried in *The Alarm* and in *The Torch* that *fin-de-*

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[35] *The Torch*, Ibid, p.6.
[36] "Chicago Anarchist Commemoration", *The Torch*, Vol. 2, No. 11, November 15, 1892, p.8.
[37], Ibid., p.7.

siècle anarchists were consciously modern. Like Marx, they believed that "capitalist society is full of contradictions" and heading toward its "inevitable destruction".[38] Industrial modernity, they argued, had created the conditions that made revolution inevitable and all of the totalising experiences of modern society, from the World Fair, to the spectacularly bloody quelling of the Paris Commune, to the sight of poor old men starving to death on the cold pavements of cities, were symptoms of what the Rossettis characterised as modern society's self-destructive tendency.

Calls to action, such as the one that appeared on the anarchists' banner, were followed by the movement's more zealous activists. One, C.C. Davis, protested against capitalism and social injustice by breaking a jeweller's window and during his trial delivered a hard-hitting speech from the dock before receiving sixteen months' hard labour. *The Torch* applauded this practical anarchist and repeated the slogan carried at the rally:

> Let us hope that more of the unemployed will follow Davis' example and not only break windows but sack the shops and take back some of the food, clothing and other necessaries of life which have been stolen from them by rich idlers." [39]

And so the radical tone of the paper deepened. In the same issue that defended Davis' window-smashing exploits Helen Rossetti encouraged Germans to revolt and "polish off all such scoundrels" as the German Emperor.[40] The paper also followed the activities of more seriously committed anarchists like Ravachol, whose *attentats* against the French police and judiciary, popularised "propaganda by deed" on the continent and was applauded by Olive Rossetti:

> If society is horrified by the crimes of a Ravachol it has only itself to blame... Ravachol is a signal instance of a man whom our present society has driven to be a murderer and a dynamitard who under other conditions might have proved a useful member of society.[41]

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[38] Marx, Karl, Postface to the Second Edition (1873), *Capital*, Vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1990), p.103.
[39] "A Debate: What We Want For Britain", *The Torch*, Vol. 3, No.3, March 15th, 1893, pp.7-8.
[40] "Notes On News", Ibid, p.7. *The Torch*, Vol. 3, No 1, January 15th, 1893, pp.10-11.
[41] "1892, A Retrospect", *The Torch*, Vol. III, No. 1, January 15th, 1893, p.2.

In August 1893 *The Torch* carried an obituary for Ravachol written by Gustave Mollet, whose praise for the French anarchist was unconditional:

> When such a man rises in his indignation and strikes (maybe blindly) at the cause of such misery, when he gives up everything that tends to his present comfort that he may but hasten the dawn of the day
>
> "When man to man the world o'er
> Shall brothers be"
>
> Is [*sic*] not a criminal, even though, to bring nearer that day he commits deeds which are repulsive to our better nature.
>
> Such a man was Ravachol.[42]

Defending the actions of terrorists was common practice for The Torch. Ravachol was certainly one of the most accomplished and notorious of the continental anarchists and in publishing an obituary that even defended "deeds which are repulsive to our better nature", The Torch had clearly aligned itself alongside the most violent elements of international anarchism. However, "the voice of dynamite" was already finding itself under pressure in Britain, where official patience had finally worn thin with the activities of foreign anarchists after the Greenwich Park explosion of February 1892, in which a Frenchman, Martial Bourdin, had blown himself up. Thus *The Torch* is to be found condemning the extradition to France of another wanted anarchist and noted terrorist, Jean-Pierre François, who had retaliated for the execution of Ravachol by bombing diners at the Café Very. Accused of being "the author of the explosion", he fled to England soon after the arrest of his colleague, Émile Henry.[43] François was quickly arrested in London and extradited from England, causing *The Torch* to take up his case. Defending "the author of the blow", the paper pointed out that "All that could be brought against François it is seen, was speaking in a way that had become so common at public meetings".[44] He had not planted any bombs, argued *The Torch*, but had only given explosive speeches.

The subject of this report is typical of the period, and French anarchists were regularly arrested and imprisoned for speech-making, to the extent that the political crime of "anarchist-speak" made its way into Joseph Conrad's short story, "An

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[42] Mollet, Gustave, "Ravachol", *The Torch*, Vol.3, No. 8, August, 1893, p.4.
[43] "Notes on News" Vol. 3, No. 1, January 15th, 1893, pp.10-11.
[44] "Notes on News: Report on the Extradition of Francois, Accused of Complicity in the Café Very Explosion of April 25, 1892", *The Torch*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 15, 1892, pp.10-11.

Anarchist". Published in Harper's Monthly Magazine in 1906, Conrad's tale of petit-bourgeois revenge centres on a convict, formerly a well-off Parisian mechanic with dreams of starting up his own business, who is arrested for drunkenly roaring "Vive l'anarchie!" after succumbing to "Gloomy ideas – des idées noires" about society during a drinking bout with a pair of anarchists. Convinced that the world is "a dismal place where a multitude of poor wretches had to work and slave to the sole end that a few individuals should ride in carriages and live riotously in palaces," the mechanic agrees with them that revolution is necessary: "There was only one way of dealing with the rotten society. Demolish the whole sacrée boutique." The mechanic is electrified by the conversation:

> Their heads hovered over the table as they whispered to him eloquently. I don't think they quite expected the result. He was extremely drunk. Mad drunk. With a howl of rage he leaped suddenly upon the table. Kicking over bottles and glasses he yelled: 'Vive l'anarchie! Death to the capitalists!' He yelled this again and again. All round him broken glass was falling, chairs were swung high in the air, people were taking each other by the throat. The police dashed in. He hit, bit, scratched and struggled, till something crashed upon his head. [45]

On his release from prison the mechanic is fired by his *patron* and, without any hope of ever finding entry into the bourgeoisie, becomes a "*compagnon*" of the pair he met in the café and is recruited into their band. He quickly learns that they are "neither more nor less than housebreakers" and is pressurised into becoming involved in their attempt to rob a bank during which, for a spectacular *finale*, "a bomb would be thrown to wreck the place." However an informer reveals the plot and he is captured, holding the bomb, and deported to French Guiana. Here, he exacts revenge on two of the gang, Simon and Mafile, for ruining his life: "'They loved their life, these two, in this evil world of theirs, just as I used to love my life, too, before they spoiled it with their phrases.'" During a mass break-out the mechanic finds a warder's revolver and he escapes with the pair in a boat, and forces them to row, telling them "'There are no comrades here. I am your *patron*.'"[46]

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[45] Conrad, Joseph, "An Anarchist" (1906), in *The Lagoon and Other Stories* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 78-79.
[46] Ibid, pp.80-81, 87.

The mechanic complains that the anarchists have ruined the word "Comrade", making it "accursed", and then shoots Simon, leaving Mafile to beg for his life:

> "Mercy," he whispered, faintly. "Mercy for me! – comrade."
>
> '"Ah, comrade," I said in a,low tone. "Yes, comrade, or course. Well, then, shout *Vive l'anarchie*."
>
> 'He flung up his arms, his face up to the sky and his mouth wide open in a great shout of despair. "*Vive l'anarchie! Vive* – "
>
> 'He collapsed all in a heap, with a bullet through his head.'[47]

The case of François and that of Conrad's fictional, ironic anarchist both illustrate how seriously the link between verbal proclamation and propaganda-by-deed was taken by the writers, as well as by the state. *The Torch* considered anarchists who made such statements from the dock and from the scaffold to be exemplary because they were dedicated to "the propaganda", having given their final moments to the cause by making proclamations that defied "the superstitious respect for private property and men in blue coats that really stands (*sic*) in the way of a Revolution". The paper therefore contended that "only by individuals acting on their own initiative" (including carrying out acts of terrorism such as blowing up cafés) could society's wrongs be overcome.[48] Their actions even inspired one contributor to write manic political poetry praising the "Men of despair and death" who "steal on and kill" their oppressors, and finally "die like men". The poem ends: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth / for a tooth, and a life for a life!"[49]

The Torch continued to publish such extreme journalism and by 1894 it was praising anarchist outrages in Spain, where one of the "men of despair and death" bombed a gala performance at the Liceo theatre in Barcelona, killing twenty members of the audience:

> Doubtless the act was brutal and terrible... But when reflecting on the barbarity with which workers are treated, thinking of the people murdered by poverty, shot down if they dare to complain... one is filled with hatred of our whole society, and, if one cannot approve of such ferocious vengeance, one excuses it, and feels sympathy for its author, for this unknown man who stands out from the crowd and single-handed against the whole forces of society, poor,

[47] Ibid, p.89.
[48] Rossetti, Olive, "Methods of Propaganda", *The Torch*, Vol.3, No.7, July, 1893, p.2.
[49] Adams, F., Untitled, ibid, p.4.

> persecuted, avenges with one blow his friend shot down, his comrades transported, and his ideal despised and persecuted.

In this report, as with those concerning François, the terrorist is presented as the "author" of his violent action. Again, the paper clearly indicated its position on the use of deadly force by anarchists by legitimating another indiscriminate act of political violence as the exaction of the bombers' "furious vengeance" against "our whole society". The article goes on to valorise the lone terrorist as "this soldier who devotes himself entirely to the Cause, and who, for a moment, strikes terror into the hearts of the middle-classes". Once more, society at large is represented by bourgeois consumers, this time those enjoying an evening of culture at the theatre. In the political opinion of *The Torch* the Spanish "middle classes" are equally as guilty as consumers of coffee on the Parisian boulevards, and are therefore legitimate targets for the anarchist man of action. Salvador Franch was the "unknown" anarchist who bombed the Liceo. He was quickly arrested and, in the pages of *The Torch*, at least, arises from obscurity, as the article concludes with an account of his last moments:

> When the time came he walked with a firm step to the scaffold. Stoical in the last, he asked the executioner to be quick, and, with his last breath, exclaimed "Vivre l'anarchie!"
>
> The crowd hooted the priest and the executioner, and the death of Franch has done more for the propaganda of Anarchy than his act itself."[50]

Not only did Franch bomb his way into custody but he talked his way to the scaffold, combining terrorist action with subversive political rhetoric and ultimately transforming his execution into a platform for "the Cause". While the dangers of public executions and their potential for creating martyrs had been acknowledged in Britain with their abandonment in 1868 (with which the British "society of the spectacle" suddenly became less spectacular), continental anarchists persisted in publicising the executions of their comrades, adding their own literary touch to the spectacle-effect of such events (the last public execution in France was held in 1939). The anarchists' own underground publishing network transmitted further the last words of terrorists like Franch and

[50] "Spain", *The Torch*, Vol. 7, New Series, December 18, 1894, pp.5-6.

Ravachol and continued the journalistic "work and duty" promoted by early anarchist martyrs like the American editor, Albert Parsons.

Such was the radicalism of *The Torch* that it even carried an article by the most infamous anarchist terrorist and martyr of them all, Émile Henry, who was tried in 1894 for causing a series of explosions in and around Paris. While Henry's subversive actions might appear sufficient to have sealed his own reputation as a terrorist, the negative perception of the movement - of anarchism-as-terrorism - was sealed at his trial. Entitled "Propaganda By Deed", the piece was drawn from an extraordinary address to the court in which Henry elaborated on his apparently motiveless attacks:

> We say that love engenders hatred; the more we love liberty and equality the more we must hate all that which hinders men from being free and equal.
>
> Thus without being led astray by mysticisms we look at the matter from the standpoint of reality, and say: It is true that men are but the products of institutions, yet these institutions are but abstract things which exist only so long as there are men of flesh and blood who represent them.
>
> There is therefore only one way of striking at these institutions; *ie*, to strike the men themselves, and we are happy to vindicate any energetic act of revolt against the Bourgeois society, for we do not lose sight of the fact that the Revolution can only result from the individual acts of rebellion all together.[51]

Standing in the dock, Henry explained that for terrorism to work it must target the powerful individuals with whom the forces and institutions of the state are associated. If, like Franch, he desired to follow up the immediate shock of his bombing campaign by inflicting rhetorical violence in the courtroom he certainly succeeded, and his speech has even been anthologised in at least one anarchist "reader". Émile Henry's anger at everyone representing the institutions of the bourgeois state extended even to the clients of boulevard cafés who, presumably because of their position as conspicuous consumers within the hated "Bourgeois society", were something of an institution in their own right. With this in mind, he struck at them in the "only one way" he knew how to, when, in February 1894 he placed a bomb in the Café Terminus, killing one and injuring many others. The Terminus attack was the sequel to an earlier bomb-attack against the Carmaux mining company, which had earned notoriety for its strike-breaking methods. Henry had planted a bomb in the company's office, which was promptly removed by

[51] Henry, Émile, "Propaganda By Deed", *The Torch*, New Series, No. 4, October 1894, p.5.

police but exploded later inside a barracks. In his notorious speech from the dock Henry lauded violence as the core element of his political doctrine. He told the court: "I do not need to develop on this occasion the whole theory of anarchism". Instead, he stressed that violence was the most important element of anarchism: "I merely wish to emphasize its revolutionary aspect, the destructive and negative aspect that brings me here before you". For this anarchist, the importance of "the deed" lay not in any elaborate political theory but in the simple incitement of terror for its own sake and in the destruction caused by his bombs. As he told the court, "propaganda by deed" spoke for itself: "I decided to intrude among that concert of happy tones a voice the bourgeois had already heard but which they thought had died with Ravachol: the voice of dynamite." Henry went on to defend his bombing of the offices of the Carmaux mining company by countering that, since the target was bourgeois, "there would be no innocent victims". He concluded his speech by threatening further attacks against "that stupid and pretentious mass of folk who always choose the strongest side - in other words, the daily clientele of Terminus and other great cafés!" and boasted: "That is why I strike at random and did not choose my victims!"[52] Henry's declaration was read as the definitive statement of *fin-de-siècle* terrorism and his justification for his own propaganda by deed transformed him into a popular emblem of French anarchy. As evidenced by its presence within the column inches of *The Torch*, his speech came to symbolise the connection that existed between the politically motivated violence of European anarchism and the rhetorical utterances and literary efforts of the movement's subversive writers and orators. And as the paper's columnists insisted, Henry might have gone to *la guillotine* on his own but he was not a solitary believer in his particularly violent brand of anarchism and rhetoric. Before he took to throwing bombs, he had spent years within the international anarchist movement and, after causing the Paris explosions, had even lived for a short while as a fugitive in London. Prior to decimating bourgeois, Henry was a writer, having served as editor of an anarchist newspaper, *L'Endehors*. Indeed, Henry had been a brilliant student and had even studied in the École Polytechnique. Therefore, dynamite was given a 'voice' by a literary man who appreciated the aesthetic value of "propaganda by deed". As he told the court that sentenced him to death: "I am almost tempted to say, with Souvarine in *Germinal*: 'All

[52] Quoted from *Gazette des Tribuneaux*, 27-28 April, 1894, reprinted as "A Terrorist's Defense: Émile Henry" in Woodcock, George (Editor), *The Anarchist Reader* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1977), pp.189-186, quotations from pp.191-193.

discussions about the future are criminal, since they hinder pure and simple destruction and slow down the march of the revolution...'"[53]

Yet, despite his radicalism, Émile Henry's anarchism, with his absolute rejection of the state and of its institutions which, he believed, should be destroyed wholesale, actually reinforces the conservative claim for the organic nature of institutions originally advocated by Edmund Burke. In Henry's theory of anarchy, the only way to deal with corrupt institutions is to attack the individuals who represent them, reducing Burke's organic state to the biological level of the bourgeois being. According to this logic, systems are represented by individuals and can be attacked by harming these people: here, the rhetoric of anarchist violence seems to reverse the disciplinary motions of the state as outlined by Michel Foucault, as individuals are targeted for the reason that they embody social (rather than criminal) wrongs. Henry's argument – that only decisive strikes against the bourgeoisie, or "the men of flesh and blood who represent them", would ever remedy social ills – reproduces the Burkean notion of the static, unchanging state. Revolutionary political violence then, when waged and proclaimed for its own sake is not so distinct from more conservative values than its anarchist advocates would like to imagine. In the final chapter of this thesis, it will be argued that similar, although more consciously avant-garde concerns with the aesthetics of the explosion, as expressed in the Vorticist journal *BLAST*, imitate the rhetorical terrorism of bombers like Henry and propose a literary version of their subversive political violence. While his trial and subsequent execution served as opportunities to publicise revolution, both events also became a stage upon which the modern, bourgeois, democratic state and the individual terrorist fought it out most bitterly. Henry's trial and execution became a classic example of how the disciplinary state made sure that it extended its discipline over the aberrant, even anarchic, individual. If, as Michel Foucault suggests, discipline is "a political anatomy of detail", or a "technique of subjection", employing several strategies so as to control "the distribution of individuals in space",[54] then the trial and execution offered an opportunity to bring the disruptive and unpredictable anarchist back within the remit of the state and its apparatuses. The guillotine was not just about ending a life as a form of punishment; it also served as a particularly visual and spectacular means of re-inscribing authority over the individual and restoring "the

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[53] Ibid., p.191.

[54] Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish*, translated by Alan Sheridan from *Surveiller et punir: Naisance de la prison* (Éditions Gallimard, 1975), (London: Penguin, 1991), pp.139, 155, 141.

collective and obligatory rhythm" of government disrupted by the terrorist's bomb. The restoration of "a schema of behaviour" allows for "the correlation of the body and the gesture", and no gesture could be more profoundly or publicly imposed than the death-blow of the guillotine. As Foucault explains, "disciplinary power appears to have the function not so much of deduction as of synthesis, not so much of exploitation of the product as of coercive link with the apparatus of production."[55] The anarchists' insistence on giving incendiary speeches from the dock, or yelling at their executioners, and the circulation of these statements by clandestine presses, was not simply a series of gestures of defiance but amounted to a persistent effort to resist their reintegration or absorption into the power dynamics of the state. As with the Spanish mass murderer, Franch, who yelled "Vivre l'Anarchie!" from the scaffold and was lauded by his comrades for doing more for "the propaganda" at his execution, Henry's courtroom speech also explains how political violence was coupled by the anarchists themselves with inflated political rhetoric.

Henry's words had an electrifying effect among anarchist circles. As the novelist Maurice Barrès recalled: "Overwrought by that terrible alcohol called death, men whom I know to be moderates behaved like madmen: 'Vive l'Anarchie was on many lips."[56] *The Torch* also carried an obituary written by Alexander Cohen, a friend of Henry's. "'The most logical and the most terrible of all the Anarchists,'" wrote Cohen, "this definition of Émile Henry's personality given by several newspapers is constantly recurring to my mind." According to Cohen, Henry told the court that anarchism "is a violent reaction against the established order... It is everywhere; - hence the impossibility to seize it. It will end by killing you." Henry's notoriety was sensational, but for anarchists like Cohen, the young man was equally a celebrity because of his rhetorical stance in the courtroom:

> There is no better way of understanding Émile Henry and the motives which induced him to commit his acts than to see what he himself said. Indeed no one could explain his acts more eloquently and at the same time more lucidly than he himself did... The clear, incisive sentences of his speech, now sparkling with wit and now again solemn, but always marked by their formidable logic fell like blows dealt by a sledge hammer on the brains of these poor imbeciles. Poor jurors! Trembling with superstitious fear, their brows clammy with sweat, there they sat, fascinated, hypnotised looking at this

[55] Ibid, pp.151-152.
[56] Quoted from *Journal*, 22 May, 1894, *The Torch*, October, 1894, p.26.

> disdainful youth, this impassioned destroyer; fear tortured them, the fear of a whole society which must die and which will not go! [57]

Like Henry, Cohen also hated the *bourgeoisie*: "As to the middle-classes, the rulers, jurors, and judges who, piteous dwarfs, undertook to sit in judgement on this man, they were crushed by the beauty of his character and by his proud stoicism."[58] For Cohen, Henry's courtroom predictions about the impending doom of bourgeois society were more than political analysis – they were a hypnotic lesson in the power of anarchist propaganda. Henry's rhetoric also created a cultic fascination with terrorism from which even mainstream journalists were not immune and Cohen quoted *L'Echo de Paris*, in which the young bomber was described as "this fierce and untameable bride-groom of death", "the most formidable adversary that the existing organisation of capitalist society has raised against itself".[59] Even Henry Maret, a deputy in the French parliament, felt drawn to the anarchists:

> We are face to face with a sect whose doctrine is: 'To destroy impartially and implacably all that exists, for the present state of things is the worst that can be, and anything else whatsoever would be an improvement.'
>
> Therein lies the key to the recklessness with which the adherents of this sect hurl hap-hazard their engines of destruction. If they strike the rich – well, whosoever they may be, they are oppressors. If it strikes the poor, it is still well, for they were resigned and did not revolt. Besides, this sect does not pretend to deal justice, but to make room for it.
>
> Besides, they are unimpeachably courageous, even bold. They act from no self-interested motives, and know full well what they render themselves liable to. They exhibit that alarming appetite for death which precedes great downfalls. They execute their plans deliberately.[60]

Maret's fixation with the young anarchist seemed to Cohen, at least, to have justified his terrorism and radical speech-making. For the anarchists, the appeal of Henry's rhetoric would outlive the infamy of his actions: "Émile Henry's declaration, translated into every tongue and read by millions of persons, will have done more to propagate the idea of

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[57] Cohen, Alexander, "Émile Henry", *The Torch*, Vol.11, No.2, July 18, 1895, pp.25-26.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Bauer, Henry, *L'Echo de Paris*, quoted in Cohen, A. "Émile Henry", *The Torch*, Vol.11, No.2, July 18, 1895, p.26.
[60] From *The Radical*, 6th February, 1895, quoted by Cohen, ibid., pp.24-25.

revolt and liberty than a hundred thousand polished speeches. Its logic is unimpeachable."[61] As well as showering praise on those who bombed theatres and cafés, *The Torch* also celebrated assassins and another writer, Benjamin Preig, described how the 1894 assassination of the French President, Carnot, by an anarchist "in one moment... sent the Bourgeoisie, the world over, into a paroxysm of rage and terror. The persecuted, the outcast, had proved themselves the strongest."[62]

While praising the 'practical' efforts of assassins, the paper also afforded some column space to those who wished to offer their literary talents to the cause. Some of their verse was particularly violent:

> Cruel City, London, London,
> Where, duped slaves of devil's creeds,
> Men and women desperate, undone,
> Dream such dreams and do such deeds.
>
> London, London, cruel city,
> By day serpent, by night vampire,
> God in thy great pity, pity,
> Give us light – though it be fire![63]

Here, as with Zero's apocalyptic roof-top speech in the Stevensons' novel, *The Dynamiter*, London is portrayed by the radical imagination in the most violent and millennial terms. The poem's Christian appeal to God, however, is less a prayer than a demand for the wholesale destruction of the metropolis. *The Torch* also published subversive songs, of a music-hall nature, that were, stylistically, at least, not very different from Rudyard Kipling's popular ballads. These were presumably written to be sung at anarchist social functions:

> Capitalism's got to go
> (Got to go *go! to go!*)
> The capitalist had better know,
> And so we've come to wake him,
> And if he points to the door,

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[61] Cohen, Ibid.
[62] Preig, Benjamin, "1894: A Retrospect", *The Torch*, No.8, New Series, January 18th, 1895, p.5.
[63] Ibid., p.12.

(To the door, to the door,)
And turns him around to sleep and snore,
Why then we'll have to shake him.

And if he calls his bobby in
(Bobby in, bobby in,)
Or sets his priest to cant of "sin"
Why then we'll have to fight him,
And if he points his maxim gun,
(Maxim gun, maxim gun)
'Twill be his final bit of fun,
For we will dynamite him.

Such praise for dynamite contrasts with the milder libertarianism of Kropotkin and Malatesta, and is equally distant from the paper's own 1892 mission statement about the importance of education in the struggle for the rights of the oppressed. Yet it also points to a distinct anarchist social scene and "lifestyle", complete with its own literature and music, which were used as means of popularising the doctrine. By 1894, then, the content of *The Torch* had shifted away from its earlier didactic, though considerably radical, journalism to clearly seditious writing. The almost naïve tone of the sympathetic report on the breaking of a jeweller's window by C.C. Davies, and the reforming zeal of many of its earlier articles had become displaced by a more bitter timbre and intellectual rage that was parodied later by Joseph Conrad in the *The Secret Agent* (1907), in which a "lazy lot" of inadequate but articulate anarchists vent their spleen on the condition of the working class.[64]

The News As Fiction: *A Girl Among the Anarchists*

In their collaborative novel, *A Girl Among the Anarchists* (1903), Christina and Olivia Rossetti gave a near-autobiographical account of their journey along "the path of the propagandist" (95) and relates their experience of publishing *The Torch* over a period of five years. The novel presents a rare account of the workings of the anarchist press

[64] Conrad, Joseph, *The Secret Agent* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.83.

and of the internal contradictions that ultimately rendered the movement impractical, charting the political development and eventual disillusionment of a teenage girl, Isabel Meredith, who joins the revolutionaries. Unlike the sensational representation of anarchism in popular fictions such as Edgar Wallace's political vigilante thriller, *The Four Just Men* (1905), or G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1907), and unlike the scathingly critical version offered in *The Secret Agent*, the Rossettis' novel offers a first-hand examination of revolutionary politics from within: as such it represents a unique insight into anarchism that relies on political and fictional realism rather than reverting to fantasy or modernist irony in its examination the movement. The novel presents an "insider's" view of anarchist culture, of the chaotic state of the movement and of the eccentric personalities involved in the underground press, as well as an insight into the contrast between British and continental anarchism: while Isabel entertains romantic notions about radical politics and idolises historical revolutionary figures she eventually comes to realise that their ideology does not fit into British circumstances.

Already a political and social nonconformist, it seems inevitable that Isabel should fall in with a band of radicals: along with her older sister, Caroline, and brother, Raymond, Isabel is brought up by her creative father, "a man of advanced ideas on most things" and "a great believer in liberty". Under his unconventional parenting, the children are "decidedly precocious", are spared "the ordinary school society and routine" and enjoy "full liberty to follow our various bents": "The idea of providing us with suitable society, of launching us out into the world, of troubling us to see that we conformed to the ordinary conventions of society, never occurred to him." The children are allowed to meet his guests in their Bohemian Fitzroy Square home and become acquainted with "various people, among whom foreigners and various types of cranks were fairly in evidence." (pp.1-3) They nickname Isabel "Charlotte Corday", after Jean-Paul Marat's Girondist assassin, for her deep interest in the French Revolution, "glorying in its heroisms and audacity" and reciting revolutionary poetry. On seeing her youthful radicalism one visitor warns her father that "'you will have to keep a look-out or she will be making bombs soon and blowing us all up'". (pp.7-8) Isabel's interest in politics contrasts with Raymond's more mundane outlook: "His ambition was to become a famous explorer; mine, to die on a scaffold or a barricade, shouting Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." (pp.9-10)

The children are bereaved upon their father's sudden death but they inherit his house and considerable wealth. As time passes Isobel realises that she is the only sibling without "a definite occupation" apart from an amateur interest in history and literature. With too much free time on her hands she becomes restless: "Mere reading without any definite object did not and could not suffice me; to write when there seemed no prospect of ever being read, and keenly alive as I was to my own deficiencies, did not attract me". (pp.10-11) Raymond, meanwhile, is radicalised by the sufferings that he witnesses as a medical student and he introduces Isabel to a socialist friend, Hughes. Hughes offers to publish one of Isobel's articles in a radical paper, the *Democrat* and she soon joins the Democratic Club, where she meets Nekrovitch, "the famous Nihilist" (pp.16-17), a character modelled on the Russian *émigré*, Sergius Stepniak. At these meetings she is indoctrinated into "Anarchist principles as opposed to legal Socialism" (p.24):

> The right to complete liberty of action, the conviction that morality is relative, and personal and can never be imposed from without, that men are not responsible, or only very partially so, for their surroundings, by which their actions are determined, and that consequently no man has a right to judge his fellow; such and similar doctrines which I heard frequently upheld, impressed me deeply. I was morally convinced of their truth, and consequently more than half an Anarchist. The bold thought and lofty ideal which made of each man a law unto himself, answerable for his own actions only to his own conscience, acting righteously towards others as the result of his feeling of solidarity and not because of any external compulsion, captivated my mind. (p.18)

Isabel decides "to throw in my lot with the Anarchists" (p.20) and begins a two-year sojourn among the radicals. She attends meetings at Nekrovitch's house where she comes into contact with an eclectic grouping: "Russian Nihilists and exiles, English Liberals who sympathised with the Russian constitutional movement, Socialists and Fabians, Anarchists of all nationalities, journalists and literary men whose political views were immaterial, the pseudo-Bohemian who professes interest in the 'queer side of life,' all manner of faddists, rising and impecunious musicians and artists". (p.22) Nekrovitch tells Isabel that "we need propagandists" with "brains and money" (p.33) and she is invited to write for an anarchist paper, *The Bomb*. When Isabel visits the paper's office, "the centre of English anarchy" (p.41), she finds "artistic posters and cartoons, the relics

of a great artist who had founded the *Bomb*, and the effigies of divers comrades to whom a pathway to a better world had been opened through the hangman's drop." She also notices an obsolete revolver and several chemical bottles. (p.44) The staff consist mostly of loafers, including a Russian girl who speaks no English, a drunkard, a young artist and "one or two fishy and nondescript characters of the Hebraic race." (p.47) Isabel enters as they are discussing the mysterious death of Augustin Myers, "an obscure little French anarchist" who has just blown himself up in a London park. (p.39) His brother, Jacob, the editor of *The Bomb*, is suspected by some of the group of informing to the police and setting his brother up with a faulty device and he is expelled. Although Myers' death is clearly modelled on the Greenwich Park explosion of 1892, its sequel is based on the arrests of the Walsall anarchists by police in the same year, as Isabel learns that two of the group, Banter the publisher and O'Flynn, the printer, have been arrested in possession of explosives and charged with incitement to murder:

> As soon as the morning papers arrived I scanned them eagerly and from them learned further particulars of the arrest. A widespread conspiracy was suspected, the object of which was to blow up the West End of London, and leaders were devoted to the denunciation of the Anarchists and their infamous teachings. Explosives, it was alleged, had been found in the possession of the arrested men, "evidently destined to carry into effect the deadly work which was only stopped by the hand of God in Queen's Park three week's ago." (p.61)

The Walsall "gin" is combined with the circumstances of D.J. Nicholls' arrest and, ironically, it is in the dailies that Meredith first reads about the alleged outrages involving her comrades and about their arrests by the police. As her involvement with the anarchists deepens, she becomes embroiled in the defence of anarchists framed by the police in the barely fictional Walsall scenario and she complains that during the trial much is made of speeches attributed to her comrades: "Many gaseous speeches made by the prisoners, or attributed to them, were solemnly brought up against them, and a shudder ran through the court at the mention of such phrases as "wholesale assassination" and "war to the death."" (p.72) The pair are sentenced to five years' hard labour and Isabel recalls her first experiences of radical politics:

> Holloway and Newgate, Slater's Mews and the Middle Temple, barristers and solicitors, judges and juries and detectives; appointments in queer places to

> meet queer people – all this had passed before me with the rapidity of a landscape viewed from the window of an express train; and now that the chapter had closed, I found that it was but the preface to the real business I had set my shoulder to. (p.74)

Remaining true to the origins of her radicalism in childhood tales of the French Revolution, Isabel renames the paper *Tocsin* and is appointed editor. The anarchist house style is characterised by one of the staff, M'Dermott, an Irish cobbler who "had an artist's soul, and would never consent to destroy the effect of a tale by slavish subservience to facts." (p.86) His aesthetic sensibility extends to offering recitations of Shakespeare to the other anarchists. Isabel's reputation as a propagandist spreads throughout the anarchist movement and the office quickly becomes a refuge for the entire staff of a French anarchist newspaper who have gone underground to avoid trial. (p.104) These anarchists, "the very reincarnation of Murger's Bohemians" (p.105), are joined by a group of Italian exiles fleeing coercion laws (pp.108-111) and as the foreigners accumulate, their "Babel of voices" fills the office. *Tocsin* undergoes further "unannounced invasions" of exiles and refugees from the continent:

> Unexpected persons would arrive at the office, of whom nobody perhaps knew anything... The most rudimentary notions of Anarchist etiquette forbade any of us from inquiring the name, address, or intentions of such intruders. They were allowed to stay on or to disappear as inexplicitly as they came. They were known, if by any name at all, as Jack or Jim, Giovanni or Jacques, and this was allowed to suffice." 117)

The cosmopolitan chaos leaves the paper vulnerable to police infiltration but Isabel develops a natural ability to identify plainclothes men: "Every Anarchist learns in time to spot a detective at first sight, and we relied on this instinct as a safeguard against spies." (pp.117-118) With the foreigners' takeover a "strange medley of outside cranks and declasses" comes to dominate the paper:

> There appeared to be a magnetic attraction about the place to tramps, désœvrés cranks, argumentative people with time on their hands, and even downright lunatics. Foreigners of all tongues assembled in the office – Russians, Italians, French, Spaniards, Dutch, Swedes, and before very long

> they practically swamped the English element. The Anarchist and revolutionary party has always been more serious on the Continent than in England, and what genuine Anarchists there are here are mostly foreigners. (pp.131-132)

As the office becomes more chaotic Isabel comes to realise that as well as importing its personnel from abroad, 'British' anarchism is itself a distinctly foreign phenomenon, dependent on the ideas of foreigners. As these radicals come and go from the office, their usually cooperative individualism mirrors the grander economic and political scheme of competitive nationalism that dominates the European scene. As well as bohemians, the visitors and staff are cosmopolitan and even though they overwhelm the English by dint of sheer numbers their presence is not considered detrimental to *Tocsin* (a newspaper title, as already mentioned, with distinctly Gallic associations) and its mission.

Louise Michel makes a cameo appearance as "Vera Marcel, the Red Virgin of the barricades, the heroine of the Commune of Paris – a woman of blood and smoke... her eyes full of the fire of faith and insane fanaticism, her hair dishevelled, her clothes uncared for." (p.150) The Parisian bomber, Jean-Pierre François, is also thinly fictionalised as "Jean Matthieu, suspected of complicity in the P.... bomb explosions" (p.160), while the Scotland Yard anarchist-hunter, John Sweeney (of whom more below), appears as "Detective O'Brien", on the hunt for Matthieu, a bomber who has destroyed a police station in France and "spread terror in the ranks of the French bourgeoisie." (p.166) However, unlike François, Matthieu escapes from the "heavy-witted, pudding-eating police" and is not deported back to France. (p.173) With the appearance of such historical figures the novel blurs the lines between political history and fiction and presents a barely concealed account of the Rossetti sisters' own, considerably deep involvement in subversion.

The further Isabel finds herself becoming entangled with the anarchists the more she realises that the movement is not made up of idealists and heroic martyrs. Instead, she finds that the anarchists are mostly petty individuals with personal grievances against the state and opportunists whose disgust for authority disguises more selfish motives. However she acknowledges that that "fanaticism" is also rampant in the anarchist movement and that even though the real militants are in a minority, their actions and declarations set the tone of the movement as a whole. When she reflects

upon the case of Émile Henry, Isabel tries to explain the circumstances that motivated his "pervertedly logical" reasoning:

> Very diverse in nature were the motives which prompted the committal of these acts of violence – these assassinations and dynamite explosions – in different men. With some it was an act of personal revolt, the outcome of personal sufferings and wrongs endured by the rebel himself, by his family or his class. In others violence was rather the offspring of ideas, the logical result of speculation upon the social evil and causes thereof. These Anarchists referred to their actions as Propaganda by deed.
>
> Émile Henry, the dynamitard of the Café Terminus, belonged to the number of what I may call the theoretical dynamitard. His terrible acts were the outcome of long and earnest thought; they were born of his mental analysis of the social canker. He committed them not in moments of passion, but with all the *sang froid* of a man governed by reason. His defence when on trial was a masterpiece of logical deduction and eloquent reasoning... when he threw his bomb among the crowd in the Café Terminus, maiming and killing indiscriminately, Émile Henry was performing his duty according to his own lights... Being a man of intellect and some culture, he could not, like his more ignorant confreres, imagine that one man or one small group of men, was responsible... Earnest thought and reflection told him that if any section of society suffered, then society at large was guilty: all the thoughtless, all the indifferent members of society were equally responsible for its abuses. Now this may be true enough theoretically, but no one but a fanatic or a madman would carry the reasoning farther to the point of saying: "Society at large is guilty; society at large must suffer. Society is fairly well represented by the mixed crowd in a café. I will attack this crowd indiscriminately, and kill as many of their number as I can. I will unreluctantly end my days on the scaffold in order to accomplish this very obvious duty;" and proceed from words to deeds. (pp.188-190)

Henry's café-bombing, then, is the result of keen intellectual reasoning misguided by unfortunate circumstance and his ideology and speech from the dock is "a masterpiece of logical deduction". His words to the court are not, in Isabel's estimation, the speech of a lunatic driven by passion, but the reasonable rhetoric of a man whose actions, though indifferent to the individual suffering of his victims, are certainly "theoretically" correct. In

the fiction of anarchism, as well as in its journalism, the infamous figure of Émile Henry represents the idea of propaganda-by-deed. In Isabel's eyes he makes "a theoretical protest translated into deeds", as distinct from "an act of vengeance, of personal and class revenge." (p.194) Therefore, as we have seen, in the anarchist lexicon "the propaganda" (p.205) can take two forms – that of word and that of words translated into deeds and it is in this light that the link between language and political violence appears to be more than a purely rhetorical matter. In anarchist journalism, fiction and speech-making, "the voice of dynamite" that was defended by Émile Henry assumes an explosive character when it is seen not only to motivate terrorism, but to provide a sequel in subsequent speeches from the dock and last words at the scaffold.

In contrast, Matthieu, like Ravachol, represents "the dynamitard by passion", or the terrorist who is motivated solely by the desire for personal revenge against the middle class. Isabel describes another revolutionary of this type, named "A-", who "ended by killing one of the crowned heads of Europe" was another frequent visitor to the *Tocsin* office. This terrorist is motivated by the sufferings of a deprived background:

> He had turned Anarchist in revolt against the society which had cramped his life, starved him in childhood, overworked his body, underfed his mind, where he had found neither place nor welcome. Born into the lowest depths of society, dragged up amid criminals and drunkards, he had spent his early years between the streets and the jail-house, at times working his undeveloped muscles, at other times begging or picking pockets. (pp.193-194)

A- tells Isabel that he has learned that society is ruled by one law – "'the survival of the fittest'" – and he has learned "'one great law of nature, the law of self-preservation'", which has taught him to survive at all costs. Still, the Darwinian terrorist is occasionally tempted to strike back at the system: "'When my stomach is empty and my boots let in water, the mere sight of a replete and well-clothed man makes me feel like murder.'" Convinced that society has turned reason on its head, so that "giants are bolstering the impotence of dwarfs'", A- is committed to carrying out his personal warfare against capitalists to the bitter end: "'We must pull them down, exterminate them; we must turn the whole world upside down before we can create a new and better order of things.'" (194) For Isabel, his theory of political violence for its own sake contrasts with the nobler brand of political chaos offered by Émile Henry. While Henry's martyrdom appears more

appealing to her, she fails to connect his pronouncements with the militant actions of the continental bombers who have gone on the run in England.

Isabel brings another one of these, a deranged Italian bomber and bank robber named Giannoli, to the National Gallery where he makes an outburst against art and literature after he is shown Da Vinci's *Madonna delle Roccie*: "'I should love to burn them all, to raze all these galleries and museums to the ground, and libraries with them. For what are libraries but storehouses of human superstition and error? We must free ourselves from the past, free ourselves utterly from its toils, if the future is to be ours.'" Like A-, Giannoli bases his "gospel of destruction" upon the concept of "entirely individual activity" and is absolutely opposed to any kind of political or subversive combination. Impressed by Isabel's strength of character and autonomy, he trusts her completely: "'You are a true Anarchist,' he said to me one day, 'and I would trust you with anything, *even*,' and he emphasised the word so as to give greater weight to the compliment, '*even* with *explosives*.'" (pp.210-213)

From this point *A Girl Among the Anarchists* documents the Rossetti's increasing distress as they deal with a movement that contains as many of the mentally ill as it does political refugees and foreign revolutionaries. Isabel is gradually disillusioned by the impossibility of her cause and by "the almost ludicrous side of the Anarchist party", the ideologues who "used long words they barely understood, considered that equality justified presumption, and contempt or envy of everything they felt to be superior to themselves." Although still very much in awe of the "dreamers" and "incorrigible idealists" who campaign for the anarchist cause, she finally accepts that the movement consists of far too many "heterogeneous elements" for *Tocsin* to make any lasting impact. (272-4) After Giannoli makes an unsuccessful attempt on the life of the Spanish Prime Minister in Barcelona the *Tocsin* office is raided by detectives searching for incriminating documents and explosives and Isabel finally gives up: "I realised that this was the *finale*, the destined end of the *Tocsin* and of my active revolutionary propaganda. I had changed. Why not let the dead bury the dead?" (298) But as she leaves M'Dermott voices a "bloodthirsty sentiment" against the police: "'What we need is to get rid of them by our insidious means, and then go in for wholesale assassination!'" (299)

In his preface to *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, the novelist, Morley Roberts, recommended the account as an alternative to those written by "the social quacks" who had come to dominate the anarchist scene. Roberts hoped that the novel would counter

characters like Giannoli, the "wild-eyed philosopher, who ought to be in an asylum" but instead "throws a bomb... turning all the meeker Anarchists" like M'Dermott "into outrage mongers." (Preface, xxi) Like the fictional Isabel, the Rossetti sisters also abandoned anarchism very abruptly; Olivia left England for Italy while Helen fell ill and also went abroad on a recuperative journey. But Isabel's rejection of her revolutionary friends is based upon her realisation of their refusal to accept political reality. Amused by M'Dermott's call to mass murder, she walks out of the office and returns home, "a sadder if a wiser woman." (p.302) Curiously, the detectives are completely unthreatening at this point and, having formerly expended a great deal of time and energy on avoiding them, Isabel politely walks past the police raiding party and back into the political and social mainstream Having had enough of her political adventures, Isabel retreats back to the security of the bourgeois home, but the gender politics of her anarchist circle is not so different from that of society at large: Isabel is the only significant woman in a group dominated by men, and the only other female anarchists are the pugnacious wife of a suspected informer and a Russian girl who cannot speak English.

Anarchism Gone Wilde

As well as inspiring this confessional novel, the avant-garde politics of the anarchist movement also impacted upon relatively avante-garde literature. As one chronicler of anarchism, Félix Dubois, noted, this was inevitable since aesthetes, "after adopting a revolutionary attitude on purely artistic questions, proceeded by a natural evolution to lend their countenance to extreme political and social views."[65] The anarchists themselves intervened in the discussion surrounding Oscar Wilde's trial for indecency, the great literary scandal of the mid-1890s, and in the pages of *The Torch* Wilde's subtle anti-authoritarianism, as expressed in his plays and other writings assumes a more seditious character. Once more, Alexander Cohen took to defending the apparently indefensible, this time by attacking the press for its sensational coverage of the trial:

[65] Dubois, Félix, *The Anarchist Peril*, trans. Ralph Decheref (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894), p.124.

> The indecency was in the attitude of the press-jackals, draining hard cash out of this case by means of the artificially increased sale of their prostituted papers, rejoicing themselves in Wilde's pain and distress, and every day giving a detailed account of every wrinkle in his face.
>
> At bottom they had never really forgiven this man his talent, his dramatic and literary success, a success which was due to writings the spirit of which was quite at variance with the accepted moralities and the base hypocrisies of the Philistines. Hence the savagery of their joy... Wilde's sentence was a monstrosity engendered by mere hypocrisy.[66]

However the vengeance exerted upon Wilde by "the delighted evening-jackal", as Cohen described the daily press, had a more political motivation than the financial one that the anarchist pointed to, since Wilde's own connection with the British anarchist movement was not inconsiderable: in 1892 he paid £100 bail for the disturbed anarchist poet, John Evelyn Barlas, when he was arrested for firing a revolver at the Speaker's residence in the Palace of Westminster. Like his mother, Lady Jane Francesca Wilde, who wrote Irish nationalist poems and radical articles under the pseudonym "Speranza", Oscar Wilde was given to supporting revolutionary causes. When Barlas wrote to Wilde thanking him for his help the playwright responded: "Whatever I did was merely what you would have done for me or for any friend of yours whom you admired and appreciated. We poets and dreamers are all brothers." A month later, Wilde followed up the favour by sponsoring Barlas' application for a reader's ticket to the Reading Room of the British Museum.[67]

Dubois feared that the talented political writers with which the anarchist movement was replete would inevitably surface as avant-garde literary artists desiring to find "expression in literary productions that appealed to a wider public." In other words, dangerous political types might become mainstream, popular writers bent on causing chaos. It was inevitable, he argued, that "so pronounced a movement" as anarchism should prevent itself from being "confined to so restricted an area" as the purely political and would eventually spill into the artistic world. Given the tendencies of these writers, acquainted as they were with "the shadier sides of contemporary society", warned Dubois, the shared matter, or "similar delineations" that made anarchism and literary

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[66] Cohen, Alexander, Untitled, *The Torch*, Vol. 2, No. 1, June 18, 1895, p.6.
[67] Wilde to John Barlas, 19 January and 4th February, 1892, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), pp.511, 512.

realism dangerously close parallels was only one "partial innovation" by which the subversives planned to break out into the public arena. Octave Mirbeau, he complained, had written a eulogy for the terrorist Ravachol while the periodical *Entreaties*, which began as a purely literary endeavour, had provocatively published the chemical formula for dynamite.[68]

Viewed in these terms, Cohen's defence of Oscar Wilde represents more than simple emotional solidarity with a disgraced public figure: it was an attempt to widen the political field and to broaden the anarchist front by associating the popular playwright with its aims. In Cohen's estimation, Wilde's prosecution was an anarchist *cause celèbre* and his case summarised what was wrong with society:

> I myself never admit the interference of "law" in any case whatsoever. But I perfectly agree with any spontaneous and individual intervention, whether "harmful" or not, for the purpose of preventing anybody from subjecting other persons to his will by violence.
>
> In Wilde's case, however, there is no question of violence done to anybody. There was neither violation nor even seduction. Subject to a passion, which it is not my place or anybody else's to judge of, Wilde sought to satisfy this passion, with the free consent of the creatures who so vilely turned round and gave evidence against him.
>
> These individuals having all, long since, reached the age of discretion, and having all prostituted themselves before they made Wilde's acquaintance, I fail to see the harm done to society, and consequently the right of society to claim redress, *ie.*, to punish.
>
> And, again, I ask in the name of what principle, whether "sacred" or not, Wilde was interfered with?[69]

The Wilde connection also worked at another level: in order to explain why government and authority were anathema to them, writers at *The Torch* compared their political stance to that of the politically disobedient Irish. In an article praising subversive Irishness, the journal provided an interesting analogue to the Cohen's sympathy for Oscar Wilde's underground sexuality:

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[68] Dubois, pp.124, 126-127.
[69] Cohen, ibid., pp.5-6.

> Our position is somewhat akin to that of the Irishman, who, when asked his political opinions, said he was "ag'in the government". We are forever "ag'in the government" no matter whether it be Tory or Liberal, Monarchy, Autocracy, or Democracy, convinced that only in the overthrow of government in all its forms and the recognition of individual liberty, is it possible for humanity to lead a pure, free, and natural life.[70]

The relationship between literature and terrorism is highlighted by these instances of solidarity with Oscar Wilde, the political and sexual 'deviant'. As an Irishman who practiced underground sexual freedoms, Wilde's doubly subversive individualism was also read by propagandists like Cohen as validation for their own anti-authoritarianism. For the anarchists, Wilde's plight in court mirrored their political struggle to "lead a pure, free and natural life." While militant pamphleteers published instructions on assassination and theatre-burning, their journalistic counterparts took time to comment on the aesthete's court case, explaining the anarchist position in relation to government in terms of a rebellious Irishman facing an oppressive British government. Their panegyrics, then, were not just reserved just for infamous café-bombers but also for a public, literary celebrity who had not harmed society but who, in Cohen's estimation was doubly punished, firstly for his homosexuality and then for his literary talent and style. But beneath the radical journalist's outrage at Wilde's treatment lies his elevation of the figure of the aesthete-as-victim. His sympathy for the writer-turned-felon corresponds with the broader adoption of aestheticism by anarchists and also with Wilde's own adoption of anarchism-as-aestheticism.

This anti-authoritarian position was clearly outlined by Oscar Wilde in his 1891 essay, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism". "All modes of government are failures",[71] he wrote, and attacked "the barbarous conception of authority".[72] Most importantly, he also offered an insight into the reasons why well-heeled aesthetes like himself might sympathise with desperadoes like Barlas. Pointing out that while capitalism had clearly empowered a significant section of well-to-do men, Wilde stressed that it had also, at the same time, alienated quite a few of them:

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[70] "News At Home and Abroad", *The Torch*, Vol.2, No., 2, July, 1895, p.17.
[71] Wilde, Oscar, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism", *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2003), p.1181.
[72] Ibid, p.1188.

> At present, in consequence of the existence of private property, a great many people are enabled to develop a certain very limited amount of Individualism. They are either under no necessity to work for their living, or are enabled to choose the sphere of activity that is really congenial to them, and gives them pleasure. These are the poets, the philosophers, the men of science, the men of culture – in a word, the real men, the men who have realised themselves, and in whom all Humanity gains a partial realisation.[73]

Even though he aided the revolutionist, Barlas, Wilde clearly understood the paradox of bourgeois radicalism and linked its political claims to his own aesthetic ones. Believing that "Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism", Wilde argued that any future left-wing system should not be authoritarian, or "the last state of man will be worse than the first."[74] The problem for the propertied and wealthy then, was one of being tied down by material possessions, and of those possessions amounting to a barrier between the wealthy individual, who should be free to do as he chooses, and art: "I can quite understand a man accepting laws that protect private property, and admit of its accumulation, as long as he himself is able under those conditions to realise some form of beautiful and intellectual life. But it is almost incredible to me how a man whose life is marred and made hideous by such laws can possibly acquiesce in their continuance."[75] Wilde complained that the concept of "private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what he possesses." The fusion of identity with capital, Wilde insisted, had "led Individualism entirely astray" but its abolition would create "true, beautiful, healthy Individualism."[76] Individualism, for Wilde, "is what through Socialism we are to attain" and if this is to be accomplished then "the State must give up all idea of government."[77]

For Wilde, democracy was a "degrading" system that allowed for "the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people", but one that contained the seeds of its own destruction: "When it is violent, grossly, and cruelly used, it produces a good effect, by creating, or at any rate bringing out, the spirit of revolt and Individualism that is to kill it." Wilde links the politically revolutionary to the aesthetically subversive by insisting that "Art is the most intense mode of Individualism that the world has known....

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[73] Ibid, p.1175.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid, p.1176.
[76] Ibid, p.1178.
[77] Ibid, p.1181.

Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value." Since art and political chaos are conjoined the artist cannot help but be an anarchist: "the form of government that is most suitable to the artist is no government at all. Authority over him and his art is ridiculous." [78] Wilde's polemic on aesthetic "Individualism" even went so far as to defend the use of revolutionary violence:

> there is much more to be said in favour of the physical force of the public than there is in favour of the public's opinion. The former may be fine. The latter must be foolish. It is often said that force is no argument. That, however, entirely depends on what one wants to prove. Many of the most important problems of the last few centuries, such as the continuance of of personal government in England, of feudalism in France, have been solved entirely by means of physical force. The very violence of a revolution may make the public grand and splendid for a moment. [79]

Sharing Cohen's disgust for the press "jackal", Wilde lamented the day that the revolutionary public acquiesced in the literary authority of the journalist:

> It was a fatal day when the public discovered that the pen is mightier than the paving-stone, and can be made as offensive as the brickbat. They at once sought for the journalist, found him, developed him, and made him their industrious and well-paid servant. It is greatly to be regretted, for both their sakes. Behind the barricade there may be much that is noble and heroic. But what is there behind the leading-article but prejudice, stupidity, cant and twaddle? And when these four are joined together they make a terrible force, and constitute the new authority.[80]

Echoing Cohen's radical distaste for this new tier of authority, Wilde claimed that "In old days men had the rack. Now they have the Press". He claimed that "the fourth estate... is really only the present estate. It has eaten up the other three... We are dominated by Journalism." Almost anticipating his own public humiliation, of which Cohen complained so bitterly, Wilde condemned journalists for abusing their "really remarkable power" as they:

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[78] Ibid p.1182, 1184, 1186, 1192.
[79] Ibid, p.1188.
[80] Ibid.

> drag before the eyes of the public some incident in the private life of a great statesman, of a man who is a leader of political thought as he is a creator of political force, and invite the public to discuss the incident, to exercise authority in the matter, and not merely to give their views, but to carry them into action, to dictate to the man upon all other points, to dictate to his party, to dictate to his country; in fact, to make themselves ridiculous, offensive, and harmful. The private lives of men and women should not be told to the public. The public have nothing to do with them at all.[81]

Wilde compares the authority of the newspaper writer to the subordinate position of the aesthetically-minded writer and complains: "we allow absolute freedom to the journalist and entirely limit the artist."[82] His defence of "private" or sexual life against the absolutism of the press has a clearly anti-authoritarian, even anarchic streak and supports Cohen's sense of Wilde as a libertarian. When considered against its extensive complaints about the abuses of "private property" and with its call for greater "Individualism", Wilde's essay stands firmly in the tradition of nineteenth century libertarianism, and has since remained a sacred tract for anarchists. Indeed, excerpts from the piece were included in George Woodcock's 1977 libertarian primer, *The Anarchist Reader*.

Written only weeks before his eulogy for Émile Henry appeared in the pages of *The Torch*, Alexander Cohen's defence of Oscar Wilde and his accusation that the press targeted the aesthete for his talent as an artist explains the ambivalent space between art and politics that was occupied by *fin-de-siècle* anarchism and which came to characterise it in the popular imagination. The celebration of vanity in Wilde's literary aestheticism is mirrored in the court-room dramatics of anarchists like Émile Henry, whose penchant for Zola was revealed in his speech from the dock, and of Ravachol, who, reported *The Commonweal*, also had aesthetic tastes and who told the judge presiding over his own trial that Eugene Sue "produced a profound impression upon me". Maintaining the link between the literary and the terrifying, Ravachol went on to warn the judge that, if he were released, he would become his next victim in the anarchist campaign and the anarchist reminded the court that, although a fan of French literature, he was also a man of action:

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[81] Ibid, p.1189
[82] Ibid.

> But words are not enough. Another way is necessary... I mean by this acts of violence, which will not of course change the social condition of things from one day to another but will awaken men's minds by giving food for reflection to the self-satisfied, troubling the sleep of the well-filled, and inducing people to study great social questions.[83]

Words, when coupled with violence, would produce the revolutionary social change that Ravachol desired. As Henry would do after him, he used his own trial as a means of publicising this idea.

The Commonweal

Another London paper, *The Commonweal*, proved that radical writing was a form of subversion in its own right and brought the issue of domestic anarchist propaganda to the fore of British political discourse by introducing the possibility of committing "literary" political crime. In doing so, the journal was eventually banned and its editor, D.J. Nicholl, imprisoned for writing inflammatory articles. Nicholl's attitude to anarchist violence is typified in one article in which the paper expressed its indignation that a man "full of love" like Ravachol should have met with the guillotine. *The Commonweal* made a plain call to action, declaring "we cry for vengeance",[84] and praised the Frenchman's methods as vital to "the propaganda":

> we should certainly hail with joy any English Ravachol who will not hesitate to use *all* means, however desperate and unfashionable, in order to gain the wherewithal for himself and for the propaganda... Our masters have no feeling for us and if we are men, with brains and hands, we must have none for them. It is a war to the knife and up to the hilt. They gain their ends by fraud, exploitation and murder; and we must not blame those who, in order to live and help the Cause, use the same weapons. [85]

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[83] "Ravachol: His Autobiography", *The Commonweal: The Official Journal of the Socialist League.*, Vol. 7, No. 312, May 7, 1892.
[84] Ibid.
[85] "Ravachol", *The Commonweal*, Vol. 7, No. 322, July 16, 1892.

In the anarchists' dialectic of endless struggle, in the "war to the knife and up to the hilt", it is "the propaganda" that is all-important, and *The Commonweal* proved exceptionally unapologetic in this regard. Unbothered by the potentially damaging content of such incendiary writing, the journal looked forward to "The day when a Government depot of ammunition can be safely and suddenly made to vanish into the hands of those who will use it in self-defence".[86] It even published the disputed pamphlet, *An Anarchist Feast at the Opera*, which was among a batch discovered during police raids after the discovery of the "Walsall plot", when detectives arrested five anarchists in possession of explosives, a revolver, chloroform and a collection of "revolutionary documents", including a manuscript that began: "Let us occupy ourselves with bombs... much more useful than barricades".[87] While British anarchists like Nicholl claimed that most of the documents were police forgeries this, the most notorious pamphlet in the collection, was aired in *The Commonweal*, which added, "We do not know whether there is any truth in the story that this pamphlet was also composed by the police."[88]

For printing such incendiary "propaganda", the paper was banned for nine months. Nicholl's fall came after he made a seditious speech in to a crowd in Hyde Park that included undercover policemen led by the CID detective, John Sweeney, for which he was charged, along with the publisher, C.W. Mowbray, with "inciting to murder".[89] But it was the uproar over an editorial on the Walsall anarchists that finally got Nicholl jailed in 1892. In this article, the editor recommended that instead of becoming involved in police stings, anarchists should act on their own initiative and murder their opponents. Nicholl pointed to the example of John Felton, who assassinated George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham, in 1628:

> Surely we ought not to have to warn Anarchists of the dangers of conspiracies. These death traps, these gins set by the police and their spies, in which so many honest and devoted men have perished. Surely those who desire to act can do so as John Felton did, when alone and unaided, he bought the knife which struck down the tyrant.

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[86] "Revolution and Physical Force", *The Commonweal*, Vol. 7, No. 325, August 6th, 1892.
[87] "Trial of the Walsall Anarchists", *The Times*, Tuesday, April 5th, 1892, p.8
[88] "An Incendiary Pamphlet", *The Commonweal*, Vol. 7, No. 309, April 9, 1892.
[89] "Prosecution By The Government", Ibid., Vol. 7, No. 311, April 30, 1892.

"Are there no tyrants now [?]" Nicholl asked and he went on to suggest a few targets for assassination. These included Henry Matthews, Secretary of State for the Home Office, the High Court judge Sir Henry Hawkins and William Melville, a detective inspector with the Metropolitan police:

> What of the Jesuitical monster at the Home Office who murders men for taking a few head of game. What of the hyena, who preys upon bodies of hanged men and whose love of gallows a few years ago won him the title of "Hangman Hawkins." This barbarous brute, who prating of his "humanity" sends our comrades to ten years in the hell of prisons. What of the spy Melville, who sets his agents on to concoct the plots, which he "discovers." Are these men *fit to live?*[90]

Meanwhile, anarchist writers alleged that they were combating the efforts of their foils in the police and in the secret service: during the Walsall trial the defendants tried to dismiss the pamphlets that were presented as evidence against them, arguing that, like the bombs that were allegedly discovered upon their persons, the pamphlets were also constructed by detectives and were no more than "police literature... paid for with secret service money in France."[91] Nicholl's conviction provoked sympathetic poetry from the moderate anarchist newspaper, *Freedom*:

> Once more the march of lawlessness is crost!
> Once more two loyal sons of Scotland Yard
> Have shown that no completeness to our cases shall be lost
> For having want of hearing sharp and swearing hard!
> Where the red revolutionary bands
> Of the Anarchists and the Dynamiters meet
> They went, with their lives in their hands,
> And regulation boots upon their feet.
>
> There's John Sweeney, he's an Irishman, you see,
> And I call all his comrades to remark,
> Right well he's learnt the lessons of the gallant R.I.C.,
> And practised (*sic*) them in Sundays in the Park,

[90] "The Walsall Anarchists. Condemned To Penal Servitude", Ibid.
[91] "The Speeches of Our Comrades", ibid.

> For he moved inconspicuously thro' the mob
> In a close-fitting mustard-color'd coat
> With a special duty truncheon in his fob
> And the tablets of his memory for a "note."[92]

Writing in *The Torch* in June 1893, H.B. Samuels proposed suicide as the most autonomous deed that could be achieved in the "living death" of modernity. The modern metropolis, with its "vast, busy, struggling stream of life hurrying, panting, snatching at every opportunity for personal profit, pleasure or popularity" was a death trap in its own right so, he continued, "let every reader if he or she cares consider this and give the answer in word or deed to the foul, diabolical, monstrosity, SOCIETY, that produces such inconsistent, incoherent, disconnected beings as we are."[93] Samuels was, in fact, the brother-in-law of Martial Bourdin, who killed himself while trying to plant a bomb at the Greenwich Park Observatory in February 1892. His praise for auto-destruction as a form of political protest is a typical trope in anarchist writing. However some of the movement's literary terrorists preferred to encourage propagandists-by-deed to continue the struggle by damaging the "monstrous" system rather than by harming themselves. Another paper, *Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist-Communism* warned that modern capitalism was to blame for all of society's ills which, it claimed, included the militant anarchists:

> There is a class of men produced by our modern competitive civilisation, which is so advantageous to the few and so crushing to the many, who cultivate a contempt for death. Ravachol and Vaillant belong to this number.[94]

Conservative Responses to the Anarchist Press

The extent of popular fascination with anarchist terrorism is evidenced in *At Scotland Yard*, the memoir of John Sweeney, a Chief Inspector of the CID who led much of the police effort against anarchists such as D.J. Nicholl and he Walsall conspirators. A

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[92] 'S.O.', "A Ballad of Scotland Yard", *Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*, Vol. 6, No. 68, p.53.
[93] Samuels, H.B., "Life or Death: Suicide and Insanity", *The Torch*, Vol. 3, No. 6, June 15, 1893, pp.1-3.
[94] *The Echo*, February 6, 1895, reprinted in *Freedom*, March, 1894, p.11.

native of County Clare and a fluent Irish speaker, Sweeney began his career as a plain-clothes detective by spying on Irish cultural events in London, and by the 1890s he had become an expert in "the business of Anarchist hunting".[95] Although an immigrant himself, Sweeney was horrified that political refugees from Europe were making England "a dumping-ground for bad characters." He was convinced that the country was teeming with "crack-brained rascals" and other "human refuse", (pp. 70, 201, 203) and used the Walsall case to argue that a widespread continental-style anarchist conspiracy was being hatched on British soil and that a bloody revolution was afoot. While the anarchists claimed that they were being framed by the police their protests went unheard as Sweeney produced examples of their pamphlets in court, where he exhibited their "highly incendiary character" (p.179) and caused a sensation, so that the prosecution focussed not only on the discovery of the anarchists' cache of bombs, but also made much of this stash of revolutionary literature. Sweeney himself considered the anarchists' rhetoric to be every bit as dangerous as the bombs that they had been caught with and he recalled that the trial "brought out a few interesting facts about the astonishing stuff which is circulated amongst revolutionaries the more thoroughly to poison their minds." (p.212) He was determined that "the constant gossip and fabrications", the "rumours and murmurings" of the anarchists, were the source of political contagion. These "mutterers and fomenters of sedition", he complained, "have a way of committing their theories, their complaints, and their misrepresentations of facts to paper, the more thoroughly to infect with the Anarchist taint minds still comparatively unsmirched". (pp.204-205) During one of the raids his men came across the usual terrorist paraphernalia - a box labelled "Sulphuric Acid", a bag of suspicious yellow powder and an exercise book containing the words "Long Live Anarchy", along with the declaration "Down with laws and government" written on the fly-leaf. (p.242) But they also discovered here another class of literature – a set of terrorist DIY manuals that offered practical advice to anarchists on the means that they might employ to further their campaign of subversion. One tract recommended an all-out struggle against the ruling class and all of its wings - administrative, legal, religious, political and military:

> Means of Emancipation: First, in order to arrive at a complete emancipation of humanity, brutal force is indispensable, whatever may say the theoricians (*sic*)

[95] Sweeney, John, *At Scotland Yard: Being the Experiences During Twenty-Seven Years of Service by John Sweeney, Late Detective Inspector, Criminal Investigation Department* (London: Grant Richards, 1904), p.36. All subsequent citations are from this edition.

> – the devil take them – otherwise we shall always be slaves and starving. Then, if it is necessary to put down all political, military, and religious authority, as well as all these law manufacturers, it is absolutely necessary to burn the churches, palaces, convents, soldier-barracks, prefectures, lawyers' and barristers' offices, fortresses, prisons, and *to destroy entirely all that has lived till now by business work without contributing to it.* As it is necessary to place all natural riches at the disposal of those that work, we shall contrive also that the blood which will flow in the streets be not ours, *but that of the infamous rich*, who have starved us. Henceforth that is our first and veritable work, without minding the band of politicians and creators of the congress. Then the real misfortune of the social revolution would be to see those men becoming masters of the battlefield of social conquest. Well, no more organisations; no more dictators; and rather than to lose precious time in serving as a ladder to those rascal deceivers, let us occupy ourselves with chemistry, and let us manufacture promptly bombs, dynamite, and other explosive matters much more efficacious than guns and barricades, to bring the destruction of the actual state of things and above all to spare the precious blood of our comrades. (pp.213-214)

A year later Sweeney arrested another anarchist immigrant, Fritz Brall, in possession of Most's pamphlet, *Scientific Revolutionary Warfare*. "This pamphlet", he recalled, "was a very remarkable work, and the mere possession of it unexplained should be made as serious an offence as the possession of explosive materials." It gave instructions in German on how to set off explosions, "so as to cause the greatest destruction to life and property". Sweeney noted that Brall was given instructions by his comrades before he was tried: "he was to defend himself to the last, and then if he found the case hopeless he was to use the dock as a platform in order to give vent to the doctrines of Anarchy." (pp.271-272) Not only were anarchists disseminating their propaganda in Britain, argued Sweeney, they were using the very courts as a medium for their propaganda just as their counterparts were doing on the continent.

These pamphlets, along with other tracts, such as *Fight or Starve*,[96] were characterised by Sweeney as "the poisonous stuff whereby they themselves and their confederates are worked up to the committal of crimes against society." He regarded anarchist writers as "the scum of the earth" and maintained that their propaganda

[96] Ibid, p.215.

encouraged "a jaundiced view of things which is akin to madness". (pp.295-296) Outraged, he called for suitably coercive legislation "which shall deal summarily with such people and apply a muzzling process preventing them from publicly declaring themselves Anarchists and inciting to the commission of crime." (pp.223-224) In Sweeney's estimation, this literature was responsible for the worst instances of anarchist subversion, and he recommended that such newspapers, pamphlets and articles should be considered as dangerous as bomb-making materials. Equating this literature with explosives and bomb-casings, his memoir indicates that the CID were conscious of the subversive impact of rhetorical terrorism.

The detective had his supporters and another critic of anarchism, Peter Latouche, agreed with his analysis of the continuum between anarchist words and deeds. "The spread of anarchist theories have been accompanied", he warned, "by considerable literary activity". Having read the movement's most extreme pamphlets, Latouche was convinced that these documents were responsible for most of the political violence attributed to the anarchists. Such material, he complained, posed an even greater threat than the anarchist groups themselves ever did because they encouraged aberrant individuals to commit outrages on their own initiative: "assassination, which is the outcome of Anarchist views, is practically never the result of conspiracy." Latouche pointed to "the ephemeral publications of this sort" - the tracts, short pamphlets and fly-sheets, sometimes illustrated, usually printed and, on occasion, even handwritten - which had become "exceedingly popular with the anarchists." Such literature was "easy to circulate" and, most importantly, easy to conceal. Inexpensively produced, these documents also allowed for the rapid spread and easy absorption of ideology, even allowing "the poorest companions to aid in spreading anarchist principles".[97]

The suppression of anarchist papers on the continent had led to the outbreak "pamphlets... couched in the most violent language." Latouche warned that in comparison with those official anarchist organs, such as the newspapers that we have already examined, these freely circulating pamphlets were dynamite:

> The menaces uttered by infuriated anarchist orators, and the vigorous invective that is common in the party newspapers, are mild and polished compared with the matter that appears in these irresponsible prints. They are written, in fact,

[97] Latouche, Peter, *Anarchy! An Authentic Exposition of the Methods of Anarchists and the Aims of Anarchism*, (London: Everett & Co., 1908), pp.77, 281, 66, 137-138. Subsequent citations are from this edition.

> with the most unbridled license, the authors being loud in their promise of murder and every form of crime, and vying with each other in profanity and grossness.[98]

Competing to outdo one another in the field of violent rhetoric, the militants' outrageous prints were having more of a destabilising effect than the actual violence that was breaking out across the continent: "of all the methods employed by the anarchists... the insidious literature is perhaps the most dangerously effective... It is doubtful whether any political party has displayed in the furtherance of its principles an ingenuity and tenacity of purpose equal to that of these extreme individualists." (p.69)

Like Sweeney, Latouche also blamed immigration for causing the spread of anarchism, so it was also an essentially foreign phenomenon: now that the anarchists were transforming London into "the Mecca of all revolutionary exiles" it had become "one of the chief centres for the production of these incendiary publications." (pp.22, 26) In his estimation, anarchist writing really was a kind of "invasion narrative" as it threatened to swamp Britain with radical foreign discourses and the kind of violent rhetoric that was more suited to continental underground presses. Having analysed the documents that were seized from the Walsall plotters Latouche confirmed that they "gave detailed and explicit instructions for the manufacture of bombs, the commission of burglary, coining, poisoning and even of illegal surgical operations", being polite Victorian shorthand for abortion. (p.126) Latouche had no doubt of their authenticity and joined Sweeney in decrying "the little knot of insane criminals who believe in hastening their millennium by outrage". These writings, he insisted, were "perverted and criminal" and inspired "cowardly and useless outrages". And as a political doctrine anarchism was "quite beyond ordinary comprehension" in its "insensate love of slaughter". (pp.11-12, 25, 29, 52) Latouche noted how one foreign "fiend", an Italian, "gave minute instructions... for the cultivation of the germs of cholera, typhoid, and other fell diseases and recommended "comrades to place them in waterworks and so decimate the bourgeoisie safely and surely". (pp.127-128) But aside from his xenophobia, Latouche also acknowledged the benefits of Britain's tolerance of political asylum-seekers and considered "Anarchism in England" to be "an undesirable alien wisely tolerated and ignored by the authorities." He believed that since terrorism thrived under coercion, Britain's moderate policy toward her resident anarchists was politically sound. Latouche

[98] Ibid, p.69.

was convinced that moderate measures, in tune with the political sensibilities of British public opinion, might check the anarchism more successfully than harsher legislation that had been adopted by continental governments. But he also recommended that steps be taken to censor the radical journals being circulated on the fringes of the British anarchist movement:

> On the Continent Revolutionary Anarchism flourishes among the half-demented victims of oppression, in spite of the vigorous efforts and vigorous methods of the police. Its "newspapers" are printed and circulated secretly, and owing to this, they advocate and applaud assassination in the most unqualified manner... Were these journals allowed to be freely printed and openly circulated, as in England, they must necessarily be shorn of their appallingly criminal character. That the English method is the wiser there can be no doubt; because although the Continental method may reduce the number issued to a minimum, one of these murderous sheets may reach the hands of a lunatic and inspire him to a foul deed at which nations stand aghast. Far better permit a print shorn of incitement to murder to reach a circulation of sixty thousand, than to limit the circulation of to even six copies by a system which leaves the writers free to inspire the foulest deeds even in the smallest area. (pp.36-38)

Latouche's conviction that even a handful of "murderous sheets" could cause more damage than thousands of moderate anarchist papers indicates that the concern with subversive writing was not limited to the police. With the publication of extreme views in pamphlets, articles and journals, it appeared to conservatives that literature itself was assuming a subversive character. According to both men, the act of writing for articles for anarchist newspapers and the production of subversive pamphlets were of themselves acts of terrorism. For Sweeney, even the public declaration of one's belief in anarchism should be considered a crime.

To illustrate his point, Latouche provided examples. One, the "Anarchist's Guide" was "a complete hand-book for the practical militant anarchist". This "instructive compilation" provided information on the manufacture of explosives and the construction of bombs, such as "the incendiary cigarette and tall hat", while another, "Police Spies" contained instructions on how to evade detection. Another, issued in 1893, compounded Louise Michel's condemnation of urban space as the site of alienation and despair by appropriating it within anarchist imagery and praising it, so that "the street"

becomes "the front!" and "the battlefield of the people... where deeds of reprisal can be accomplished". He also published the most notorious of all the documents seized by John Sweeney during the raids on the Walsall anarchists. Entitled *An Anarchist Feast at the Opera*, the pamphlet offered practical instructions to the politically motivated mass murderer. It urged anarchists to enjoy "the delightful spectacle of seeing on a fine evening this splendid building all in flames in the middle of a brilliant feast" and to consider it "as a variable apotheosis carried towards heaven." Like the Clan na Gael dynamiters, the writer of this tract was taken by the idea of destroying public buildings, and the tract gloatingly describes how a single anarchist might with minimum effort or risk to himself massacre opera audiences by causing an inferno inside the theatre. The tract advised that after severing the building's gas pipes and leaving behind a simply constructed time-bomb, the anarchist could leave the performance after the first act. The subsequent explosion, it stated, will fire the gas and the collapsing ceiling "will have the effect of grapeshot on the jolly spectators":

> It requires only hatred in the heart and to be pitiless. After all, what do we care for the failings of humanity, even with regard to the women and children of that race of robbers and real criminals? Do not their young become wolves likewise? Are their females less eager for prey than the males? Therefore it is pious work to crown worthily those revels which the bandits throw as a defiance at our misery and sufferings. Would not a single one amongst us feel his heart beat with an immense joy in hearing the shriveling of the grease of the rich, and the howlings of that mass of flesh swarming in the midst of that immense vessel all in a blaze? In fact, what delight in our town to see even at a distance such a red conflagration! A thousand times more beautiful to our eyes than the dazzling of the purest diamond! To hear howlings, the cries of pain and the rage of the wolves, their females and young ones in the midst of the furnace – a thousand times more pleasant and more vibrating to our ears than the songs of half-a-dozen prostitutes above an orchestra. (pp.129-130)

The crescendo of pornographic detail in *An Anarchist Feast at the Opera* certainly indicates that anarchists and, if the document is a forgery, their pursuers in the police, were both fixated by the shock-value of terrorism. If it were a forgery, the pamphlet's crazed prose, in which the suffering of women and children is described as the howling of wolves, allows the act of political violence to reach an imaginary pitch that is

calculated to reveal the merciless and indiscriminate nature of anarchist terrorism. But whether or not it was a genuine document or a police 'plant', it found a place alongside the declarations of Émile Henry and Salvador Franch and even though non-militant anarchists disputed the authenticity of the piece, the indiscriminate targeting of such sites of bourgeois display and consumption as cafés and operas by libertarian folk-heroes provided a chilling analogue to this kind of propaganda. Their journalism, manifestoes, threats and speeches had been polarizing public opinion since the mid-1880s and radical political philosophers like Errico Malatesta had a difficult time in dispelling it. The pamphlet caused a sensation at the Walsall trial and fuelled public paranoia over recent attacks on theatres, such as that carried out by Franch in 1893, that had become a trademark of the continental anarchists and Latouche believed that a similar text had inspired the atrocity: "These inhuman crimes may perhaps be directly traceable to the dreadful literature circulated, which it is shocking to think any Englishman, however depraved, could bring himself to read without loathing." (pp.131-132) Not only was this kind of literature vile, it was also foreign. For conservatives like Sweeney and Latouche, the threat posed by anarchism lay in the appropriation of the rudiments of scientific knowledge by immigrants like Fritz Brall, in whose hands it had been placed by Johann Most. This literature, he believed, was being circulated by "paid agitators" (p.233), professional anarchist propagandists whose publications could incite spectacular acts of political violence.

Terrorism, Advertising and Modernity

Some writers could not resist using terrorism as a means of selling their own newspapers. In December, 1894, London was subjected to another panic, which became known as "The Tamworth Bomb-Scare", when two men, Charles Henry Dent and Francis Bawn, posted twenty four hoax bombs to government offices in the capital, as well as to five MPs and to the Lord Mayors of Liverpool and Manchester, the Mayors of Bradford, Leeds, Exeter, Bristol and Gloucester, as part of a publicity campaign for a periodical entitled *Answers*. The parcels containing the fake bombs included a copy of the journal, which alerted the Special Branch to the nature of the hoax and allowed them to arrest the culprits:

> They admitted having sent off the boxes, and explained that they had seen a notice in this periodical offering a prize of £250 to whoever should best advertise twenty-four copies of it; from this they had conceived the idea of making twenty-four sham bombs, enclosing copies of the paper, and sending them to prominent public men.[99]

A note accompanied the bomb, informing the recipients that "page 452 explains the joke". On this page were written the words: "Does this win, say yes, please."[100] At the trial, it was noted that the bombs were modelled on one found on Francis Polti, one of the Walsall anarchists. In their defence, the men explained that "(t)hey had had no intention of harming anyone but had simply thought that it would be a good way to create a sensation and advertise the newspaper."[101] Unable to resist the publicity that another public scare would raise for their paper, these entrepreneurs ironically proved Sweeney's point that "incendiary" writing was infectious.

In creating the "Tamworth Bomb Scare" Dent and Bawn adapted the voice of dynamite for their own entrepreneurial means and achieved the kind of publicity and notoriety that Henry's court room dramatics had done. Even though their plot was a purely commercial one it supported Sweeney's theory that unchecked anarchism had a life of its own and could spill out of the political underground and into the commercial mainstream. With the *concept* of value-free bombs at large and circulating across the country, this motif of political subversion had now filtered out of the world of radical individualism and into the zone of commercially competitive individualism, and these ambitious advertisers imitated the "perfect independence" enjoyed by members of "the anarchist army".[102] In this way the commercial combination of high explosives and journalism meant that actual bombings and subversive literature became another set of modern stimuli and yet another late Victorian sensation fit for public consumption. While Isabel Meredith's experience of political anarchism ends with her acknowledgement that as an ideology it is unsuited to the political situation in Britain, this bomb scare underlined how its ethos of unrestricted militant action had a certain *chic* that was suited

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[99] Ibid, p. 160
[100] Ibid, p. 165.
[101] Ibid, p. 164.
[102] Ibid, pp. 50, 54.

to private enterprise. As Dubois noted: "The spirit of innovation is an essential characteristic of the anarchist."[103]

The symbolic role of the bomb within the Victorian *verbal* spectacle had begun to grow and the case of the periodical, *Answers*, underlines how the phenomenon of terrorism was also perceived as a form of political advertising in an age of nascent commercial publicity. The notion of subversion serving as a modern motif pervades James Joyce's *Ulysses*, particularly the *Aeolus* episode, in which Joyce's modernist fiction is stylistically linked with newspapers through its punctuation by headline text. Set in the offices of the *Freeman's Journal*, the episode offers a glimpse of Leopold Bloom's work, "The gentle art of advertisement", but it also presents a significant Joycean reflection on the very modern nature of urban revolt. Stephen Daedalus and Madden O'Burke are told that they look "like communards" by MacHugh, and like "fellows who had blown up the Bastille" by J.J. O'Molloy. As with Tom Greer's novel about airborne Irish bombers, Joyce's modernist Daedalus has a revolutionary association in this chapter, and both he and O'Burke remind Molloy of the assassination of General Bobrikoff, the hardline Russian Governor General of Finland who was assassinated on June 16th, 1904, the day on which *Ulysses* is set. The editor, Myles Crawford, wants Daedalus to write a sensational story on this topic ("Something with a bite in it") and goes on to praise the journalist Ignatius Gallaher, who "made his mark" by writing a detailed report on the Phoenix Park assassinations and having his copy syndicated by the *New York World*: "That was the smartest piece of journalism ever known. That was in eightyone, sixth of May, time of the invincibles, murder in the Phoenix Park, before you were born... Gave it to them on a hot plate, Myles Crawford said, the whole bloody history. Nightmare from which you will never awake."[104] The Joycean nightmare is the nightmare of political violence rather than that of abstract history as its presence is always felt in modern society. Ever-occurring, its continuity is once more brought to the immediate surface by the murder of Bobrikoff. Its presence in the overlapping of past and present is revealed as Crawford shows Daedalus the report and maps the Invincibles' escape route across Dublin. Gallaher's report is discussed in terms of its up-to-dateness, in a newspaper office, in a fictional present, 1904, which is mirrored by the actual present of the novel's publication, 1922, the year in which the brief but ferocious Irish Civil War erupted. Political violence as an underlining feature of the ongoing

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[103] Dubois, ibid, p.211.
[104] Joyce, James, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp.170-174.

present is a concern that Joyce's modernist classic shares with the little clandestine, modernising printing presses of the anarchists, with their anxious opponents like Dubois and Sweeney, and with the audacious advertisers of the newspaper, *Answers*.

CONCLUSION

All of these examples of anarchist writing underline exactly how the role played by radical political writing and action fitted into the range of late Victorian sensational phenomena. As well as serving a political role, terrorism also developed a spectacular one and, like the dynamiters of the 1880s, the anarchists of the 1890s assumed a place within the popular imagination that made political violence appear than more than just a fleeting political trend. With its insertion into the panoply of modern excitements, political violence and the literature that supported it was imaginatively absorbed and even recycled as fiction, as in the Rossetti's novel, or as advertising fodder, as illustrated by the Tamworth Bomb Scare. Although conservative scare-mongers like Peter Latouche warned the public that "there is no crime, however horrible, which is not gathered under the aegis of Anarchism" these outrages had a thrilling appeal: "The very fact that certain crimes might especially shock the public, commend them to the Anarchistic mind which delights in shocking and terrifying the bourgeoisie."[105] While disputes arose over the authenticity of pamphlets that were produced at various anarchist trials, or were claimed to have been found during police raids, the anarchists themselves indulged in literary shock tactics in their own newspapers and never really objected to creating literary sensations of their own. In journals such as *The Torch*, *Commonweal*, the London *Alarm*, *The Anarchist*, *Freedom*, *Herald of Anarchy,* and the Chicago-published *The Alarm,* extremist writers were often published alongside well-known moderates. This appeared to justify Sweeney's polemic about the threats of "explosive" anarchist writing, in which the libertarians appeared as an amorphous mass of speech-making, pamphlet-wielding Émile Henrys and Ravachols baying for the destruction of society-at-large. The anarchists themselves did little to reverse the stereotype in their own presses and their newspapers often reveal enjoyment at scaring the middle-classes. It was the visceral

[105] Latouche, ibid., p.143.

value of terrorism that the anarchists transformed into a literary aesthetic in their partisan journalism, alarming pamphlets and defiant speeches from the dock. Therefore, during the late 1880s and 1890s, the doctrines of anarchism were communicated through clandestinely printed newspapers as well as inside Sweeeny's "murderous sheets".

While the popular imagination was firmly captivated by the declarations and writings of the extreme school of anarchism, moderate libertarian pamphleteers continually tried to distinguish their ideology from terrorism. One complained that popular opinion was "oppressed with the popular idea of an Anarchist as one who goes about with a dagger in one hand and a dynamite bomb in the other, trying to overturn society".[106] However, such denials of the link between anarchist thought and violent political action were undermined by the homogeneity of anarchist literary culture, within which established libertarian writers and thinkers regularly mixed with obscure but extremist radical authors. Thus, one anarchist songbook that featured William Morris' anarchist anthem "All for the Cause" also included ditties by lesser-known bards, such as "We'll Turn Things Upside Down!" and "People Who Wouldn't Be Missed". This song provides a list of possible targets for the aspiring revolutionary, including "patriotic gentlemen", "emigration-mongers", bourgeois, policemen, landlords, jerry-builders, evangelists, "sweating middlemen", rent-collectors, landlords, employers and businessmen of any class.[107] As even the anarchists' song-books indicate, *fin-de-siècle* anarchist literature was thoroughly characterised by its expression of political violence as much as it was by its more philosophical rhetoric. This propaganda-by-the-word was expressed through speeches, newspapers and pamphlets and took a firm hold of the popular imagination. The editors of these newspapers considered their propaganda as a necessary accompaniment to the desperate deeds of anarchists like Henry and Ravachol. While Seymour tried to counter the negative impressions that this literary propaganda conveyed to the public by publishing his own pamphlets, his claim that "Anarchy is synonymous with liberty..."[108] and that it is "the negation of law and expression of equal liberty"[109] could hardly have met with a warm reception from a public fed on scare stories that were fuelled by the anarchists' own printing presses. Even the Walsall anarchists' claims that detectives like John Sweeney planted evidence and

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[106] Warren, G.O., *Freedom: Rent, Interest, Profit and Taxes, the True Causes of Wage-Slavery* (London: William Reeves, 1894) p.3.
[107] Anon., *Songs for Socialists* (Aberdeen: James Leatham, 1890), pp. 16-17.
[108] Seymour, Henry, *Anarchy: Theory and Practice* (London: Henry Seymour, 1888), p.4.
[109] Ibid., p.8.

invented pamphlets such as *An Anarchist Feast at the Opera* found little sympathy among a public already threatened on a regular basis in their underground newspapers. Regardless of their veracity, Sweeney's production of extremist anarchist pamphlets at the Walsall trial further sensationalised an anarchist discourse that had already been verging on illegality for years, although the trial did contribute to an enduring public hostility toward libertarian ideologies. Despite the efforts of the Kropotkins and Malatestas, their political culture was irreversibly enmeshed with the actions of Ravachols and Henrys because anarchism was defined not as a purely ideological formation but as a violently subversive pandemic. This perception of anarchism was popularised not only by its own writers, but by its enemies and by the writers of fiction. Therefore the kind of chemical scares predicted by Peter Latouche emerge in a displaced form in contemporary fictions such as H.G. Wells' short story,"The Stolen Bacillus" (1892) and E. Douglas Fawcett's *Hartmann The Anarchist: Or The Doom of The Great City* (1893), in which a futuristic London is destroyed by anarchist airships armed with the latest incendiary explosive technologies. And the radical anarchists themselves were unworried about the long-term political or cultural implications of their rhetoric. As one nonchalantly observed in *Freedom*, "Anybody can make and use bombs; they cost only from ten to fifteen cents a piece. These are facts and I can't help that."[110]

[110] "Autobiography of George Engel", *Freedom: A Revolutionary Communist-Anarchist Monthly*, Chicago, Vol. 1, No. 8, June 1st, 1891.

Chapter Three

Apprehending the Unknowable Suspect: Political Violence in H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*

Although they are the stuff of literary fantasy the invisible men of nineteenth century popular fiction are primarily political subversives whose fantastic condition amounts to a form of protest against the spectacular structures of bourgeois society and its culture of consumption. As Eric Hobsbawm has explained, capitalism enjoyed a "global victory"[1] during the second half of the century, when "the epoch of triumphant liberalism"[2] was well underway. Jürgen Habermas has described how, since the seventeenth century, the rise of capitalism along with the attendant development of print culture created a visibly bourgeois public sphere within which public discourse was controlled by an economically independent class of businessmen and intellectuals. This economic and cultural sphere emerged out of conditions associated with the early development of capitalism: "It was specifically a part of 'civil society,' which at the same time established itself as the realm of commodity exchange and social labor governed by its own laws."[3] According to Habermas, the primary function of public political representation, which he describes as the "publicity of representation", is "to make something invisible visible", to make something tangible of "an aura" by staging it in the public sphere.[4] In other words, participation in and ownership of the political process requires that its actors and influences are perceptible. Since the middle ages the "staging of the publicity involved in representation" was attached to visual and personal attributes, such as insignia, badges, demeanour and rhetoric. However as these symbols of "noble"[5] conduct came under strain from the more democratising impetus of entrepreneurial capitalism, with its stress upon the rising bourgeois individual and his freedom from aristocratic tradition, the visual nature of the political sphere was reinforced: as we have already seen, the nineteenth-

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[1] Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* ([1975] London: Abacus, 2001), p.47.
[2] Ibid, p.115
[3] Habermas, Jürgen, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: *An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Translated by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence from *Strukturwandel der Öffentlicheit*, Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, Dermstadt and Neuwied, 1962 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p.3.
[4] Ibid, p.7.
[5] Ibid, p.8.

century bourgeoisie, who were attacked by anarchists such as Émile Henry and Salvador Franch, indulged in a culture of conspicuous consumption and display and were condemned as "that stupid and pretentious mass of folk who always choose the strongest side". As a reaction to these displays of leisure and pleasure on the boulevards and in the theatres, Henry and his comrades promised to continue bombing "the daily clientele of Terminus and other great cafés!" The industrial revolution had an underside, as economic and technological development led to rapid urbanisation and the development of a new class – the urban, industrial proletariat, an underclass that was characterised by its invisibility and which produced the anarchists who tried to undermine the social order. By the late nineteenth century the public sphere was dominated by the middle classes, so that the "basic pattern of the representative publicness not only survived but became more prominent".[6] Despite the bourgeoisie's insistence upon its "private elements"[7], this tendency towards the politically visual elements of public life peaked in the late nineteenth century. This process had a doubling effect, as the industrial system that made the mass production of commodities possible was mirrored in the radicalisation of sections of the working class, as we have seen in Chapter Two. In this atmosphere the urban poor were alienated as "(c)ivil society came into existence as the corollary of a depersonalised state authority".[8] Meanwhile, as economic opportunities increased for the middle classes, so too did their estrangement from the state. By the end of the nineteenth century the bourgeoisie were dominant and had become "the real carrier of the public",[9] but this power also implied that class's potential independence from the political center.

The anarchists decried the political dispensation as serving "the narrow selfishness of the privileged classes".[10] For radicals like Peter Kropotkin, the brief moment of revolutionary glory presented by the French revolution had been usurped by "the Dantons and the Robespierres", who were "men well provided with means", individuals who proclaimed "'Respect for the law'". Subsequently, bemoaned Kropotkin, the nineteenth century was characterised by the rapaciousness of the middle classes, whose "principle... of representative government", he complained, "sums up the whole philosophy of the bourgeois age, the XIX century." This class, he argued, "has preached

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[6] Ibid, p.10.
[7] Ibid, p.11.
[8] Ibid, p.19.
[9] Ibid, p.23.
[10] Kropotkine, Pierre (also Kropotkin, Peter), *The Place of Anarchism in Socialistic Evolution*, translated from the French by Henry Glasse (London: International Publishing Company, 1886), p.1.

this doctrine in its schools, it has propagated it in its writings, it has moulded its art and science to the same purpose, it has thrust its beliefs into every hole and corner". But despite the saturation of nineteenth century society with middle class values and aspirations Kropotkin pointed out that the dominant ideology was being challenged by its political opponents, the anarchists: "times and tempers have changed since a hundred years ago. Rebels are everywhere to be found, who no longer wish to obey the law."[11] As we have seen, anarchists and their writings and subversive actions provided political pundits and newspaper journalists with plenty of discussion and copy. They also featured in fantastic fictions of this period. This chapter will read H.G Wells' 1897 novel, *The Invisible Man* and other invisibility fantasies as fictions that were concerned with the dominant politics of the late nineteenth century, with the economic and political figure of the lone bourgeois, and with his rival or political counter-figure, the anarchist. In this novel Wells speculates as to the political chaos that might occur should an invisible man escape from his normal urban environment and remain at large in small-town and rural England. Coming into conflict with a stratum of influential "private persons" [12] who resemble Habermas's bourgeois types, the Invisible Man revolts against them and he offers a vision of the kind of anarchy that could emerge from such a conflict.

The idea of invisibility as a political condition that required isolation and containment was outlined by the French sociologist, Gustave Le Bon, who, in his 1895 book, *The Psychology of Revolution*, pointed to the revolutionary drama of late eighteenth century France. This period, complained Le Bon, was dictated by "invisible forces", or "invisible powers"[13] that controlled the masses in France and produced a slow process of mental contagion[14] that engulfed "the blind multitudes" during the nineteenth century.[15] This was proven, he claimed, by the more recent emergence of "data relating to the disaggregation of personality" and to the rise of "mental contagion" that had come to characterise society over the course of the nineteenth century.[16] While Le Bon's discomforting vision of modern society as a turbulent and unsorted mass of politicised malcontents moving under the influence of unseen and "invisible powers" might be dismissed as a conservative reaction against the rise of democracy, Kropotkin's fellow-

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[11] Ibid, pp.4-5.
[12] Habermas, Ibid, p.28.
[13] Le Bon, Gustave, *The Psychology of Revolution*, translated by Bernard Mall from *La psychologie des revolutions* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, [1895] 1913), p.16.
[14] Ibid, p.106.
[15] Ibid, p. 325.
[16] Ibid, p.12.

radicals also pointed to the subversive potential of the unseen. Mikhail Bukunin, another Russian anarchist, proposed to his colleagues that revolutions must be led "(b)y a force that is invisible, that no one admits".[17] Echoing Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa's call for revolutionary "men who will fly over land and sea like invisible beings"[18] Bakunin advised his co-conspirators that only an "invisible collective force" could "preserve and guide the revolution" and recommended anarchists should move "like invisible pilots in the thick of the popular tempest". This, he suggested, would provide a leadership "without insignia, titles, or official rights" that would be "all the stranger for having none of the paraphernalia of power". "If you set up this collective, invisible dictatorship," he told his comrades, "you will triumph, the revolution, properly guided, will triumph." Along with Le Bon's conservative imagery of the imperceptibility of subversive political forces, Bakunin's model of a revolutionary movement that is "all the more salutary and effective for not being dressed up in any official power or extrinsic character"[19] suggests that invisibility had come to be a way of thinking about subversive political forces.

The sociological implications of political secrecy were examined in science fiction and other forms of speculative fiction during the 1880s and early 1890s. In these fantasies the panoptical dialectic is resisted and reversed so that the "mechanism of objectification"[20] employed by the state is enjoyed by anarchists such as Wells' Invisible Man, Griffin, who imposes his own form of surveillance upon, and attempts to overthrow, the lawful authority of England when he goes on an anarchic rampage in West Sussex. This early science fiction novel of Wells' offers a theory of political terror in which the terrorist is resistant to the surveillance of the bourgeois state and its participating public and the novel hinges on its presentation of what could happen should a terrorist become invisible. One element of the story that shifts it away from the realm of "hard" science fiction and places it more closely in line with the literary tradition of the political fable is the fact that the exact process by which the Invisible Man creates his scientific formula is never clearly explained and, as he admits to his fellow scientist and eventual nemesis, Dr. Kemp "this was not a method, it was an idea". Explaining his research in the field of "'Optical density'" the Invisible Man describes how "'a general principle of pigments and

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[17] Bakunin, Mikhail, Letter to Sergei Nečaev, June 2nd, 1870, *Selected Writings*, p.192.

[18] See Short, K.R.M., *The Dynamite War: Irish American Bombers in Victorian Britain* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1979), p.38.

[19] Bakunin, Letter to Albert Richard, April 1st, 1870 (Translated from the French by Stephen Cox), Ibid, pp.180-181.

[20] Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish* (Translated from the French, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* [Éditions Gallimard, 1975] by Alan Sheridan), p.187.

refraction, a formula, a geometrical expression involving four dimensions'" led him to discover the key to invisibility. An experiment "to lower the refractive index of a substance, solid or liquid, to that of air" was the goal of his research and, he proposes, with the correct formula, human tissue might be rendered as invisible as "white powdered glass... put into water". This experimental process leads the Invisible Man to the vague conclusion that the human body is, at bottom, "made up of transparent, colourless tissue. So little suffices to make us visible to one another." (pp. 81-83) His invisibility is, in effect, a political rather than a scientific or biological condition, not a hard scientific fact but rather something that belongs in the realm of ideas, or, to be more precise, in the area of political and intellectual speculation. This led Wells to develop the Invisible Man as an anarchist and as one of the most politically speculative and subversive characters of late Victorian popular fiction. Considered against the process of bourgeois embodiment, the Invisible Man can be read as one who has failed to realise his attempt to become one of Oscar Wilde's "real men... in whom all Humanity gains a partial realisation." Those who have lived up to this standard, according to Wilde, "have been able to realise their personality, more or less completely." [21] But when The Invisible Man fails to live up to this realisation, the frustrated scientist turns to an individualised and extreme form of political crime in order to have a stake in the system. Griffin's "magnificent vision of all that invisibility might mean to a man – the mystery, the power, the freedom" (p.84) is a revolutionary political proposal and, as we shall see, his methods for achieving this power and freedom are those of the terrorist.

Offering a theory that complements Habermas' explanation of the visual nature of the political sphere, Michel Foucault has explained how "the body itself is invested by power relations." Pointing to "the political technology of the body", Foucault's model of a bodily discourse, the "mechanisms and effects" of which are put to use by the state and its institutions, illustrates how the visible body is implicated in the dominant political structures that surround it:

> What the apparatuses and institutions operate is, in a sense, a micro-physics of power, whose field of validity is situated in a sense between these great functionings and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces.[22]

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[21] Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism", *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, pp. 1175, 1177.
[22] Foucault, ibid, p. 26.

Foucault's model of a bodily-focussed state power asserts that this "power produces knowledge", and that "power and knowledge imply one another". The Invisible Man, however, resists this implication of the body into the "micro-physics" and workings of the state and undermines official power as the "field of knowledge" that Foucault has explained it as amounting to. For Foucault the dynamic of power-as-knowledge is inherent within the panoptical system that underpins disciplinary society: the penitentiary panopticon, which makes inmates visible to power, has become an emblem of modern society, which is characterised by hierarchy, surveillance and observation. The panoptical system, according to Foucault ensures the functioning of power and constitutes "a genealogy of the modern soul". But the Invisible Man's struggle against this political and cultural system reveals the anarchic flip-side to the modern consciousness. His transparency is presented as a counter-measure to the structures of the late-Victorian state and its "whole technology of representation" but, unlike Le Bon, who railed at the thought of the next French revolution that appeared to him to be just around the corner, Wells ultimately contains the invisible and the anarchic, restores the "individualizing"[23] gaze of the state and reinforces the conservative structures of the late-Victorian surveillant society as the Invisible Man's revolt is gradually contained.

More "rational" but nonetheless revolutionary ideologies such as Irish nationalism were readable within the context of the overarching Victorian political system, wherein their separatism could be understood as offering an alternative sovereignty to that which already existed.[24] However the anarchists' political aims were less clearly defined. During the decade when forensic scientists like Francis Galton, the pioneer of finger-printing, were attempting to isolate criminal suspects from the masses and thereby identify them, Wells' thought up his fantasy about an invisible, untraceable and featureless anarchist and the novel reflects how Griffin's brand of terrorism tries but fails to evade the overarching system of legal semiotics. These rules, developed over the previous hundred-or-so years in a process whereby "the codification of the offences-punishments system and the modulation of the criminal-punishment dyad go side by

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[23] Ibid, pp. 26-27, 29, 104, 127.

[24] The interpretation of Irish republicanism as an essentially conservative ideology was recently articulated when one of its most famous leaders, Pádraig Pearse, was described by Declan Kiberd as being both "A rebel and a Victorian". See Delaney, Eamon, "A Different Profile of Pádraig Pearse", *Weekend, The Irish Times*, Saturday 7th April, 2001:
http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/weekend/2001/0407/archive.01040700212.html
Also, see Kiberd, Declan, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Vintage, 1996), "Revolution and War", especially pp.191-195.

side, each requiring the other"[25] eventually overwhelm the Invisible Man but not before he manages to commit murder and cause political havoc. In the absence of the kind of legal and political modulation described by Foucault those who committed propaganda-by-deed and then gave defiant speeches from the dock were assigned simple criminal status and written off as "wretches bent on murder and devastation".[26] However such containment-by-description failed to assimilate anarchists into the "anatomy of detail" that was provided by the disciplining state. Therefore, until the very end of the novel, Wells' anarchist is resistant to the power relation underlining the exercise of punishment, whereby "the crime as a fact (is) to be established according to common norms, but the criminal as an individual (is) to be known according to specific criteria."[27] By defying the political panopticon acts of anarchist terrorism became the great unreadable crimes of the late nineteenth century and offer an explanation as to why the political figure of the anarchist is represented in Wells' popular novel as an invisible man.

For the average French *citoyen* or British subject, "It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection"[28] and late nineteenth-century observers certainly felt vulnerable to the threat posed by anarchists who tried to ignore the law and its power. By resisting the police they also, by extension, resisted the "capillary functioning" [29] of state power that was quietly obeyed by the rest of the population, for whom. This resistance to civil norms reached a peak in France from 1892-1894 when, as we have seen, the Republic was terrorised by such proponents of "propaganda by deed" as Ravachol, Auguste Vaillant and Émile Henry. In 1894, the year in which the French President, Sadi Carnot, was assassinated by an anarchist, Félix Dubois warned that the "agitation is hydra-headed" and that "(e)ffective observation of the party is in consequence almost impossible." Indeed, some of the most dramatic assassinations and outrages that occurred across Europe during the 1890s, such as that of Carnot, were carried out by individuals who operated alone. Conscious of their unpredictable nature, Dubois estimated that France contained not only a "regular army" of around ten thousand openly professed anarchists but also a hardcore of "fanatics in whom the spirit of individualism is developed to such a pitch that they abstain on principle from any

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[25] Foucault, ibid., p.99.
[26] "The Conviction of Vaillant", *The Times*, January 12th, 1894, p.5.
[27] Foucault, Ibid., pp.139, 101-102.
[28] Ibid, p.187.
[29] Ibid, p.198.

communication with their comrades". Dubois warned that the wider anarchist movement could contain up to another twenty thousand such renegade individuals as "it cannot be denied that in the last four years the doctrine has made comparatively rapid progress." This army was most at home in the cities of France, where vast numbers of lonely and isolated workers, whose employment as tailors and shoemakers tended to alienate them from society even further, provided ample recruits for this new army. The cities were the source from which anarchism spread its contagion by promulgating "the conception of untrammelled personal liberty".[30] In its own way anarchism proposed a logical, if politically radical, extension of the liberal state.

"The Stolen Bacillus"

Wells' first fictional examination of anarchism appears in his short story "The Stolen Bacillus",[31] published in the *Pall Mall Budget* in June, 1894. As with *The Invisible Man*, this piece features the crossover between science and anarchy, when one of the "extreme individualists" about whom Félix Dubois complained in his book *The Anarchist Peril* (also published in 1894), makes his way into the laboratory of a bacteriologist. Wells blends the fantasy of science fiction with contemporary political troubles, speculating about the possibility that an anarchist outrage might be committed by means of the invisible bacillus. This fiction associates bacteriological invisibility with terrorism, the scientist showing dead cholera cultures to a stranger who has been recommended to him by a friend. Unknown to the scientist, his guest is, of course, an anarchist:

> 'Touch this screw,' said the Bacteriologist; 'perhaps the microscope is out of focus for you. Eyes vary much. Just the fraction of a turn this way or that.'
>
> 'Ah! now I see, said the visitor. 'Not so very much to see after all. Little streaks and shreds of pink. And yet those little particles, those mere atomies, might multiply and devastate a city! Wonderful!' (p.3)

The anarchist asks the bacteriologist if his lab might contain any "'in the living – in the active state?'" and he is shown "'the living thing... Bottled cholera, so to speak.'" Fascinated with the deadly sample, the visitor tells the scientist "'It's a deadly thing to

[30] Dubois, *The Anarchist Peril*, pp.50, 53-54, 59.
[31] Subsequent quotations are from Wells, H.G., "The Stolen Bacillus" and "The Diamond-Maker", *The Complete Short Stories of H.G Wells* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000).

have in your possession,'" (p.3) and the Bacteriologist, who "had been told rhetoric was his weakness", tells his guest how deadly it might prove in a built-up urban environment:

> 'Yes, here is the pestilence imprisoned. Only break such a little tube as this into a supply of drinking-water, say to those minute particles of life that one must needs stain and examine with the highest powers of the microscope even to see, and that one can neither smell nor taste – say to them, "Go forth, increase and multiply and replenish the cisterns," and death – mysterious, untraceable death, death swift and terrible, death full of pain and indignity, - would be released upon this city, and go hither and thither seeking his victims Here he would take the husband from the wife, here the child from its mother, here the statesman from his duty, and here the toiler from his trouble. He would follow the water-mains, creeping into the wells of the mineral-water makers, getting washed into salad, and lying dormant in ices. He would wait ready to be drunk in the horse-troughs, and by unwary children in the public fountains. He would soak into the soil, to reappear in springs and wells at a thousand unexpected places. Once start him at the water supply, and before we would ring him in, and catch him again, he would have decimated the metropolis. ' (p.4)

Invisible to the human eye, the microscopic and "untraceable" cholera germ appears as if it might become the perfect weapon in the revolutionary's arsenal. Not only will the mass deaths be "mysterious" but the victims of the bacillus will be subjected to an undignified and painful death. With its excruciatingly painful symptoms, including explosive diarrhoea, the cholera epidemic promises to provide the anarchist with a particularly spectacular outrage (perhaps this story of an explosion of cholera could be read as the first literary example of a "dirty" bomb). Hoping to leave London irradiated with a cholera plague, the original Wellsian terrorist views himself as being ahead of his own colleagues in the competition to commit the most outrageous atrocity possible: "'These Anarchist – rascals,' said he, 'are fools, blind fools – to use bombs when this kind of thing is attainable.'" (p.4)

When the meeting is interrupted by the Bacteriologist's wife the scientist leaves the visitor alone in the lab but when he returns the "morbid" man leaves for another appointment. All of a sudden the scientist realises that the visitor has taken a test-tube

sample and panicked, he runs into the street after him, hails a cab and commences a quick pursuit:

> The man in the foremost cab sat crouched in the corner, his arms tightly folded, and the little tube that contained such vast possibilities of destruction gripped in his hand. His mood was a singular mixture of fear and exultation. Chiefly he was afraid of being caught before he could accomplish his purpose, but behind this was a vaguer but larger fear of the awfulness of his crime. But his exaltation far exceeded his fear. No Anarchist before him had ever approached this conception of his. Ravachol, Vaillant, all those distinguished persons whose fame he had envied dwindled into insignificance beside him. He had only to make sure of the water supply, and break the little tube into a reservoir. How brilliantly he had planned it, forged the letter of introduction and got into the laboratory, and how brilliantly he had seized his opportunity! The world should hear of him at last. (p.6)

Determined to wreck his vengeance upon anyone "who had sneered at him, neglected him, preferred other people to him, found his company undesirable", the anarchist drops and breaks the test-tube during the chase and, drinking down what remains of the sample, resigns himself to becoming the first victim of his own atrocity. Realising that he has no more need to escape the Bacteriologist, he stops the cab and gets out:

> He slipped on the step, and his head felt queer. It was rapid stuff, this cholera poison. He waved his cabman out of existence, so to speak, and stood on the pavement with his arms folded upon his breast awaiting the arrival of the Bacteriologist. There was something tragic in his pose. The sense of imminent death gave him a certain dignity. He greeted his pursuer with a defiant laugh.
>
> 'Vive l'Anarchie! You are too late, my friend. I have drunk it. The cholera is abroad!' (p.7)

The diseased anarchist walks off, "jostling his infected body against as many people as possible." Amused, the Bacteriologist gets back into the cab with and explains what has happened to his wife who has just caught up with him: not knowing that his guest was an anarchist he wanted to "'astonish him'" and showed the man a sample of "'that new species of Bacterium I was telling you of, that infest, and I think cause, the blue patches

upon various monkeys; and like a fool, I said it was Asiatic cholera.'" Had he actually deposited the bacteria in the water supply, "'he certainly might have made things look blue for this civilised city'" but now that he has ingested the lot he should turn blue, as have a kitten and several puppies that the Bacteriologist had been experimenting on. (pp7-8)

In his first parody of anarchism, Wells send up the notion of his cartoon terrorist becoming distinctly visible in London. Such parodies of libertarian radicalism were common during the 1890s and were a regular feature of popular journals and magazines (the *Strand* magazine in particular made regular jokes about anarchists). With puzzles such as "Find the Anarchist" and cartoons featuring hoax dynamite scares, the *Strand* represented subversion in a reassuring tone similar to Wells' in "The Stolen Bacillus". In writing the short story Wells pandered to this popular perception of anarchists as fools and buffoons, but in *The Invisible Man* the threat of political violence is presented as a much more ominous affair.

The Invisible Man

In pointing to the scientific "impossibility" of his fictions H.G. Wells claimed that the important feat for a writer of fantasy is "to *domesticate* the impossible hypothesis". Instead of making the impossible appear rational by appealing to magic, Wells pointed to the need for realism: "I simply brought the fetish stuff up to date, and made it as near actual theory as possible." His writing was involved in the political concerns of modern society: ""I have never been able to get away from life in the mass and life in general as distinguished from life in individual experience, in any book I have ever written. I differ from contemporary criticism in finding them inseparable."[32] His 1897 fantasy, *The Invisible Man*, is rooted in the political and cultural concerns of modern capitalist society, specifically its response to the threat of terrorism. In its discussion of invisibility, *The Invisible Man* explores contemporary political concerns with unpredictable subversive political violence; the contemporary revolutionaries who featured regularly in the newspapers appear as Griffin, the deranged and frustrated scientist. *The Invisible Man* therefore shares thematic concerns with other terrorist fictions such as Fanny De Grift

[32] Wells, H.G., "Authorial Preface to *The Scientific Romances of H.G. Wells*" (London:Gollancz, 1933, pp.vii-x, reprinted in Wells, H.G., *The Invisible Man* (London: Dent, 1995, pp.139-143), pp. 140-141.

and Robert Louis Stevenson's 1885 novel *The Dynamiter.* Wells' novel fits within the paradigm of these earlier fictions but he updated the terrorist, offering a more sophisticated version than that of the Stevensons' stereotypically insane but comic dynamite fiend, Zero. Griffin is clearly another figure from this political imaginary: a mad scientist who, upon his arrival in the countryside from London, is quickly associated with continental anarchism, is mistaken for a terrorist, and eventually challenges the authority of the British state itself. Wells posits invisibility as a particularly modern, paradoxical state, made possible by the very pressures and imperatives of the conjoined processes of bureaucratisation and urbanisation that fractured individual identity. Clearly, the modernist fascination with the limits of the body[33], usually associated with the literary products of the later, more purely aesthetic literary movement can be seen emerging in this earlier, popular text.

According to Walter Benjamin, "(t)he harder a man is to find, the more suspicious he becomes."[34] While Benjamin posits the familiar notion that surveillance is a key feature of the modern state, Wells places invisibility at the heart of the imagination of urban chaos. The revolt and bloody suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871 underlined this fact to the city's municipal authorities and a systematic process of ordering and mapping was begun in order to prevent another revolutionary revolt that might use the anonymity of the city's unplanned network of streets to its advantage. Following Haussmann's restructuring of Paris during the 1850s and 1860s, when the boulevards were put in place to make insurrection and the building of barricades more difficult, the city was brought under centralised control through such basic methods as house-numbering. These methods of surveillance were intended to increase administrative power by making the city more recognisable to municipal agents, thus making it easier for them to trace individuals while making it more difficult for those who wished to avoid the police to conceal their identity. The Parisian project was an example of the expansion of centralised metropolitan political power and of the "internal social control function that cities could display".[35] It became the set piece for the new principles of an emerging political consciousness - that of the centralised and surveillant urban administration. By the 1890s the Parisian model had become the foil to the chaos

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[33] Armstrong, Tim, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1998), p.4.

[34] Benjamin, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Verso (London: 1997), p.48.

[35] Lyon, David, *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society*, Polity Press (Cambridge:1994), p.32.

of London in the British popular imagination. Yet, the British capital had undergone its own transformation during the early decades of the Victorian period. As Joseph McLaughlin has pointed out, between 1836 and 1856 large areas of East End were redesigned and commercialised: New Oxford Street was cut through St. Giles, Commercial Street through Whitechapel, and Farringdon Street, New Cannon Street and New Victoria Street arose out of the poorest and most densely populated parts of London. Because of these renovations, urban space in both cities was a highly politicised issue during the nineteenth century: as Hausmannisation and the London clearances showed, urban planning was a form of ideology in itself that created a mass consumer public but which also led to resistance to its imposition of an "alienating modernity."[36] As we have seen in the previous chapter, anarchists were the political figures who resisted the new urban and political situation; after realising his own alienation from society, the Invisible Man goes on an anarchic spree, beginning with an act of arson and continuing with his causing chaos on the commercial thoroughfare of Oxford Street. While Wells presents London as the locus of chaos, the English countryside also features prominently in *The Invisible Man* as a singularly "uncontinental" place, the space wherein anarchy might be contained and "the visionary violence of Continental Socialism" that was rapidly "Continentalising the native Englishman" defeated.[37] As Wells' example shows, while the British metropolis could be a more complicated place than it at first seems, England itself is capable of resisting the spread of dangerous foreign influences.

Yet, despite the novel's obvious political themes, we do not often think of *The Invisible Man* as a political novel. This is in part because popular cinematic representations of Wells' novel have avoided its explicitly political content altogether, bending instead to Hollywood's logic of privatised (and therefore apolitical) terrorism. Although James Whale's 1933 film, *The Invisible Man*, is close to Wells' original, rather than emphasising the novel's political context this popular movie portrays Griffin as a lunatic. In this version, the mad scientist who achieves invisibility, played by Claude Rains, does not enact the widespread terror of Wells' original Griffin and acts instead as a maniac whose random acts of terror, such as murder and train wrecking, are the result of an unbalanced mind. As one reviewer complained of the film, "the terror is robbed of

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[36] McLaughlin, Joseph, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London From Doyle to Eliot* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p.85; Marcus, Sharon, *Apartment Stories*, p.139.

[37] Jeyes, S.H., "Foreign Pauper Immigration", *The Fortnightly Review*, London, July, 1891, pp.22-23.

its full effect" and, failing to adequately translate Wells' Invisible Man onto the big screen as "the terror of the country", Whale's version failed "to give any convincing impression of the way in which the life of the country would react to the menace of a man clad in the armour of invisibility and insane with the knowledge of his own powers." For failing to stress the terror-effect of the original novel, Whale was criticised for his "disappointing production" and "the failure of the film to capture the spirit and force of Mr. Wells's original conception."[38] Likewise, Paul Verhoeven's recent *Hollow Man* (2000), updates the invisibility fantasy to accommodate modern cultural expectations (and fantasies) by projecting the mad scientist's condition as a violently sexual one, and Wells' terrorist is privatised even further, this time as a sex attacker. In this version, a scientist, Sebastian Cane (Kevin Bacon) develops a taste for voyeurism and committing sex crimes after he becomes invisible. After murdering his research director, Dr. Howard Kramer (played by William Devane), when he threatens to cut the project's budget, Caine rapes a neighbour living in a nearby apartment building and from this point the film's action and plot are largely contained by its laboratory-bound setting. Although Wells' Invisible Man is also quite mad, the original narrative is, at bottom, an exploration of what might happen if the urban terrorist should leave London for the English countryside. The subsequent rural anarchy is the result of a figure of modern, urban and subversive figure imposing himself on the world of the small town and the squire; Wells' fantasy expresses anxieties about what might happen if "authentic" England were infiltrated by the political culture of the metropolis. Griffin, then, is a fugitive from "the pace of the big city"[39] whose body cannot be detected by the amateur rural detectives who pursue him.

The novel opens with the uneasy relationship between Griffin and his landlady, Mrs Hall, and his "explosive" stay is marked by a number of "skirmishes" with her over his unusual behaviour and appearance. (p.18) An "inscrutable" lodger, who covers his face with bandages and dark spectacles (p.5), Griffin attracts the curiosity of locals such as Teddy Henfrey, who suggests he is a fugitive and leads the locals to read his self-concealment as politically subversive behaviour:

> Out of her hearing there was a view largely entertained that he was a criminal trying to escape from justice by wrapping himself up so as to conceal himself altogether from the eye of the police. This idea sprang from the brain of Mr

[38] ""The Invisible Man": A Film Of Mr. H.G. Wells's Story", *The Times*, January 25th, 1934, p.8.
[39] Ibid., pp.40-41.

> Teddy Henfrey. No crime of any magnitude dating from the middle or end of February was known to have occurred. Elaborated in the imagination of Mr Gould, the probationary assistant in the National School, this theory took the form that the stranger was *an Anarchist in disguise, preparing explosives*, and he resolved to undertake such detective operations as his time permitted. These consisted for the most part in looking very hard at the stranger whenever they met, or in asking people who had never seen the stranger, leading questions about him. But he detected nothing. (p.19)

Hall, the landlord, connects Griffin's odd behaviour with Henfrey's suggestion and when his wife confronts the lodger he answers her by revealing his invisibility:

> It was worse than anything. Mrs Hall, standing open-mouthed and horror-struck, shrieked at what she saw, and made for the door of the house. Every one began to move. They were prepared for scars, disfigurements, tangible horrors, but *nothing*! The bandages and false hair flew across the passage into the bar, making a hobbledehoy jump to avoid them. Every one tumbled on every one else down the steps. For the man who stood there shouting some incoherent explanation, was a solid gesticulating figure up to the coat-collar of him, and then – nothingness, no visible thing at all. (p.32)

Once he is at large the Invisible Man's presence becomes aural as "the voice" of the stranger is the only thing that indicates his whereabouts. (p.39) He quickly comes across a tramp, Thomas Marvel, to whom he complains of England: "'It's a beast of a country... And pigs for people.'" Griffin forces the tramp to work for him but explains that their shared social status will help his campaign: "'"Here," I said, is an out-cast like myself. This is the man for me." So I turned back and came to you'". He promises the tramp that that working for him will be worthwhile because "'An invisible man is a man of power.'" However his real intention is that marvel should serve as his slave, his "money box" and "luggage carrier". (pp.43, 113) By making Marvel his slave the Invisible Man steps up the social ladder, transforming himself from an outlawed anarchist and coming closer to the economic level of a rising bourgeois. With his acquisition of a human "money box", Marvel's enslavement and the Invisible Man's mastery over him is not just a power relationship but also an economic one. Like the real life anarchists of the 1890s, the Invisible Man's aspirations for political independence mirror the economic ambitions of the middle classes when, after he puts Marvel to work, "(t)he story of the

flying money" begins to circulate around the countryside, as small businesses and even banks start haemorrhaging cash:

> The story of the flying money was true. And all about that neighbourhood, even from the august London and Country Banking Company, from the tills and shops and inns – doors standing that sunny weather entirely open – money had been quietly and dexterously making off that day in handfuls and rouleaux, floating quietly along by walls and shady places, dodging quickly from the approaching eyes of men. And it had, though no man traced it, invariably ended its mysterious flight in the pocket of that agitated gentleman in the obsolete silk hat... (p.62)

Despite his invisibility Griffin is dependent on the cash nexus and is forced to loot not objects but money. Pointing to the importance of capital within the spectacle, Debord hints at the reason for Griffin's inability to escape from the liberal economic network:

> With the achievement of a purely economic abundance, the concentrated result of social labor becomes visible, subjecting all reality to an appearance that is in effect that labor's product. Capital is no longer the invisible center determining the mode of production. As it accumulates, capital spreads out to the periphery, where it assumes the form of tangible objects. Society in its length and breadth becomes capital's faithful portrait.[40]

Griffin's invisibility and his anarchistic rage are both reactions against this process since, as Guy Debord argues, capital is a deliberately and overwhelmingly visible process. The Invisible Man is always linked to its performance and functioning and his theft of money from banks, shop tills and the vicarage indicates that he is far more deeply enmeshed in the system than he would like to believe. As Debord explains, the spectacle, at bottom, is capital-as-image: "The spectacle is another facet of money, which is the abstract general equivalent of all commodities". Griffin's attempt to stand outside the late nineteenth-century liberal system is an uphill struggle, even when he enjoys the apparent advantage of invisibility and he is entangled in it, since money "has dominated society as the representation of universal equivalence". As the levelling agent in a diversified market economy, allowing for the exchange of goods that are otherwise

[40] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, p.33.

incompatible, the flow of cash is not just another "image-object" flowing in the stream of the spectacle. Instead, "the spectacle in its full development is money's modern aspect".[41] By burning his lodgings in London and then wrecking the parlour at the Coaches Inn, Griffin has only freed himself from the agents of the system, the landlords who act as capital's middlemen. His involvement in the flow of money necessitates that Griffin be involved in the exploitation of labour, forcing him to use Marvel not only to act as a human "money box" but also to carry out the kind of work that he himself cannot do, even if he is invisible. In some respects, the Invisible Man is not so much *anti-bourgeois* as *alternative bourgeois*. As the American anarchist, Benjamin R. Tucker, argued, when he called for "competition everywhere and always", the distinction between anarchy and competitive capitalism were not as clearly delineated as they appeared: for Tucker, "the Anarchistic scheme" refused to "furnish any code of morals to be imposed upon the individual" because "'Mind your own business' is its only moral law. Interference with another's business is a crime, and the only crime, and as such may properly be resisted." For Tucker, even "vice" is a legitimate form of private "business",[42] and his ideology is mirrored in Griffin's thievery. The "floating" coins and notes appear as a kind of counter-capital but, as we shall see below, the flow of mainstream capital is irresistible to the anarchist, and its enlistment of labour in its service proves to be the downfall of the Invisible Man.

Terrified by his new boss, Marvel promises to obey and the tramp's first mission is to infiltrate Iping and the Coach and Horses inn. He steals Griffin's diary from the inn, where Cuss and the vicar, Mr Bunting, have been examining it. Comprising of three volumes, the diary is filled with polyglot notes, including entries in "Russian or some such language", as well as mathematical computations, writing in Greek and cipher. As they scan the diary for clues Bunting refuses to believe "this absurd invisibility story". (pp.45, 47, 48) But just as they are about to begin deciphering the notes the invisible man grabs them, warning the pair, "'*Don't move, little men… or I'll brain you both!*'" He then punishes them for reading the books:

> 'I'm sorry to handle you roughly,' said the Voice, 'but it's unavoidable.'

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[41] Ibid, p.16, pp.32-33.
[42] Tucker, Benjamin R., *State Socialism and Anarchism: How Far They Agree & Wherein They Differ*, pp.23-24.

> 'Since when did you learn to pry into an investigator's private memoranda?' said the Voice; and two chins struck the table simultaneously, and two sets of teeth rattled.
>
> 'Since when did you learn to invade the private rooms of a man in misfortune?' and the concussion was repeated. (p.49)

The Invisible Man's secret text mirrors that of the Russian Nihilists in Sergei Stepniak's 1889 novel, *The Career of a Nihilist*. A "witness and participator" in the Russian nihilist movement, Stepniak's intention was that his novel would reveal terrorism "in the full light of fiction".[43] Telling the story of a doomed young Russian revolutionary, Andrey Kjukhov, the novel opens in Geneva, where he receives clandestine mails from his comrades at home in "the distant capital of the Tzars".[44] An expert in producing "revolutionary literature"[45], Kjukhov, who "throroughly approved of the new acts of revolutionary terrorism", is also a lodger in a cramped, "coffin-like" [46] room "littered with books and papers"[47] where he carries out his literary propaganda. Andrey is given a rather plain letter by his comrade, Helen (also "Lena"), but he ignores its mundane news of home and instead treats it with a chemical substance:

> Lena handed to him the glass brush, whilst Andrey carefully smoothed out the letter. Then dipping the brush into the bottle he passed it several times over the page before him. The black lines written with common ink, rapidly disappeared, as if melting in the corrosive liquid. For an instant the paper remained a blank. Then suddenly it was all movement and life. From its inmost depths, as if thrust up from below, came forth, hurrying and crowding one upon another, words, letters, phrases – here, there, everywhere! It was a disorderly rout... In place of the former mock letters, serried lines of close-straight handwriting stood ready to unfold the message they had faithfully carried to the pair who now leaned over the table with flushed faces and glistening eager eyes.[48]

Part of the message written in invisible ink is in code:

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[43] Stepniak, Sergius, *The Career of a Nihilist* (London: Walter Scott, 1901), Preface to the Second Edition, ix.
[44] Ibid, p.8.
[45] Ibid, p.13.
[46] Ibid, p.15.
[47] Ibid, p.4.
[48] Ibid, p.5.

> She took the phial and the brush, and rapidly moistened the remaining pages. In a few instants they underwent the same transformation. But they had a somewhat different appearance. The ordinary running hand was interrupted here and there by long passages in cipher, which evidently contained news of particular importance. The cipher was a protection if the police should conceive some special suspicion, and not satisfied with reading the letter should try chemicals to see if there were hidden contents.[49]

The code appears on the page as a series of binaries, "joined in a regular forest, as in tables of logarithms, without the slightest interruption of punctuation." The sender of the letter uses "the double cipher of the League", so that:

> the original figures in the letter had to be changed by means of a key into another set of figures, and these again by the aid of a second key were finally resolved into words. This afforded an endless variety of signs for each letter of the alphabet, and made the cipher absolutely proof against discovery, even by the ablest experts of the police. But if the writing was defective it sometimes remained a mystery even to those for whom it was intended.[50]

Even when it is rendered readable Andrey's invisible text must be deciphered as it is double-locked in a complicated code that makes it impenetrable to the police. Only the Nihilists can decipher its secrets and their code distinguishes them from the rest of the reading public, presenting Andrey with a literary paradox: charged with making the revolutionaries' message known to the wider public, he is a professional propagandist but the League's private communications are protected from public by this code. Although Stepniak hoped that his novel would reveal to its readers "the inmost heart and soul of these humanitarian enthusiasts"[51] the inner workings of his fictional organisation are hidden behind a textual barrier of impenetrable code. Stepniak's Russian revolutionaries write with invisible ink in cipher which must then be translated into Russian; meanwhile, Wells' invisible terrorist keeps his notes in an indecipherable mixture of Russian, cipher and Greek. Both novels use these "code-scenes" in a very self-reflexive manner in order to raise the issue of modernist "difficulty", or the illegibility

[49] Ibid, pp.6-7.
[50] Ibid, p.7.
[51] Ibid, Preface, ix.

of texts, which is placed against the "transparency" of popular literature (one of Stepniak's Geneva scenes was later absorbed by Joseph Conrad into his 1911 novel, *Under Western Eyes*). Cipher provides the Invisible Man and the little cell of nihilists with a secret *literary* code with which they can avoid unwelcome scrutiny and although subversive ideology is the real meaning that lies behind the secret text, the fact that Griffin's notebooks require decoding indicates that, at this point, *The Invisible Man* is making a statement about modernism: as with the exploding library books in *Captain Shannon*, this popular novel is also concerned with the changing state of the literary market.

The nihilists are just as unknowable as the Invisible Man who, having no visible form, is equally as unreadable as Andrey's secret code, and is as politically suspicious. With its convoluted meaning the secret code can even prove as impossible to translate for the nihilists as it does for the police, so that Stepniak's use of invisible ink underscores the unstable nature of the terrorist's identity. In this fashion both he and Wells emphasise the difficulty in ascribing political meaning to an ideology that defies the dominant bourgeois culture in Britain, and that of the Tsarist autocracy in Russia. For the Invisible Man and his Russian equivalents among "the League", the seemingly impenetrable language of subversion renders interpretation impossible, undermining the British and Tsarist cultures of conspicuous display and consumption against which anarchists and nihilists struggled. If read by the uninitiated, the Invisible Man's entries containing the secrets of invisibility threaten to expose not only his scientific condition but also, like Stepniak's nihilists, his political one. When Marvel finally escapes from him and hides the diaries, he laments: "'In the books – the books that the Tramp has hidden – there are marvels, miracles!'" (p.81) While the popular nihilistic concerns of late Victorian society are spectacularly addressed in Wells other fictions, *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898), the political and literary practices of the nihilists appear *in cameo* in *The Invisible Man*.

It is not long before the Invisible Man's presence is reported in the press and news of his violent subversion spreads quickly to the neighbouring villages and towns. The next morning, in nearby Port Stowe, a shattered Marvel is shown a newspaper report by an elderly mariner:

> 'It makes me regular uncomfortable, the bare thought of that chap running about the country! He is at present At Large, and from certain evidence it is supposed

> that he has - taken – *took*, I suppose they mean – the road to Port Stowe. You see we're right *in* it! None of your American wonders, this time. And just think of the things he might do! Where'd you be, if he took a drop over and above, and had a fancy to go for you? Suppose he wants to rob – who can prevent him? He can trespass, he can burgle, he could walk through a cordon of policemen as easy as me or you could give the slip to a blind man! Easier!' (p.60)

Marvel is about to reveal that he has been enslaved when he is suddenly forced to leave the mariner. Realising that he will be punished for trying to get help, the tramp changes tack and tells the old man that the story is a newspaper "hoax", to which claim he responds, incredulously "'But it's in the paper... But how 'bout this paper?'" (p.61) And now that his "story" is in the public realm the Invisible Man's struggle leads to an inevitable showdown with the area's authorities.

Doctor Kemp, a scientist living just outside the town of Burdock, is one of the local agents of this authority. A rational, scientific man, he is initially sceptical about the press reports and rumours of an invisible man, leading him to complain that "'(o)ne might think we were in the thirteenth century.'" (p.63) Then a panic occurs in the town as the inhabitants see Marvel being pursued by something unseen "and perceived the abject terror on his perspiring face":

> People screamed. People sprang off the pavement. It passed in shouts, it passed by instinct down the hill. They were shouting in the street before Marvel was halfway there. They were bolting into houses and slamming the doors behind them, with the news. He heard it and made one last desperate spurt. Fear came striding by, rushed ahead of him, and in a moment had seized the town.
>
> 'The Invisible Man is coming! *The Invisible Man!*' (p.64)

As Kemp is about to discover, Burdock is under threat from a very modern kind of terror rather than an outdated, medieval one. Transmitted by the press, news of the Invisible Man's campaign of terror has created a panic that has taken hold in the town. With its tram-lines and construction works the town is a more urbanised setting than the backwater of Iping and the Invisible Man's campaign gains momentum as he draws nearer to the town: when he catches up with Marvel in a pub he ends up taking on a policeman and is shot by a customer. Wounded, he visits Kemp, threatens to kill him if

he behaves "like a frantic rustic" and introduces himself as Griffin, an old acquaintance of Kemp's from University College in London. (pp.71-72)

When Griffin finally falls asleep, Kemp picks up the morning paper to read the "Strange Story from Iping". The *St James' Gazettte* carries the more sceptical headline, "An Entire Village Goes Mad", which describes how Griffin "'Ran through the streets striking right and left'" providing the paper with an improbable story that is "'Too good not to print – *cum grano!*'" Kemp realises that "'He's not only invisible... he's mad! Homicidal!'" The following morning's paper reports the incident at the Jolly Cricketers and the cutting of the village telegraph wire in Iping. Now that he is stuck with an invisible man who is as "free as the air", Kemp listens uncomfortably as his guest wakes up and proceeds to smash up the furniture in his bedroom. He confronts Griffin with the fact that he has made the headlines: "'All the facts are out about you... all that happened in Iping, and down the hill. The world has become aware of its invisible citizen." (pp.78-80) As we have already seen with the dynamite novels of the 1880s, late Victorian popular fiction is often very reflective, given to ironising the popular media and the paranoia that was often expressed by the "new journalism". The moment of Kemp's realisation that he is giving shelter to a subversive indicates the breakdown of the barrier between popular text and the modern subject, as the news of the terror has, quite literally, come home to roost for him. Here, Wells' popular novel also breaks down the kind of barrier that literary modernists (and the Invisible Man with his cipher) try to maintain between reader and the text.

Griffin explains to Kemp how he discovered his invisibility formula when, after years of poverty and existing on "cramped means", he finally stole money from his father, driving the disgraced man to suicide. With the stolen money, Griffin rents a room in a slum near Great Portland Street and begins the final round of his research. He recalls that he took a break from his work to attend his father's funeral:

> 'I remember walking back to the empty home, through the place that had once been a village and was now patched and tinkered by the jerry builders into the ugly likeness of a town. Every way the roads ran out at last into the desecrated fields and ended in rubble heaps and rank wet weeds. I remember myself as a gaunt black figure, going along the slippery, shiny pavement, and the strange sense of detachment I felt from the squalid respectability, the sordid commercialism of the place.' (p.84)

Already alienated from society by the impoverishment imposed by his commitment to scientific research, Griffin is further embittered by the small-scale, "squalid" capitalism that he sees on his return to the countryside. Even a chance encounter with an old flame while walking along the High Street fails to draw Griffin away from his disgust: "'She was a very ordinary person.'" Realising that in visiting his small-town past he has "'come out from the world into a desolate place'" dominated by '"the inanity of things'", Griffin returns to his metropolitan abode, to "'the things I knew and loved... the apparatus, the experiments arranged and waiting... the planning of details." (p.87) However, his urban idyll does not last for long and the Invisible Man's confrontation with the Halls is echoed in his account of an earlier confrontation with his London landlord. As Griffin recounts what happened in London we learn that his campaign of rural subversion is the sequel to several tableaux of urban anarchy.

Careful not to go into details (these, of course, are recorded in his diary in Russian and in cipher), Griffin explains how he "'processed'" (p.87) a piece of fabric, making it invisible, and then graduates onto experimenting with a cat. It is not long before he begins to imagine "all the fantastic advantages an invisible man would have in the world", but before he has a chance to experiment on himself the self-styled superman (like a politicised version of Friedrich Nietzsche's "overman", Griffin turns to anarchism to achieve a "higher form of being"[52]) is subjected to some rather degrading treatment, as his landlord, a Polish Jew, makes "threats and enquiries". Suspecting that Griffin is a vivisectionist, the landlord snatches a glimpse of his tenant's laboratory:

> What was I doing? Why was I always alone and secretive? Was it legal? Was it dangerous? I paid nothing but the usual rent. His had always been a most respectable house – in a disreputable neighbourhood. Suddenly my temper gave way. I told him to get out. He began to protest, to jabber of his right of entry. In a moment I had him by the collar; something ripped, and he went spinning out into his own passage. I slammed and locked the door and sat down quivering.
>
> 'He made a fuss outside, which I disregarded, and after a time he went away.
>
> 'But this brought matters to a crisis. I did not know what he would do, nor even what he had the power to do. To move to fresh apartments would have

[52] Nietzsche, Friedrich, *The Will To Power*, translated by Walter Kaufman and R.J. Hollingdale (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1967), pp.463-464.

> meant delay; all together I had barely twenty pounds left in the world – for the most part in a bank – and I could not afford that. Vanish! It was irresistible. Then there would be an enquiry, the sacking of my room – (pp.89-90)

Griffin decides to "vanish" after being served with an eviction notice and he decides to destroy the slum when the eviction party arrives: "'A feeling of extraordinary elation took the place of my anger as I sat outside and watched these four people'". Finally fed up with their invasion of his privacy, he carries out the ultimate act of resistance against his landlord:

> 'I slipped up again with a box of matches, fired my heap of paper and rubbish, put the chairs and bedding thereby, led the gas to the affair, by means of an india-rubber tube, and waving farewell to the room left it for the last time.'
>
> 'You fired the house!' exclaimed Kemp.
>
> 'Fired the house. It was the only way to cover my trail - and no doubt it was insured. I slipped the bolts of the front door quietly and went out into the street. I was invisible, and I was only just beginning to realise the extraordinary advantage my invisibility gave me. My head was already teeming with plans of all the wild and wonderful things I had now impunity to do.' (pp.92-93)

This act of arson, with which Griffin comes to realise the potential of his invisibility, connects him very closely with London's immigrant communities. In his xenophobic memoir, *At Scotland Yard*, John Sweeney, whom we met in the previous chapter, complained about the "hordes" of foreigners taking over the East End. He alleged that "about the immigrants there is a great deal that is unattractive," such as their dishonesty, meanness, and poor hygiene. He also claimed that a "tendency to incendiarism is credited to them."[53] But in this story it is the native English tenant of a Polish Jew who carries out the allegedly foreign practice of burning down a lodging house and in doing so leaves himself homeless; Griffin takes his first step into the world as an invisible man after committing this particularly un-English outrage. The Invisible Man is truly alone from this point, and it is tempting to align him with the transient immigrants from whom some of the most extreme anarchists were drawn, and to whom Sweeney referred when he complained that these represented the worst of the immigrant communities – "it is the

[53] Sweeney, John, *At Scotland Yard*, p.312.

unattached who are the undesirables."[54] Although an Englishman, the Invisible Man is drawn from the same urban underclass as the immigrants and political refugees who sought refuge in London.

As with Griffin's eviction from Iping, this scene connects the text to contemporary discussions about terrorism and, in particular, to journalistic discourses about the threat posed to Britain by continental anarchism. The link is provided by a contemporary newspaper report about one French anarchist's vendetta against private property and landlordism. Following the explosion at Greenwich Park on February 16, 1894, in which the French anarchist, Martial Bourdin, was killed, a series of reports about "The Anarchist Conspiracy" in London and on the continent was carried in *The Times*. Two incidents that were reported in the series anticipate Wells' eviction scene. On February 20, a bomb exploded in a lodging house in the Rue St. Jacques in Paris and soon after another was found in a room in the Renaissance Hotel, in the Faubourg St. Martin district. *The Times* reported that both explosions were attempts to kill police officers:

> In both cases the undiscovered culprit had taken the most elaborate precautions to wreak his vengeance on the police. He went to the lodging-house in the Rue St Jacques at 11 o'clock and inquired (*sic*) Mme Calabresi the price of a room. For this he paid 5f. for a week in advance. He gave his name as Rabardi and produced papers to show that he was born at Laval and had a good character. He went immediately up to his room and remained there about half an hour. He then went out, saying to the landlady "I shall not return till the evening." Her husband relates that when he came home his wife was full of talk about the new lodger and expressed suspicions that he might be an Anarchist. When, therefore, the man had not returned even by midnight the husband, tired of sitting up for him, went up to the room. He found it empty and remarked nothing unusual. His wife then went up, and almost immediately noticed that a small shelf had been fixed over the door and that upon it was a tin box such as is used for preserved meat. Their suspicions being aroused, they rushed out for the police.[55]

Two policemen were called and, when they arrived, the landlord, his wife and another lodger accompanied them to the room. The bomb detonated as they went inside and

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[54] Ibid, p.325.

[55] "Latest Intelligence: Another Explosion in Paris", *The Times*, London, Wednesday, February 21, 1894, p.5.

the explosion was immediately registered in the popular imagination as yet another anarchist outrage. The same article also reported that during police raids in Lyon, an anarchist was arrested in possession of a note that contained a line from "The Song of Ravachol": "If you wish to prosper, hang your landlord".[56] With Griffin's rampages against landlordism, including an attack against the property of a Polish Jew, Wells clearly imagines England as becoming more like the cities of Europe due to the continuing urbanization of London, increased immigration and what was perceived by many to be the consequential spread of terrorism. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the flux of immigration brought anarchists like Francis Polti and Fritz Brall to London, and these men, Sweeney believed, were importing a foreign, incendiary literature and ideology into Britain. And as can be seen with the Invisible Man's protests against landlordism, they had also begun to occupy a place in the popular literary imagination. The theme theme of immigration-as-anarchism was explored later in Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent*, and Conrad also relied heavily upon the reports on anarchism that were carried by *The Times* following the Greenwich explosion and used them as source material for his novel. Like the Professor, Conrad's "perfect anarchist"[57], and like the real life anarchist who planted the bomb in the hotel on the Rue St Jacques, the Invisible Man advocates ruthless terrorism. Griffin's verbal declarations and threats echo those of the Parisian anarchist, Émile Henry, who, as we have seen, made an infamous speech from the dock condemning all of the "bourgeois".

Griffin soon finds out that invisibility dos not offer all the advantages that he originally thought it might, especially in the city since the inhabitants of London, being familiar with the experience of urban sensation-effects, are more than able to meet the threat posed by him and he is rendered helpless in the urban environment. Initially, he feels "'a wild impulse to jest, to startle people, to clap men on the back, fling people's hats astray, and generally revel in my extraordinary advantage.'" However Griffin quickly learns that his anarchic mischief-making can be costly, even for an invisible man. After scaring a tradesman and giving in to the "irresistible" impulse to throw his basket of soda-water siphons into the air, Griffin is injured by a cabman who rushes to help the victim of his prank. As a crowd gathers he realises his predicament:

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[56] Ibid, Idem.
[57] Conrad, Joseph, *The Secret Agent* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.112.

> 'I let the whole down with a smash on the cabman, and then, with shouts and the clatter of feet about me, people coming out of the shops, vehicles pulling up, I realised what I had done for myself, and cursing my folly, backed up against a shop window and prepared to dodge out of the confusion. In a moment I should be wedged into a crowd and inevitably discovered.' (p.94)

He escapes by running "into the afternoon throng of Oxford Street" but here the crowds are just as difficult to negotiate: "'I tried to get into the stream of people, but they were too thick for me, and in a moment my heels were being trodden upon." Forced to walk in the gutter, he is struck by a passing hansom cab and realises that invisibility has rendered him vulnerable to the dangers of the city: "'My mood was as different from that in which I had sallied forth ten minutes ago and it is possible to imagine. *This* invisibility indeed! The one thought that possessed me was – how was I to get out of the scrape I was in.'" His next encounter is with a densely packed crowd watching a Salvation Army band ("'Such a crowd, chanting on the roadway and scoffing on the pavement, I could not hope to penetrate'") and after "'the tide of the crowd washed along the pavement'" the muddy outline of his feet are spotted by two urchins. They raise the alarm and Griffin is chased until he rests in a "maze of less frequented roads." (pp.94-97)

Retreating from the chaos, he returns to his lodgings in Great Portland Street where he finds a commotion:

> 'Then came men and boys running, first one and then others, and shouting as they ran. It was a fire. They ran in the direction of my lodging, and looking back down a street I saw a mass of black smoke streaming up above the roofs and telephone wires. It was my lodging burning: my clothes, my apparatus, all my resources indeed, except my cheque-book and the three volumes of memoranda that awaited me in Great Portland Street, were there. Burning! I had burnt my boats – if ever a man did! The place was blazing.' (pp.97-98)

An impoverished but ambitious professional who is forced to live in wretched rented accommodation in the metropolis and then in the countryside, the Invisible Man is the social foil to the successful small-town scientist, Kemp, who works in a "pleasant little room" in his own house in Burdock and reads in a study that is well lit "with three windows, north, west and south", boasting "bookshelves covered with books and scientific publications, and a broad writing-table". But as an urban type, his misfortune upon the crowded streets reflects Wells' own concerns about the development of

London, which he considered unnatural. He believed that the history of the city's expansion during the nineteenth-century amounted to "a tale of growth without form – like a cancer". "There is a dreadful flavour of mortality about these city growths of the past hundred years," he complained, "so that one wonders at times whether the world will ever recover from them." Unlike the terrorists in the dynamite novels that have been examined in an earlier chapter, the Invisible Man feels under threat in the metropolis, is forced to break out of it and escape into rural England. This amounts to an unresolved contradiction in *The Invisible Man*, as Griffin is an urban counter-figure to Kemp, the comfortable small-own scientist, while, at the same time, he is antagonised by the city's environment. In fleeing it, he is brought into contact with his old college friend, but while he is under threat of constant exposure in London, the village of Iping, and then the town of Burdock, seem to offer him some kind of sanctuary from the perils of the city and the urban crowd.

Wells' later work on this topic reflects the same his concern with the problems that the Invisible Man faces in London. Writing in 1934, he was still very conscious of the suffering of tenants who were living in similar conditions to Griffin: "the ground had been... sold under their feet", he argued, leaving them only "needlessly restricted and devitalizing quarters", or wretched lodging houses, in which to live.[58] While he acknowledged that his was "the normal way of the individual life" in the city he remained bitterly aware that it could only result in alienation, as the city-dweller embarks on "a pilgrimage from familiarity to loneliness":

> We cling to friendships, social circles, cliques, clubs, movements, societies, parties, descendants: but for all our clinging we are forced towards the open. We lose the trick of easy clinging. In the long run, if we live long enough, we find ourselves standing alone, grown up at last altogether, in the face of the universe and life – and what remains to us of death.[59]

While this passage is rich in melodrama, it also reflects Wells' concern at the isolating and dehumanising aspects of modernity, and, when writing this novel in 1897, he was equally concerned with the isolation and stress caused by living under such conditions. The Invisible Man's first act of rebellion and arson is, after all, a radical protest against the social and economic conditions that he has been forced to live and work under.

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[58] Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography*, Vol. 1 ([1934] London: Faber & Faber, 1984), p.276.
[59], Ibid, pp. 377-378.

Meanwhile, his rival, Kemp, has a promising and comfortable career ahead of him: "the work he was on would earn him, he hoped, the fellowship of the Royal Society, so highly did he think of it."[60] For Kemp, science is a pleasurable, gentlemanly pursuit and not the kind of overwhelming pressure that Griffin has found it to be. As with Conrad's anarchist, the Professor, urban alienation, initiated by poverty and exacerbated by professional failure, has drives Griffin to anarchy and revolutionary violence. The political consciousness of anarchy is "embodied" in the fantastic condition of invisibility which, ironically, forces Griffin further away from the urban crowd, away from the metropolis and toward the rural environment of Sussex.

After this series of chaotic encounters Griffin finally realises the absolute nature of his "invisible quality" and, suffering from "'exposure and misery'", he accepts that he has no chance of survival in the city: "'even to me, an Invisible Man,'", he tells Kemps, "'the rows of London houses stood latched, barred, and bolted impregnably.'" At this point, he decides upon his next hideout. "'Omniums'", a shopping arcade, "'the big establishment where everything is to be bought – you know the place – meat, grocery, linen, furniture, clothing, oil paintings even, a huge collection of meandering shops rather than a shop'". (p.99) This appears to be the perfect place for an invisible man to hide:

> I should be able, I thought, to rob the place for food and clothing, and disguised, prowl through it and examine its resources, perhaps sleep on some of the bedding. That seemed an acceptable plan. My idea was to procure clothing to make myself a muffled but acceptable figure, to get money, and then to recover my books and parcels where they awaited me, take a lodging somewhere and elaborate plans for the complete realisation of the advantages my invisibility gave me (as I still imagined) over my fellow men.

As he waits for the shop assistants to finish up for the evening, Griffin watches them with fascination:

> 'a number of brisk young men began with a remarkable alacrity to tidy up the goods that remained undisturbed. I left my lair as the crowds diminished, and prowled cautiously out into the less desolate parts of the shop. I was really surprised to observe how rapidly the young men and women whipped away the goods displayed for sale during the day. All the boxes of goods, the hanging

[60] Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p.63.

> fabrics, the festoons of lace, the boxes of sweets in the grocery section, the displays of this and that, were being whipped down, folded up, slapped into tidy receptacles, and everything that could not be taken down and put away had sheets of some coarse stuff like sacking flung over them. Finally all the chairs were turned up on to the corners, leaving all the floor clear. (p.100)

Griffin's fascination with the novelty of the arcade and its workers indicates that the Invisible Man is at large during a moment of profound political and cultural change, the period in which the ethos of the politicised individual was displaced by the rise of consumerism. Spending his first night at large in one the "temples of commodity capital,"[61] Griffin does not realise that the commercial activity he is watching is, in fact, eroding the kind of political activity that he stands for. As we have seen in the previous chapter with the *Answers* episode, when magazine advertisers caused the "Tamworth Bomb Scare" by sending copies of a journal, packaged alongside hoax bombs, to prominent individuals across England, commercial culture was more than capable of absorbing and repackaging subversive culture as a means of publicising and selling commodities. Rivalled by these new practices of capitalism and its advertising techniques, which themselves trade upon shock-value and spectacular imagery, the older Jacobin tendencies of nineteenth century political culture, as represented by the Invisible Man, appear destined to be replaced by the more novel and far-reaching methods of consumer culture. In his 1912 essay, "The Labour Unrest", H.G. Wells pointed out that the political stability of the working class was being undermined by these developments in consumer culture. He warned that the "spectacular view of luxury, amusement, aimlessness, and excitement" being offered to impoverished workers who could never afford such things by the press, the cinema and "a score of collateral forces", was alienating them from the very system that promised material comforts and was fuelling an unprecedented level of subversive discontent:

> Whatever gravity and spaciousness of aim there may be in our prosperous social life does not appear to him. He sees, and he sees all the more brightly because he is looking at it out of toil and darkness, the glitter, the delight for delight's sake, the show, and the pride, and the folly... The Spectacle of Pleasure, the parade of clothes, estates, motorcars, luxury, and vanity in the

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[61] Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, Trans. from *Das Passagen-Werk* by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 37.

> sight of the workers is the culminating irritant of labour. So long as that goes on, this sombre resolve to which we are all awakening, this sombre resolve rather to wreck the whole fabric than to continue patiently at work, will gather strength.[62]

Britain's traditionally passive workers were, he warned, being alienated by "the increase of luxury and self-indulgence in the prosperous classes", a situation which "must inevitably lead to a series of increasingly destructive outbreaks, to stresses and disorder culminating in revolution." Although written fifteen years after the novel's first publication this foreboding piece explains Wells' discomfort with the rise of consumer culture and the threat that he felt it posed to political stability in Britain. Having displaced the earlier, more purely literary culture with popular art forms such as cinema and replaced modest consumption with "slack, extravagant living," he blamed "this spectacle of pleasure that has been spreading and intensifying in every civilised community for the last three or four decades" for a breakdown in political deference. In creating popular dissatisfaction, this process, which had been conspicuously visible throughout the late Victorian period, was, in Wells' estimation, producing "insurgent" revolutionaries, unnecessarily provoking discontent and promising only a wasteful future of domestic disorder and "incurable conflict" worse than anything seen during the Boer War.[63] As we shall see below, the popular reaction against the Invisible Man iterates the kind of conservatism shown here by Wells.

Clearly, Wells felt that the blatant visibility of consumption was producing political subversives like the Invisible man. Unable to resist its lure, the anarchist even indulges in the smooth flow of commodity culture as he proceeds to rob the store:

> 'at last a good hour or more after the shop had been closed, came a noise of locking doors. Silence came upon the place, and I found myself wandering through the vast and intricate shops, galleries, showrooms of the place, alone. It was very still; in one place I remember passing near one of the Tottenham Court Road entrances and listening to the tapping of boot-heels of the passers-by.
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> 'My first visit was to the place where I had seen stockings and gloves for sale. It was dark and, and I had the devil of a hunt after matches, which I

[62] Wells, H.G., "The Labour Unrest", (London: *The Daily Mail*, undated[1912?], originally published May 13th-20th, 1912), pp.14-15.
[63] Ibid, pp.15-18.

> found at last in the drawer of the little cash desk. Then I had to get a candle. I had to tear down wrappings and ransack a number of boxes and drawers, but at last I managed to turn out what I sought; the box label called them lambswool pants, and lambswool vests. Then socks, a thick comforter, and then I went to the clothing place and got trousers, a lounge jacket, an overcoat and a slouch hat – a clerical sort of hat with the brim turned down. I began to feel a human again... (pp.100-101)

After ransacking the clothes shop for a disguise, Griffin dines in the refreshment department but the next morning the teenage shop assistants find his "'plunder'" (pp.101, 103) and he is forced to leave the Emporium empty-handed. Dejected, he returns to the streets.

Griffin tells Kemp how staying in the city threatened to make the Invisible Man become *visible*, as the elemental stuff of the city starts expose him: "'(a) greasy glimmer of humanity... I went abroad – in the London air – I gathered dirt about my ankles, floating smuts and dirt upon my skin. I did not know how long it would be before I should become visible from that cause also. But I saw clearly it could not be for long.'" No longer completely imperceptible, the longer he stays in London, the more his condition is reduced to one of residual visibility, as the grime of the streets continues to adhere to him. Careful "to avoid the busy ways,'" he walks "'towards the back streets north of the Strand'" toward a theatrical costumier's shop. "'Every crossing was a danger, every passenger a thing to watch alertly'", he tells Kemp. Griffin plans enter the premises and to "'rummage out a wig, mask, spectacles, and costume, and go into the world, perhaps a grotesque but still a credible figure... I could go forth into the world again, equipped.'" (pp.104-106, 109) Convinced of "'what a helpless absurdity an Invisible Man was – in a cold and dirty climate and a crowded civilised city'" Griffin finally decides to get out of London, and admits that the "'thousand advantages'" he had dreamed of acquiring through his "'mad experiment'" are impossibilities there.

He reveals to Kemp that he has come to Sussex to find seclusion and begin research on restoring his visibility. If he might only be left alone by the inquisitive locals who have "'made things a thousand times more difficult'", he should be able to begin his work quickly. Otherwise, he ominously warns Kemp, "'I shall go wild – I shall start mowing 'em.'" (p.112) Griffin tells that him that his original plan was to leave England altogether:

> 'I was going to clear out of the country. But I have altered that plan since seeing you. I thought it would be wise, now the weather is hot and invisibility possible, to make for the South. Especially as my secret was known, and everyone would be on the lookout for the masked and muffled man. You have a line of steamers from here to France. My idea was to get aboard one and run the risks of the passage. Thence I could go by train into Spain, or else into Algiers. It would not be difficult. There a man might always be invisible – and yet live. And do things. (p.113)

In outlining Griffin's proposed escape to France, then Spain and then on to Algeria, which is ostensibly driven by his desire to inhabit a warmer climate where he might exploit his invisibility to the hilt, Wells reveals another clue as to the political origins of the Invisible Man: as we have seen, both France and Spain were rocked by anarchist violence, while many French anarchists were deported to Algeria. However Griffin has chosen to stay in England and he goes on to outline his plans for achieving a political revolution on British soil:

> 'Hitherto I have gone on vague lines. We have to consider all that invisibility means, all that it does not mean. It means little advantage for eavesdropping and so forth - one makes sounds. It's of little help, a little help, perhaps - in housebreaking and so forth. Once you've caught me you could easily imprison me. But on the other hand I am hard to catch. This invisibility, in fact, is only good in two cases: it's useful in getting away, it's useful in approaching. It's particularly useful, therefore, in killing. I can walk round a man, whatever weapon he has, choose my point, strike as I like. Dodge as I like. Escape as I like.'

His authoritarian agenda requires a qualified degree of violence since, as he tells Kemp, "it is killing we must do":

> 'Not wanton killing, but a judicious slaying. The point is, they know there is an Invisible Man. And that Invisible Man, Kemp, must now establish a Reign of Terror. Yes - no doubt it's startling. But I mean it. A Reign of Terror. He must take some town like your Burdock and terrify and dominate it. He must issue his orders. He can do that in a thousand ways - scraps of paper thrust under

> doors would suffice. And all who disobey his orders he must kill, and kill all who would defend them.' (pp.114-115)

But despite the apparent advantages of being at large in rural England the countryside proves to be just as restrictive a place for the Invisible Man as London did. As outlined above, the city is no place for an invisible man, nor, as we shall see, is the English countryside. As Griffin explains his plan of action Kemp is actually waiting for a visit from Colonel Adye, the chief of the Burdock police and when the policeman arrives, Kemp tries to lock Griffin up. The pair are are overpowered by the Invisible Man and he escapes and Kemp cries "'My God!... the game's up! He's gone!'"[64] But the English countryside quickly becomes the perfect environment for devising and executing a containment strategy. Kemp warns the colonel:

> 'He is mad... inhuman. He is pure selfishness. He thinks of nothing but his own advantage, his own safety. I have listened to such a story this morning of brutal self-seeking! He has wounded men. He will kill them unless we can prevent him. He will create a panic. Nothing can stop him. He is going out now – furious!'

Invisibility has not just transformed Griffin scientifically: by inducing this individualistic and anarchic rage it also turns him into a mutated version of the nineteenth century bourgeois. As the anarchist paper *The Torch*, declared, it is "the superstitious respect for private property and men in blue coats that really stands in the way of a Revolution" and "it is only by individuals acting on their own initiative that it can be overcome." Paradoxically, anarchist ideology mirrors that of the liberal middle class, and its support for "Free Initiative"[65] blurs the distinction between left wing radicalism and the politically conservative but economically radical methods of the nineteenth century men of means like Dr Kemp.

The conflict between the bourgeois and his social and political other is enacted in the struggle between the comfortable scientist, Kemp and his outlawed other, the Invisible Man. Under threat from this foe, Kemp becomes "suddenly... full of ideas" and outlines his own strategy to counter the terrorist:

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[64] Ibid, p.116.
[65] Rossetti, Olivia, "Methods of Propaganda", *The Torch*, Vol.3, No.7, July 1893, p.2; Rossetti, Helen, "Cowardice", *The Torch.*, Vol.3, No.8, August, 1893, p.5.

> 'You must begin at once. You must set every available man to work. You must prevent his leaving this district. Once he gets away, he may go through the countryside as he wills, killing and maiming. He dreams of a reign of terror! A reign of terror, I tell you. You must set up a watch on trains and roads and shipping. The garrison must help. You must wire for help.'

Despite his civilian status Kemp at once organises a defensive manoeuvre that involves all of the resources corporate capitalism and the state, which he proposes to pit against Griffin's anarchy. Kemp knows that the only thing keeping Griffin in Burdock for the moment is his desire to get his diary back from Marvel, and he advises the colonel that until he gets the books the advantage will be in the hands of "the whole countryside":

> 'you must prevent him from eating or sleeping; day and night the country must be astir for him. Food must be locked up and secured, all food, so that he will have to break his way to it. The houses everywhere must be barred against him. Heaven send us cold nights and rain! The whole countryside must begin hunting and keep hunting. I tell you, Adye, he is a danger, a disaster; unless he is pinned and secured, it is frightful to think of the things that may happen.' (p.117)

Armed with the twinned resources of the army and the railways, Kemp begins to contain the terrorist threat and the Invisible Man finds himself increasingly forced into the open. Griffin responds by making a declaration of war against Port Burdock, introducing another context for *The Invisible Man* - that of the rural subversion of the Irish Land War of 1879-1882, when, as the *Times* lamented, Ireland had become "the prey of anarchy and despair".[66] Compared to other European states, Britain remained relatively politically stable during the nineteenth century but, as we have already seen with the example of Clan na Gael, and with Robert Louis Stevenson's views on the Land War in "Confessions of a Unionist", the United Kingdom did come under attack from within, as its own brand of Jacobinism – militant Irish separatism – challenged British authority. Unlike dynamiting, the Irish Land War was the result of a widespread, popular subversion and it shook the Irish countryside, as the open efforts of the Irish Land

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[66] Anon., Parnellism and Crime, Or "The Bloody Work of the Two Leagues" (London: The Times, 1887)., p.88.

League, which demanded agrarian reform, were accompanied by clandestine acts of rural sabotage and terror. Like France, Ireland appears as an imaginary other to England, although Ireland's otherness is specifically rural and France's appeals more to the urban imagination. This is perhaps one reason why the countryside seems to be a more dangerous place than the city in *The Invisible Man.*

Appearing as England's imaginary other, the troubled Ireland of the Land War seems to inform Wells' text, and is perhaps one reason why the countryside initially seems to be a more dangerous place than the city in *The Invisible Man.* Ireland, complained the *Times*, was different to England, because here, "a man could be murdered... going home from a market town, and with probably many people on the road". This kind of political crime "would seem strange in England," where the law was observed by the population, but not so in Ireland, where there was "no safeguard" from agrarian rebels.[67] Griffin's methods, such as leaving death-threats "on a greasy sheet of paper" (p.123), mirror the Irish ribbonist methods that were familiar to the late-Victorian imagination. The Land War also coincided with the Phoenix Park assassinations of May 1882, which are discussed in Chapter One. Having occurred within the park, Dublin's countryside-within-the-city, the attack exposed the insecurity of Ireland's most important political administrators and sensationally highlighted the wider political instability that had taken hold throughout rural Ireland. Although the double assassination was not directly linked either to the Land War or to the Irish Land League, it was immediately associated with the Home Rule campaign in the popular press. The leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, Charles Stewart Parnell, was even linked to the Phoenix Park murders by *The Times* but was vindicated in February, 1889, when the newspaper was found to have used forged letters as proof of his complicity. It was also alleged that the double-killing was connected to more general agrarian outrages, including the murders of landlords and their agents, which occurred during the Land War.[68] While the dynamite campaign shook London, an atmosphere of rural anarchy took hold in Ireland, creating a sense of insecurity in British political circles and provided another historical context to the terrorist fiction of the 1890s. Like the explosions that shook Paris during this decade, the violence that rocked the Irish countryside during the early 1880s threatens rural England in Wells' fiction. Griffin's campaign of rural terror begins with a murder - the killing of Lord Burdock's steward, Mr Wicksteed, which occurs as Kemp

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[67] Ibid, p.75.
[68] See Crime Branch, Special, B Files, 1881-1882, National Archive, Dublin.

prepares his containment strategy with the police. At this point Griffin passes "out of human perceptions" (breaking a child's ankle in the process) in order "to piece together again his shattered schemes against his species." Kemp and Adye issue a proclamation that "gave briefly but clearly all the conditions of the struggle, the necessity of keeping the Invisible Man from food and sleep, the necessity for incessant watchfulness and for a prompt attention to any evidence of his movement." Meanwhile, the local population comes out in force to capture the Invisible Man, swinging the balance of odds against him:

> During that time a growing multitude of men scattered over the countryside were busy. In the morning he had still been simply a legend, a terror; in the afternoon, by virtue chiefly of Kemp's drily worded proclamation, he was presented as a tangible antagonist, to be wounded, captured, or overcome, and the countryside began organising itself with inconceivable rapidity. By two o'clock even he might still have removed himself out of the district by getting aboard a train, but after two that became impossible. Every passenger train along the lines on a great parallelogram between Southampton, Manchester, Brighton, and Horsham, travelled with locked doors, and the goods traffic was almost entirely suspended. And in a great circle of twenty miles round Port Burdock, men armed with guns and bludgeons were presently setting out in groups of three and four, with dogs, to beat the roads and fields.[69]

Kemp's plan, with its near-national railway restrictions and stoppage of goods' traffic (as revealed by Griffin's admission of emporium-sacking, the Invisible Man is as dependent on commodity culture as the next man, if not more so) and its commissioning of armed vigilantes renders the countryside under "a stringent state of siege" but "before nightfall... a thrill of horror went through the whole watching nervous countryside" as it learns of the fate of Mr Wicksteed, steward to Lord Burdock. While being pursued by the "inoffensive" man, Griffin turned on him with an iron rod, "broke his arm, felled him, and smashed his head to a jelly." The next day Griffin emerges "active, powerful, angry, and malignant, prepared for his last great struggle against the world." (pp.120-122) With this murder, Wells suggests that the rural environment might not provide the kind of sanctuary and retreat that it is expected to, and his model of a conservative and resilient countryside anticipates the similar treatment that John Buchan accords Scotland in his

[69] Ibid, pp.119-120.

1913 novel, *The Thirty-nine Steps*. In this novel the fugitive Richard Hannay embarks on an adventure after finding "the amusements of London" to be "as flat as soda-water that has been standing in the sun". Searching, like the Stevensons' characters in *The Dynamiter*, for "a sort of Arabian Nights", he becomes implicated in an anarchist plot to destabilise international relations and finds himself being pursued by an underground network, "the Black Stone". Pursued through the Scottish countryside, "a wide green world with glens falling on every side and a far-away blue horizon", by the terrorists and by the police, Hannay finds to his horror that he has nowhere to hide: "there was not cover in the whole place to hide a rat". Starting to "suffocate" in the glens, Hannay discovers that "(t)he free mooorlands were prison walls, and the keen hill air was the breath of a dungeon."[70] The Scottish countryside, like rural Sussex in *The Invisible Man*, turns out to be a model for surveillance and containment and while Griffin introduces his campaign with the murder of the steward, he soon comes up against the same kind of difficulties faced by Richard Hannay. Wells, like Buchan, also points to the possibility that the rural environment might prove troublesome for an individual who finds himself at odds with the law and "on the run".

Griffin's next step is to leave a *sans-culottish* death-threat, scrawled "on a greasy sheet of paper", at Kemp's house:

> 'The game is only beginning. There is nothing for it, but to start the Terror. This announces the first day of the Terror. Port Burdock is no longer under the Queen, tell your Colonel of Police, and the rest of them; it is under me - the Terror! This is day one of year one of the new epoch - the Epoch of the Invisible Man. I am Invisible Man the First. To begin with the rule will be easy. The first day there will be one execution for the sake of example - a man named Kemp. Death starts for him today.' (123)

Griffin's threat to impose a state of political terror echoes the militant language of the Jacobin dictatorship that took over French revolutionary politics in 1793. Under the Revolutionary Government of the Year II, this faction overthrew the milder Girondist grouping in the national Convention and ruled by means of *la Terreur*, creating a climate of bourgeois fear or of "Domestic carnage", as it was characterised by William

[70] Buchan,, John, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 13, 39, 57, 59.

Wordsworth.[71] The Terror came to symbolise the French Revolution in the British consciousness and Griffin's campaign threatens to introduce its political methods into Britain. Posing as the leader of a revolutionary vanguard, Griffin taunts Kemp, advising him that hiding will only "'impress my people'". It is pointless for him to take any precautions, boasts the letter, because "'Death, the unseen Death, is coming... Death starts from the pillar box by midday.'" He also warns the population to avoid the damned scientist: "'The game begins. Death starts. Help him not, my people, lest Death fall upon you also.'" (p.123) He then attacks Kemp in his home, leaving the house looking like a scene "after a violent riot." Kemp's country home, representative of bourgeois and professional domesticity is left a shattered, besieged wreck: "Every window was broken, and every window, save those of the belvedere study, was blinded by the internal shutters." On seeing Kemp being pursued, his well-heeled neighbour, Mr Heelas, retreats into his suburban home, screaming "'Shut the doors, shut the windows, shut everything! the Invisible Man is coming!'" (pp.132-133) Kemp runs toward town, past "the gaunt villas" that are "locked and barred" against the Invisible Man and he makes his way to the outskirts of Burdock. Here he is reassured by the sight of a tram, the police station and the Jolly Cricketers pub (where Griffin was shot when he first arrived in Burdock) and reaches "the blistering fag end of the street, with human beings about him." Here he passes a group of navvies labouring on drainage works and he tries to use the urban geography to his advantage:

> 'The Invisible Man!' he cried to the navvies, with a vague indicative gesture, and by an inspiration leapt the excavation and placed a burly group between him and the chase. Then abandoning the idea of the police station he turned into a little side street, rushed by a greengrocer's cart, hesitated for a tenth of a second at the door of a sweetstuff shop, and then made for the mouth of an alley that ran back into the main Hill Street again. Two or three little children were playing here, and shrieked and scattered running at his apparition, and forthwith doors and windows opened and excited mothers revealed their hearts. Out he shot into Hill Street again, three hundred yards from the tram-line end, and immediately he became aware of a tumultuous vociferation and running people.

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[71] Wordsworth, William, *The Prelude*, Book Tenth, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (New York: Norton, 2000), Vol. 2, p.359.

To his relief, Kemp finds that workers in the town have begun to defend him, stacking the odds at last against the Invisible Man:

> He glanced up the street towards the Hill. Hardly a dozen yards off ran a huge navvy, cursing in fragments and slashing viciously with a spade, and hard behind him came the tram conductor with his fists clenched. Up the street others followed these two, striking and shouting. Down towards the town, men and women were running, and he noticed clearly one man coming out of a shop-door with a stick in his hand. 'Spread out! Spread out!' cried some one. Kemp suddenly grasped the altered condition of the chase.

As he watches these moves by Burdock's urban proletariat Kemp is suddenly overpowered and brought to the ground by the Invisible Man but he is quickly rescued by one of the labourers:

> a knee compressed his diaphragm, and a couple of eager hands gripped his throat, but the grip of one was weaker than the other; he grasped the wrists, heard a cry of pain from his assailant, and then the spade of the navvy came whirling through the air above him, and struck something with a dull thud... In another second there was a simultaneous rush upon the struggle, and a stranger coming into the road suddenly might have thought an exceptionally savage game of Rugby football was in progress. And there was no shouting after Kemp's cry – only a sound of blows and feet and a heavy breathing.
>
> Then came a mighty effort, and the Invisible Man threw off a couple of his antagonists and rose to his knees. Kemp clung to him like a hound to a stag, and a dozen hands gripped, clutched and tore at the Unseen. The tram conductor suddenly got the neck and shoulders and lugged him back.

After "some savage kicking" the Invisible Man surrenders but a merciless labourer is unconvinced and calls for the others to restrain him: "'Don't you leave go of 'en,' cried the big navvy, holding a bloodstained spade: 'he's shamming.'" Held down by Kemp and a police constable, Griffin's body at last starts to materialise:

> everyone saw, faint and transparent as though it was made of glass, so that veins and arteries bones and nerves could be distinguished, the outline of a

hand, a hand limp and prone. It grew clouded and opaque even as they stared.

'Hullo!' cried the constable. 'Here's his feet a-showing!' (pp.134-135)

The locals watch as the bones, flesh and skin are exposed and they see that his chest has been crushed by the violent battering from the workers and that the invisible man has been mortally wounded. (p.135) Having come to the Sussex countryside in order to find the necessary peace to transform his body back to its normal, visible self, the locals, in killing the Invisible Man, carry out this transformation for him. As Eric Hobsbawm claims, despite sporadic radical activity, "British labour remained firmly in the tow of the liberals" during the second half of the nineteenth century[72] and in stepping out to rescue Kemp, the labourers and the tram conductor defend the status quo against the revolutionary peril.

The state, with its surveillant technology, but more importantly, with the aid of its workers, brings the Invisible Man to his knees. Griffin can be read as standing in opposition to what Michel Foucault terms the "major technology of the telescope, the lens and the light beam", but he is overcome in the end by its "discreet" power of authority and discipline, the "obscure art of light and the visible"[73] in which the workers in Burdock are implicated. As we have seen with Wells' complaint about the rise of popular commercial culture and, as he viewed it, the threat that this posed to the loyalty of the British working class, the author was concerned that anarchy might result from rise of new cultural and commercial forms. We might imagine that the threat has been fully contained by the navvies of Burdock, but despite Griffin's brutal death at their hands, the novel closes with another member of the social underclass, the tramp, Marvel, who has inherited the diaries containing the Invisible Man's scientific secrets. Having been hired "'to tell the story at the Empire Music 'all'", Marvel has made a fortune out of the sensational story and now owns a public house in Port Stowe called, appropriately, "The Invisible Man", where, after closing time, he secretly consults Griffin's diary. Some of the notes have been washed away entirely by ditch-water but others remain, indecipherable: "'Hex, little two up in the air, cross and a fiddle-de-dee. Lord! what a one he was for intellect!... Full of secrets... Wonderful secrets!'" (pp.137-138) The novel's conclusion is a return to the kind of cultural concerns that Wells would revisit in his 1912 essay, but in

[72] Hobsbawm, ibid, p.141.
[73] Foucault, ibid, p.171.

this case the new cultural form is not a popular one: as we have already seen, the diaries' cipher functions in this novel as a fictional "stand-in" for another, more esoteric cultural concern - literary modernism. Like the other modern forms that Wells found so politically distasteful and ominous, such as cinema, consumer culture and the simple but corrupting "Spectacle of Pleasure", this text threatens to lead to another outbreak of revolutionary discontent and of invisibility, if it should ever be decoded by the tramp.

In his super-individuality, Griffin goes so far beyond the social that he is hunted down and defeated by the crowd, the very entity that, paradoxically, also seems to give rise to political spectres such as the Invisible Man. One year before the novel was published the French sociologist, Gustave Le Bon, commented on the phenomenon of the urban crowd. Le Bon was one of the new professional class of 'social scientists' and, as a state intellectual, analysed what he considered to be a key factor of modernity. The rise of the crowd, he theorised, meant that the individual would be no match for the collective, and he claimed that "(t)he substitution of the unconscious action of crowds for the conscious activity of individuals is one of the principal characteristics of the present age." This, he argued, made the crowd a dangerous phenomenon: "after noting the extreme mental inferiority of crowds, picked assemblies included, I yet affirm it would be dangerous to meddle with their organisation, notwithstanding this inferiority."[74] This inferiority becomes a comfort and reassurance for Wells, as it is the collective, not the individual, which triumphs. Indeed, Wells was such an opponent of individualism that throughout his life he advocated a single world state to replace the existing political systems. The over-determined nature of the crowd is mirrored in the novel's treatment of rural England as an unstable space that is more open to rebellion and destabilisation than the British city and town. But at the same time the rural environment is a contradictory space as it fulfils a variety of meanings in the text – as a retreat from modernity, as the foil to the chaos of Paris, as the locus of Irish-style agrarian political chaos. Invested with these multiple roles the countryside appears as a problematic and unstructured place in *The Invisible Man*. Despite its traditional structures rural England is the weak spot where Griffin almost succeeds in applying his Jacobin tendencies, while these are quickly contained in London and defeated at the edge of Port Burdock. While rural England is the space where Griffin launches his campaign of subversion, the English small town provides the reassuring space within which he is overcome.

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[74] Le Bon, Gustave, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (T. Fisher Unwin: London, 1896), v-vi.

The Invisible Man is a text that reflects the kind of contemporary fears about terrorism that were expressed through the popular press. Cesare Lombroso equated anarchism with "delinquent man",[75] defining it as an abnormal form of criminal behaviour. But Wells' anarchist is an energetic and committed scientist, a professional gone wrong, whose inherently political character was overshadowed ten years later by Conrad's terrorist genius The Professor in *The Secret Agent*. Griffin's invisibility is also a product of contemporary fantasies about the modernised and increasingly fragmented society that seemed to be gradually replacing the traditional and more coherent pattern of English rural life,[76] and amounts to the imaginative planting of insane but clearly politicised figures such as Émile Henry onto English soil. In *The Invisible Man*, the countryside becomes a more unfamiliar place due to the superimposition of urban patterns such as the scientific laboratory that Griffin installs in Mrs Hall's inn, or his refusal to go to church on Sundays, and his anarchic tendencies to interrupt communications, commit murder and carry out acts of arson. Not only is Griffin defined by the historical terrorism of the 1880s and the 1890s, he is almost *over*-determined by it. Michel Foucault has explained that in modern political systems "the submission of bodies" is exercised "through the control of ideas".[77] Griffin resists modern methods of control and surveillance so that his invisibility is a particularly modern phenomenon and it is also a political one. The novel represents what can happen to English society tradition, is broken – where better place for the political shock of urban anarchy to be enacted than upon conservative, rural England? Griffin's invisibility also points to the illegibility of terrorism as his body serves as a metaphor for an unknowable political strategy and it transforms him into a subversive who is bent on overthrowing the state; in this way the motives of the Invisible Man become as unreadable as those behind the real life bombers of the Paris Opera and the Café Terminus.

Just as terrorism aims to make symbolic gestures, it also exercises profound cultural implications, and these are registered most subtly in *The Invisible Man*, so subtly that the novel's political context has almost been overlooked. While contemporary experts on crime attempted to contain anarchist terrorism by defining it as an abnormal form of criminal behaviour and blaming it on "delinquent man", as Lombroso did, Wells

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[75] Quoted in Ferracuti, Franco, and Bruno, Francesca, "Psychiatric Aspects of Terrorism in Italy", in Barak-Glantz, Israel and Huff, C. Ronald (Eds.) *The Mad, The Bad, and The Different* (Lexington: Gower, 1981, pp. 199-214), p.206.

[76] See Bailey, Peter, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), p.28.

[77] Foucault, Ibid., p.102.

presented his anarchist as an energetic, committed scientist and as a renegade professional. Lombroso's denial of the political implications of terrorism is reversed by Wells' story of a politically loaded figure and his "brutal dream of a terrorised world". (p.119)

"The Diamond Maker"

The theme of the subversive professional was also visited by Wells in another short story, "The Diamond Maker", published in the *Pall Mall Budget* in August,1894. Another tale about the political concerns of "this transitional age", the story describes how a well-heeled man about town meets a dishevelled, tramp-like figure on the Embankment in London who claims to have "'a big business in hand, a very big business'". He confides in the narrator, "'The fact is... I make diamonds'" and offers to sell him "a brown pebble" that is "not unlike an uncut diamond of the darker sort, though far too large, being almost as big as the top of my thumb." (pp.48-49) Asking how he acquired this "'Behemoth of diamonds'", the narrator is given an explanation:

> 'Diamonds,' he began – and as he spoke his voice lost its faint flavour of the tramp and assumed something of the easy tone of an educated man – 'are to be made by throwing carbon out of combination in a suitable flux and under a suitable pressure; the carbon crystallises out, not as black-lead or charcoal-powder, but as small diamonds. So much has been known to chemists for years, but no one yet has hit upon exactly the right flux in which to melt the carbon, or exactly the right pressure for the best results. Consequently the diamonds made by chemists are small and dark, and worthless as jewels. Now I, you know, have given up my life to this problem – given my life to it.' (p.50)

Like Griffin, the tramp sacrificed his youth in the pursuit of scientific research, his own goal being the synthetic production of diamonds: "'I began to work at the conditions of diamond making when I was seventeen, and now I am thirty-two. It seemed to me that it might take all the thought and energies of a man for ten years, or twenty years, but, even if it did, the game was still worth the candle.'" Hoping to make diamonds "'as common as coal'" and thereby "'realise millions'", (p.50) the inventor is now "'on the verge of it

all'". Having studied in Berlin, the diamond maker shares Griffin's fear of the possible exposure of his research, as this might lead to the flooding of the global market with fake diamonds: "it was important that if I really meant to make a pile, people should not know it was an artificial process and capable of turning out diamonds by the ton. So I had to work alone.'" Having run out of money, he also worked in adverse conditions "'in a wretched unfurnished room in Kentish Town, where I slept at last on a straw mattress on the floor among all my apparatus.'" His money "'simply flowed away'" and although he tried to earn a living through teaching "'I found I had to give a lot of time and labour for precious little money.'" Eventually, he "'got nearer and nearer the thing'" and eventually "'settled the problem of the composition of the flux, and got near the pressure by putting this flux of mine and a certain carbon composition into a closed-up gun-barrel, filling up with water, sealing tightly, and heating.'" The "'rather risky'" process caused an explosion, demolishing the tramp's lab but producing some diamond powder. The disastrous but slightly productive episode sent his research in a new direction:

> I hit upon some researches of Daubrée's at the Paris *Laboratoire des Poudres et Salpêtres*. He exploded dynamite in a tightly screwed steel cylinder, too strong to burst, and I found he could crush rocks into a muck not unlike the South African bed in which diamonds are found. It was a tremendous strain on my resources but I got a steel cylinder made for my purpose after his pattern. I put in all my stuff and my explosives, built up a fire in my furnace, put the whole concern in, and – went out for a walk.'

The narrator is amused by the scientist's nonchalance (which is not far from Griffin's devil-may-care attitude when he fires his own aprtment), and asks if there were any other lodgers in the house:

> 'It was in the interest of science,' he said ultimately. 'There was a costermonger family on the floor below, a begging-letter writer in the room behind mine, and two flower-women were upstairs. Perhaps it was a bit thoughtless. But possibly some of them were out.' (p.51)

However when he returned he found that the cylinder was not damaged by the explosion of the dynamite and found it lying "'among the white-hot coals.'" The scientist realised that whatever crystals it might contain would be small as "'it is only by prolonged

standing that they grow to any size.'" Resigning himself to a lengthy wait, he "resolved to let this apparatus cool for two years, letting the temperature go down slowly during that time.'" (pp.51-52) Desperate and with "'scarcely a penny in the world'" he was forced to spend the period working humiliating menial jobs, selling newspapers, holding horses, opening cab doors and he even "'had a place as assistant to a man who owned a barrow, and used to call down one side of the road while he called down the other.'" On one occasion he was forced to beg but resisting the temptation to buy food ("'How the fish shops smelt!'") he invested the money in the coals that he required in order to heat the cylinder again. Then, shortly before meeting the narrator, he had a breakthrough:

> 'At last, three weeks ago, I let the fire out. I took my cylinder and unscrewed it while it was still so hot that it punished my hands, and I scraped out the crumbling lava-like mass with a chisel, and hammered it into a powder upon an iron plate. And I found three big diamonds and five small ones.

However his success was tarnished by an inquisitive neighbour:

> As I sat on the floor hammering, my door opened, and my neighbour, the begging-letter writer, came in. He was drunk – as he usually is. "'Nerchist," said he. "You're drunk," said I. "'Structive scoundrel," said he. "Go to your father," said I, meaning the Father of Lies. (p.52)

The dipsomaniac told the scientist that he had the police around earlier and the tramp tells the narrator that "'I suddenly realised I was in a hole. Either I should have to tell these police my little secret, and get the whole thing blown up, or be lagged as an Anarchist.'" Outraged, he grabbed the drunkard "'and rolled him about a bit'", gathered up his diamonds and left, destitute again but now also a fugitive: "'The evening papers called my den the Kentish Town Bomb Factory. And now I cannot part with the things for love or money.'" As happens with Griffin, the scientific efforts of this educated man of no means are associated with terrorism and he is forced to go underground. Unable to sell the diamonds because he is suspected of fraud or of selling stolen goods, he complains that "'I am going about now with several thousand pounds-worth of diamonds round my neck, and without food or shelter.'" (p.52) He tries again to sell the diamond to the narrator, who instead gives him his card and the tramp wanders off. The narrator

speculates that "he may still be wandering about trying to sell the things. It is just possible he may yet emerge upon society". However this is unlikely because, like Griffin, his pursuit of the liberal dream to acquire wealth, status and independence has resulted in his political ostracism. The Diamond Maker's process of creation through destruction, whereby diamonds are created by means of explosions adds an ironic insight into late Victorian commodity culture. Its creative processes are inherently destructive, exploding "all that is solid" in order to create commodities of greater value. As Marshall Berman has pointed out, modernity has a dual function in that as well as promising growth and transformation it also threatens everything with its paradoxical "maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal".[78] Because of this process anarchists, as we have seen, are continually confused with criminals, dynamiters and even entrepreneurs. Like the actual Tamworth Bomb Scare of 1894, the fictional "Kentish Town Bomb Factory" of Wells' short underlines how entrepreneurship can be confused with anarchism. Written in the same year that the hoax bombs were posted, the story links terrorist bombs with the destructive powers of capitalism itself, and anarchists and the agents of this power are confused with one another. Paradoxically, it is when the Diamond Maker, a competitive capitalist is refused admission to the economic system, that he finds himself transformed into a political fugitive. Wells' story is suggestive: the nineteenth century bourgeois public sphere might not have been as welcoming to new talent as it claimed to be.

Conclusion

H.G. Wells claimed in his autobiography that writers are essentially "outsiders" and "men with no legitimate and pre-determined roles... whose common characteristic it has been to fly across the social confusion quite unaccountably". In the light of this statement, the early Wells himself might be interpreted as something of a literary terrorist. Writers, he argued, are inherently destructive: "Such men are inevitable in a period of obsolete educational ideas and decaying social traditions. Whatever else they are not dull and

[78] Berman, Marshall, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity (London: Penguin, 1988), p.15.*

formal. They quicken, if it is only quickening to destroy."[79] Paradoxically, *The Inivisible Man* links Wells' idea of literature-as-subversion with his more conservative desire to see Britain politically stabilised and free from anarchy, and Wells himself occupied as paradoxical a position as the Invisible Man does. As we have seen with his essay, "The Labour Unrest", Wells was uncomfortable with "our present drift towards revolution or revolutionary disorder", which was partly created by the aggressive consumption and display of the late Victorian period. Wells believed that Britain at this point was in "the opening phase of a real and irreparable class war". This threatened revolt was the result of "a spreading disorganisation" and, thanks to improved education, "the temper of labour has changed" so that "(t)he outlook of the workman has passed beyond the works and his beer and his dog." The average worker, warned Wells, "questions a thousand things his father accepted as in the very nature of the world." Distrustful of the traditional political system and about to abandon his "loyalty to the Crown", the new, educated worker is unconcerned with the old hierarchy and "ceases to believe in the law, ceases to believe in Parliament". This anarchic process, Wells claimed, could only be countered by the firm action of "a governing class that means to go on governing", and he recommended that government could only save itself by commandeering "the imaginations of this drifting, sullen, and suspicious multitude".[80]

To begin with, Wells proposed, the British ruling class should meet some of these workers' demands or face an outbreak of revolution:

> The thing our society has most to fear from labour is not organised resistance, not victorious strikes and raised conditions, but the black resentment that follows defeat. Meet labour halfway and you will find a new co-operation in your government; stick to you legal rights, draw the net of repressive legislation tighter; then you will have presently to deal with labour enraged. If the anger burns free, that means revolution; if you crush out the hope of that, then sabotage and a sullen general sympathy for anarchistic crime.[81]

The greatest threat to British democracy, he warned, was not posed by large-scale organised actions such as strikes but by the unpredictable disturbances caused by

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[79]Wells, *Experiment*, p.522.
[80] Wells, "The Labour Unrest", pp. 1-4.
[81] Ibid, p.11.

militant revolutionaries. However these free and angry agents of political chaos were in a tiny minority as, according to Wells, most people are naturally inclined to conform to the overarching political system: "Man is a social animal; few men are naturally social rebels".[82] Apart from the unruly few, society can be governed and moderated. Despite the lapse in time between this essay and the publication of *The Invisible Man* in 1897, both texts share a concern with the breakdown of order, and a fear of the more radical brands of socialism.

In 1934 Wells was still railing against errant radicals and claimed that during the 1890s British socialists had to contend with the imported ideologies of extremists. "Foreign Socialism", he complained, "had little of our British spirit of compromise." This alien ideology went on to "fight out differences" rather than solving them rationally; it "was under the sway of certain other obsessions" and even though it "polished and elaborated doctrine much more than the Fabian school," its ideology was directed "unhappily not in a practically constructive direction." While the Left was united around "one idea", "the idea that the motive of profit, which then dominated economic life, was wrong",[83] the continental brand of socialism was "impracticable" because of "the absence of an experimental and analytical spirit." Like Griffin's vaguely scientific explanation for his discovery of invisibility, left-wing thought was much more speculative than scientific, in Wells' opinion: "There had been a conspicuous absence from about the cradle-side of Socialism, of men with the scientific habit of mind." Socialism "was a pre-scientific product and it had just that bad disposition to finality of statement which it is the task of experimental science to withstand." This lack of rigorous methodology, argued Wells, was what made continental socialists so prone to the destabilising influences that their sounder, more reasonable British counterparts were able to withstand. Their failure "to test it soundly and work out its necessary methods" resulted in "strange, mystical and dogmatic phrases. The 'Proletariat' was to rise against the 'Bourgeoisie' and 'expropriate' them, etc., etc."[84] These theoretical problems troubled Wells throughout the 1890s and he criticised Marxism's tendency to impose itself and, in particular, the question of class warfare, on socialist practice:

> Marx... finally fettered the ideas of Socialism and Democracy together. His imagination intensified the insurrectionary impulse in modern

[82] Ibid, p.12.
[83] Wells, *Experiment*, pp.248-249.
[84] Ibid, pp.251-252.

> democracy and sought in the resentment and discomfort of the disinherited, a sufficient driving force for a revolutionary reconstruction of society. There was a certain plausibility in the suggestion that the mass-losers in the struggle for gain, would necessarily be in favour of the abolition of private property. But it did not follow at all that they would be able to grasp the idea of collectivised property and take an intelligent controlling interest in its collective administration. Over that thin ice the Marxists skated very swiftly and nimbly. Steadily and surely the idea of the class-war was imposed upon the Socialist idea, until for many Socialism ceased to be a movement for a more comprehensive organization of economic life and took the quality of a violent restitution of stolen goods – to everybody in general and nobody in particular.[85]

Wells advocated a popular form of socialism transmitted by ideas that he believed were simpler than theories of total revolution, collectivisation and proletarian rule. Wells' vision could therefore be characterised as a form of paternal socialism, an idea that found its ultimate expression in his proposals for a world state. Unhappy with either pole as they existed in Britain, he found the Fabians to suffer from "intellectual conservatism" while Karl Marx had been:

> an uninventive man with... a subconscious knowledge of his own uninventiveness... he lacked the imaginative power necessary to synthesize a project. His exceptionally intense egotism insisted therefore in a pose of scientific necessitarianism and a depreciation of any social inventiveness. He fostered among his associates a real jealousy of the creative imagination, imaginative dullness, masqueraded among them as sound common-sense, and, making plans, 'Utopianism' that is, became at last one of the blackest bugbears in the long lists dictated by Marxist intolerance. [86]

With his emphasis on what he considered to be "destructive revolution", Wells wrote off Marxism and "Foreign Socialism" as impractical ideologies while he advocated a "scientific" rather than "politic" brand of radicalism.[87] For Wells, scientific socialism could

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[85] Ibid, pp.252-255.
[86] Ibid, pp.263-264.
[87] Ibid, p.248.

only be pursued through parliamentary democracy and reform while foreign "revolutionism" or Marxism, was responsible for having "sterilized Socialism for half a century."[88]

Wells viewed his own fiction as a means of popularising these political ideas and *The Invisible Man* is no exception to this rule. He considered the act of writing to be closely implicated the kind of cultural and political surroundings described by Habermas and Benjamin: "I was disposed to regard a novel as about as much an art form as a market place or a boulevard." This view of literature-as-commodity led him to contradict Henry James' notions of literary realism[89] and even led to the end of his friendship with Conrad, who in 1898 addressed him as "O! Realist of the Fantastic" and praised the "diabolical psychology" of the novel that "plants its points right into a man's bowels".[90] Wells argued that "the Novel was not necessarily, as he (James) assumed, this real through and through and absolutely real treatment of people more living than life... realism and exhaustive presentation were not its only objectives." This position on the role of fiction therefore explains how Wells' concern with foreign socialism and what he considered to be its extremist rhetoric are so fundamental to a reading of an apparently fantastic fiction such as *The Invisible Man*. Theories such as James' were the product of "the broad smooth flow of nineteenth-century life in Great Britain," where "the art of fiction floated" in the "assumption of social fixity." The realist novel "produced in an atmosphere of security for the entertainment of secure people who liked to feel established and safe for good." Despite his apparent conservativism in the face of the threat of "foreign" socialism, Wells had a radical view of the role that fiction could play in addressing the social and political concerns of his day. The "respectable"[91] reading public constituted the public sphere that Habermas describes and with the publication of his fictions, Wells claimed, "the splintering frame began to get into the picture". Adopting

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[88] Ibid, p.264.

[89] Wells, ibid, pp.488-489.

[90] Conrad to H.G Wells, 4th December, 1898, in Conrad, Joseph, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol. 2, 1898-1902 (Cambrdige: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.126-127.

[91] In 1941 George Orwell recalled that during his boyhood he discovered that Wells was "a true prophet": "Back in the nineteen hundreds it was a wonderful experience for a boy to discover H.G. Wells. There you were, in a world of pedants, clergymen and golfers, with your future employers exhorting you to 'get on or get out', your parents systematically warping your sexual life, and your dim-witted schoolmasters sniggering over Latin tags; and here was this wonderful man who could tell you about the inhabitants of the planets and the bottom of the sea, and who *knew* that the future was not going to be what respectable people imagined." Disappointed in Wells' pursuit of "paper dragons" after 1920, Orwell believed that the author "squandered" his subversive talent. See Orwell, "Wells, Hitler and the World State", *Collected Essays* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975), p.165.

this radical literary and cultural position, he claimed, provided him with a "free hand" and an "unrestricted field".[92]

If Wells' fiction amounts to "a ventilation of the point at issue"[93] rather than a pure and theoretically-concerned art form such as James', then his treatment of terrorism in *The Invisible Man*, along with the novel's subject matter of anarchism and an attempted overthrow of British sovereignty places it firmly at odds with the complacent reading habits of Habermas' bourgeois public sphere. As a figure drawn from the popular political imagination the Invisible Man functions as another one of the "promiscuous range of effects" produced during the late nineteenth-century, when a heightened visual and sensory field, wherein observers might "consume vast new amounts of visual imagery and information",[94] was initiated. As well as becoming an emblematic figure of popular fiction and later cinematic popular culture the Invisible Man stands primarily for the unreadable political culture of the anarchists and other socialists whom Wells considered extremists. Although the public field of perception is resisted and even disrupted by Griffin's subversive tactics he is ultimately overcome by a popular response from labourers and other urban workers who, just as Wells himself criticised foreign revolutionaries, also reject the anarchist and his "Reign of Terror".

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[92] Wells, Ibid, pp.491-495.
[93] Ibid, p.497.
[94] Crary, ibid, p.96.

Chapter 4

Sanscullotism, Tunbril and Tocsin: *BLAST* and the Radical Politics of Vorticism

Many readers have associated the politics of literary modernism, and particularly those of Vorticism, with extreme rightwing ideologies. Both Paul Peppis and Frederic Jameson have, with hindsight, pointed to the apparently "protofascist" [1] nature of the Vorticist group. In contrast, this chapter will argue that their movement was instead regarded by contemporary readers as a "post-terrorist" literary phenomenon that drew on contemporary popular concerns about subversive political violence and reprocessed the rhetoric of revolution as modernist literature. Vorticism was a short-lived but important avant-garde movement that appeared on the literary, artistic and political scenes with the publication of two numbers of its journal, *BLAST*, in 1914 and 1915. Projecting themselves as a revolutionary grouping committed to "the fundamental and popular instincts in every class and description of people",[2] the "Vorticists" were a circle of writers, artists and sculptors gathered around the critic, painter, novelist, and political commentator, Percy Wyndham Lewis; they included the American poet Ezra Pound and the French sculptor, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. This grouping had as its goal the aesthetic championing of "The Great English Vortex", which, they claimed, was a particularly British form of advanced modernism aimed at creating an aesthetic that was both typographically and stylistically designed to express how "writing as an art is very susceptible to shock."[3] This chapter will examine the radical aesthetics of *BLAST* and its Vorticist champions in the context of the political shocks caused by the radical and subversive groups that preceded it, such as the Irish-American dynamitards, the anarchists of the fin-de-siecle and the Suffragette movement (the influence of radical feminism upon Vorticism has been extensively explored in Alex Houen's *Terrorism and Modern Literature*, and therefore will not be repeated here[4]). The experience of terrorism so informed the modern consciousness that by the time of the publication of the first

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[1] Peppis, Paul, *Literature, Politics and the English Avant-Garde: Nation and Empire, 1901-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.1 and Jameson, Frederic, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Futurist* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1979), p.15.
[2] "The Great Revolutionary Vortex", *BLAST: REVIEW OF THE GREAT ENGLISH VORTEX*, No. 1, June 20th, 1914, p.7.
[3] Lewis, Wyndham, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1937), p.260.
[4] See Houen, Alex, *Terrorism and Modern Literature, From Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. Chapter 2, "Wyndham Lewis: Literary 'Strikes' and Allegorical Assaults", pp. 93-142.

issue of *BLAST* in June 1914 political violence had become a key spectacle of modernity. The terrorist's methods of violent subversion were appropriated by the Vorticist movement, which adopted the declamatory methods of the dynamiters, the radical feminists and of the anarchists: it fine-tuned these subversive practices and finally gave them a uniquely avant-garde expression in *BLAST*. Vorticism presented itself as an artistic development of the subversive journalism and the actual political terrorism examined in the previous chapters; *BLAST* provided its readers with an aesthetic saturated by the rhetoric of revolutionary politics an always looming threat to bourgeois normality. As the very title of the journal suggests, the key figure for this subversiveness was the image of an exploding bomb. Lewis tried to reinvent himself as a fascist in the early 1930s, and in his infamous book *Hitler,* published in 1931, he described himself as "an exponent... of German Nationalsocialism (*sic*), or Hitlerism", praised Nazism for its "accent of passion and of impressive conviction" and described Adolf Hitler, as a "Man of Peace", while while dismissing Nazis' anti-semitism was no more than a "preliminary snag".[5] But before the rise of German National Socialism Lewis hitched his art onto another political bandwagon – that of anarchist subversion.

BLAST circulated a series of avant-garde literary manifestos, showcasing the Vorticists' shocking poetics and uncompromising aesthetic position against the background of recent political disturbances. Their adoption of such an extreme platform, whereby Lewis, in particular, elevated the aesthetically conscious individual above the desensitised masses, led to the popular perception of their brand of advanced modernism as a form of "literary terrorism". In owing such a cultural and stylistic debt to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century terrorists, Vorticism remains distinct from other expressions of early modernism, such as F.T. Marinetti's Italian Futurist movement. Indeed Futurism is criticised throughout the pages of *BLAST* for its appeal to the masses by means of an ironic form of primitivism, which Lewis complained, was expressed in Marinetti's worship of technologies such as the "Automobile-God". Unlike Futurism, with its praise of industrial and technological advancement, Vorticism laid particular stress on the role of the individual artist in what it perceived to be an age of negative and backward "democracy". The movement's aesthetic anarchism contradicted the Futurists' allegiance with the Italian state and Lewis lambasted Marinetti for his association with government and for allowing himself to be "fêted at Rome officially as the precursor of fascismo". If

[5] Lewis, Wyndham, *Hitler* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1931), pp.4, 11.

"Fascism is merely Futurism in practice",[6] as Lewis complained, by the very nature of its dissociation from the state and of its advocacy of individual subversive aesthetic action, Vorticism can be read as a form of literary anarchism and as the aesthetic sequel to its practical and political antecedent, terrorism.

The Vorticists combined an anarchistic, subversive sense of the responsibilities of the aesthetically-conscious individual with more reactionary and typically modernist fears of the masses and their increasing political influence, similar to those expressed by early sociologists such as Gustave Le Bon, which have been examined in Chapter 3. In 1895 Le Bon had noted "The substitution of the unconscious action of crowds for the conscious activity of individuals" as being "one of the principal characteristics of the present age."[7] Late nineteenth-century sociological fears of the "unconscious" crowd, within which experts like Le Bon feared that "conscious personality vanishes"[8] are countered by Vorticism's modernist desire to resurrect the "conscious" individual. Therefore while *BLAST* shares some of its political leanings with anarchist philosophers like Pierre Joseph Proudhon - whose foundational anarchist text, *Que c'est la propriété*, Lewis read - the journal's élitist anarchism is also characterised by the way in which it foregrounds Lewis' paranoia at what he considered to be the unwholesome influence of democracy. Like Le Bon, Lewis also expressed a fear of "the crowd" and its mass politics, sharing the French sociologist's belief that when he takes part in any kind of mass mobilisation "a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation."[9]

First issued in June, 1914, shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, *BLAST*, as its title suggests, was designed to shock the aesthetic sensibilities of its readers. As well as expressing a radical literary style the journal also featured an experimental typography that was designed to shock. So, too, were its origins: the seat of "the Great London Vortex" was the Rebel Art Centre in Great Ormond Street, from which copies of *BLAST* were distributed. With its sensational manifestos demanding that whatever was stagnant in art and society be "blasted" away, Lewis "shot into fame as editor of *Blast*". Although he was quickly labelled "the arch-futurist", this was "a misnomer". Lewis soon found that his "anonymity was gone", and although he was "plunged back into anonymity once more" with the outbreak of the First World War the following August, "the brief spell of sudden celebrity"[10]

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[6] Lewis, Wyndham, *Time and Western Man*, p.213.
[7] Le Bon, Gustave, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, Translated From *La Psycologie des Foules* (1895), (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896), Preface, vi.
[8] Ibid, p.2.
[9] Ibid,p.13.
[10] Lewis, Wyndham, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p.26.

heralded by the publication of *BLAST* was unique: "from a position of relative obscurity, I became extremely well-known... by August 1914 no newspaper was complete without news about "vorticism" and its arch-exponent Mr. Lewis." Lewis remembered that as "*chef de bande* of the Vorticists" he "cut a figure in London". "There were no politics then", he recalled, but thanks to the notorious reputation that the journal had made for itself "I might have been at the head of a social revolution, instead of merely being the prophet of a new fashion in art." While there are no sources to confirm a Lewis's view of himself as a literary terrorist, he insists upon his claim that he was perceived as a revolutionary. He also maintained that the grouping required his leadership because, as an artist, he had the kind of skills needed to confront the bland "bourgeois" institutions that they were targeting:

> Really all this organized disturbance was Art behaving as if it were Politics. But I swear I did not know it. It may in fact have been politics... But I was unaware of the fact: I believed that this was the way artists were always received; a somewhat tumultuous reception, perhaps, but after all why not? I mistook the agitation in the audience for the sign of an awakening in the emotions of artistic sensibility. And then I assumed too that artists always formed militant groups. I supposed they had to do this, seeing how "bourgeois" all Publics were – or all Publics of which I had any experience. And I concluded that as a matter of course some romantic figure must always emerge, to captain the "group". Like myself! How otherwise could a "group" get about, and above all *talk*. For it had to have a mouthpiece, didn't it? I was so little of a communist that it never occurred to me that left to itself a group might express itself *in chorus*. The "leadership" principle, you will observe, was in my bones. (pp.35-36)

Despite his claim to political naiveté, Lewis drew attention to himself as the pioneer of a new, popular and stylish brand of "agitation" by assuming control of the leadership of a revolutionary and "militant" art grouping. He claimed that his subversive celebrity was due to the strength of the British press, which in this period was relatively apolitical and that in this cultural environment the written word was relatively unadulterated by other competing media such as film or the wireless:

> the painter could really become a "star." There was nothing against it. Anybody could become one, who did anything funny. And Vorticism was replete with humour, of course; it was acclaimed the best joke

> ever. Pictures, I mean oil paintings, were "news." Exhibitions were reviewed in column after column. And no illustrated paper worth its salt but carried a photograph of some picture of mine or of my "school"... or one of myself, smiling insinuatingly from its pages. To the photograph would be attached some scrap of usually quite misleading gossip; or there would be an article from my pen, explaining why life had to be changed, and how. "Kill John Bull with Art!" I shouted. And John and Mrs. Bull leapt for joy, in a cynical convulsion. For they felt safe as houses. So did I. [11]

Although *BLAST* was obscured within weeks by what Lewis called the "fog of war", it propelled his proposed literary revolt into the public eye. While the "blaze of publicity" that the journal produced was brief, its publication and subsequent media curiosity nevertheless gave "the finishing touch" to a year's worth of self-advertising by the painter. Having achieved the necessary publicity, Lewis was integrated into "what is called 'society'":

> Everyone by way of being fashionably interested in art, and many who have never opened a book or bought so much as a sporting-print, much less 'an oil', wanted to look at this new oddity, thrown up by that amazing spook, the Zeitgeist. So the luncheon and dinner-tables of Mayfair were turned into show-booths. For a few months I was in constant exhibition. (...) The editor of *Blast* must at all costs be viewed; and its immense puce cover was the standing joke in the fashionable drawing-room, from Waterloo Place to the border-line in Belgravia.[12]

Even though it appeared, incongruously, "not unlike a telephone book", *BLAST*'s radical chic captured the imagination of the trendy London set and the journal became the must-have literary and artistic item of the season. Its popularity, Lewis claimed, served as "an object lesson in the attitude of what remained of the aristocratic life in England to the arts" and after the fad died down, he never again "consorted with... those delightful people". Despite "the poor results of all this publicity" in the long-term, Lewis nevertheless took the opportunity to entertain his wealthy hosts as he realised that their collective fixation with *BLAST* might be turned to the radical aesthetic ends of the Vorticists:

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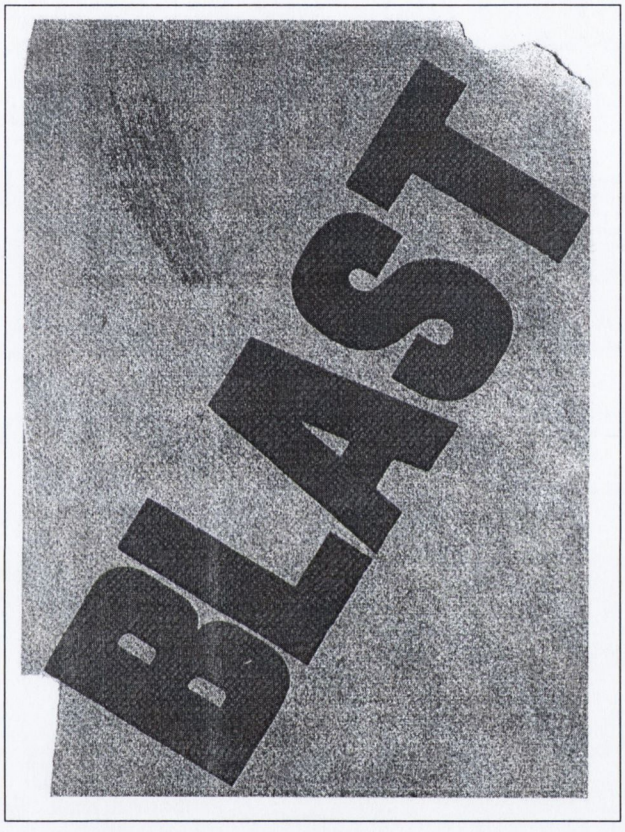
[11] Ibid, pp.39-40.
[12] Ibid, pp.50-51.

> Rapidly I understood that the champagne of luncheon tables and the vulgar paraphernalia of butlers and druggets were all that was to be got out of them. But this nursery of almost mindless spoilt-children was a sort of barren accolade, of a farcical celebrity. Good-humouredly I accepted it; for, indirectly, it might serve the cause of 'rebel' or of 'abstract art and revolutionary letters, I reflected. I was content to starve on champagne and caviare for a season. [13]



With "an immense puce cover" and looking "not unlike a telephone book", *BLAST* was, according to Lewis, first and foremost, a modernist "publicity device".

Such was the popularity of the journal that Lewis' spate of "furious junketing"[14] culminated in an invitation to meet the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, who, like the rest of the journal's rich fans, read a deeper political message in the pages of *BLAST*. But despite having revelled in his role as a soirée showpiece Lewis was

[13], Ibid, pp.51-52.
[14] Ibid, p.53.

rattled that the "political figurehead" of "old Liberal society" suspected that Vorticism was a cover-name for an international terrorist conspiracy:

> Mr. Asquith unquestionably displayed a marked curiosity regarding the 'Great London Vortex,' in which he seemed to think there was more than met the eye. He smelled politics beneath this revolutionary technique. I, of course, was quite at a loss to understand what he was driving at. That it should be suspected that an infernal machine was hidden in the midst of the light-hearted mockery of my propaganda was to me fantastic. I was questioned at length about my principles. I remember especially that he asked me 'whether I was in touch with people of similar views in other countries.' Yes, I admitted, I had corresponded with continental painters, critics and men of letters. He nodded his head thoughtfully at this. It was obvious it gave him food for thought. Here was a movement masking itself beneath the harmless trappings of the fine arts, and camouflaged as a fashionable stunt of the studios, but with wide ramifications in all countries, and with unavowed political objectives. It cracked jokes, attached to it was a technical mumbo-jumbo to rattle and hoodwink the fashionable crowd. Its so called pictures looked like plastic ciphers or properties of the magician. And here was its high-priest![15]

Asquith regarded the journal's unreadable and therefore radical manifestos and typographical novelties as more than an avant-garde code – to him, if we are to believe the claims made by Lewis, it was the stuff of foreign revolutionary propaganda. While he had spent the past weeks entertaining party-going toffs and high-society art patrons the Prime Minister had been busily scanning the cipher-laden journal for hidden political meanings. The figurehead of Britain's political etablishment, it seems, had scanned *BLAST* for subversive material and suspected that its explosive style might reflect an equally explosive political message. Believing that despite his own good humour he must have remained just as "impenetrable" to the Prime Minister as his journal had proven, Lewis failed to convince the Premier of his movement's apolitical nature and admitted that his project of achieving an artistic revolution could only have appeared subversive, and in the direct line of radical dissent initiated by the architects of the French Revolution:

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[15] Ibid, p.55.

> He thought of the *philosophes*. He saw in "the Vortex" a political portent. His attitude to it, and to me, was that of an expert on his mettle, confronted with a political crossword-puzzle of the greatest ingenuity.I was, I protest again, completely innocent of all political motives. I saw that if London was to be pulled down (and this I advocated, and still advocate) that vested interests would be involved. That much was evident, but even of that I was not over-conscious... for my part I was an artist, first and last... But the Prime Minister of England could not be expected to accept this simple explanation. For the destruction of a capital is a highly political operation. And these blasting operations so clamourously advocated, suggested dissatisfaction with the regime as well as with the architecture of the houses. And "Kill John Bull With Art!" The title of one of my most notorious articles – there was a jolly piece of sanscullotism. What could that mean, if it did not point to tumbril and tocsin?

Lewis claimed that Asquith's reading of the politically subversive nature of Vorticism continued and entered their discussion throughout further meetings between the pair. Before long "a little secret" developed between the men:

> Although what he *mentioned* were mere pointed 'futurist' absurdities, this was as it were a code. We were in fact discussing matters of far more import. I might almost have been a member of a powerful secret society. I could not have had bestowed upon me a more attentive regard if I had been.[16]

Like the subversive cipher of Stepniak's Nihilists and the codes containing the Invisible Man's scientific secrets that are discussed in the previous chapter, Vorticism's modernist code was, according to Lewis, read as the stuff of political revolt. That the French Revolution still haunted even the Liberal imagination indicates the influence of Thomas Carlyle's warning, made in 1837, that the revolutionary terror was "the Crowning Phenomenon of our Modern Time."[17] For Asquith, at least, Vorticism was a threatening revolutionary and political discourse that connected British artists to the continental underground. Conjuring Dickensian images of sanscullotism, tunbril and tocsin in the mind of the Prime Minister, *BLAST*, to some extent, filled the political void left by the extinction of the radical anarchist

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[16] Ibid, pp.55-57.
[17] Carlyle, Thomas, *The French Revolution: A History*, p.179.

press that occurred with the collapse of the anarchist movement under the pressure of the *lois scélérats*, a series of repressive measures initiated against anarchists and their propaganda by the French government following the assassination of President Sadi Carnot by the Italian anarchist Santo Jeronimo Caserio in June, 1894. The repression in France culminated in the *Procés des Trente*, a high-profile trial during which anarchists, including journalists and radical newspaper editors such as Sebastien Faure, Jean Grave and Félix Fénéon were accused of subversion. Combined with a large degree of political exhaustion on the part of the revolutionaries themselves, this legislation drove many French anarchists into the more conventional, if no less radical syndicalist movement.[18] While their incorporation into the trade unions was certainly motivated by the realisation of many anarchists that their movement was failing and badly in need of a new ideological direction, others were no doubt attracted to the *syndicats* by the cover offered to individual and outlawed subversives by participation in a popular mass movement. With the subsequent reduction in anarchist propaganda suspicious officials and governments began to look elsewhere for subversion. As we have seen with the case of *The Torch*, French anarchists played no little part in the production and circulation of subversive literature in London, and their political demise had a knock-on effect in the British capital. And just like the Rossettis and their fictional heroine, Isabel Meredith, many British anarchists had become disillusioned with their increasingly dogmatic movement. Despite Wyndham Lewis' claim that he was "a political ignoramus"[19], *BLAST* nonetheless stepped into the imaginary space vacated by these anarchist writers and it served the Vorticists as more than pure publicity as the journal shocked the artistic, literary and political establishments which were either titillated by its radical style or had their suspicions raised by its unreadable content. Lewis recalled that "no more highbrow publication ever saw the light in England than *Blast*",[20] but he also promoted the journal's revolutionary profile, and its manifestos, extreme poetics and decidedly subversive political tone provide an example of how the literary and verbal methods of terrorism influenced Britain's modernist avant-garde and their readers.

The shocking nature of warfare is made clear In Lewis' later writing, particularly in his 1927 memoir, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, but as a Vorticist he was also conscious of the impact of political conflict upon aesthetic matters and

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[18] Sorel, Georges, *Reflections on Violence*, trans. from *Réflections Sur la Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings, trans. T.E. Hulme, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univerity Press, 1999), footnote, p.152.
[19] *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p.67.
[20] Ibid, p.68.

wanted "to show how war, art, civil war, strikes and coup d'états dovetail into each other." In a political atmosphere that was imbued with images of conflict, Lewis informed his readers: "You will be astonished to find how like art is to war, I mean 'modernist art'. They talk a lot about how a war just finished effects art. But... a war *about to start* can do the same thing." Although *BLAST* is conventionally read as an example of the literature of "the war about to start", that is, of the First World War, it can also be understood as a literary rendering of the kind of political troubles that affect modern society; a political reading contextualizes *BLAST*'s literary content. Lewis' grander model of "dovetailing" violence was influenced by George Sorel's "pessimistic conception"[21] of "the historical role of violence"[22] in civilisation (Sorel's 1906 work *Reflections on Violence* was translated from French by Lewis' friend, T.E. Hulme). Lewis' comment that, "as an artist one is always holding the mirror up to politics", underlines the journal's politicised aesthetic. Lewis believed that conflict and literature were enmeshed ("war and art have been mixed up from the start")[23] to the extent that "my politics – like politics as a whole – become more like fiction everyday", making the era in which he wrote and painted "propitious" for him.[24] As a subversive, politicised avant-gardist, Lewis typifies the fractious, oppositional and contradictory character of the Modernist avant-garde, with its various groupings, such as the left-wing German Expressionists and Russian Constructivism, and the Surrealists, who launched a project of involvement with the French Communist Party. As Raymond Williams has pointed out, this "oppositional" manner of self-positioning also had ideological implications as "the politics of the avant-garde, from the beginning, could go either way."[25] "The antithetical nature of the doctrines and practices" of the various modernisms, whether symbolism, expressionism, cubism, futurism or constructivism, were politically "ambidextrous",[26] as Perry Anderson points out. Ironically, his anti-bourgeois stance and appropriation of an anarchic self-image was abandoned by the late 1920s for a much more right-wing set of ideologies and the new Lewis was happy to support the crowd-baiting politics of the German National Socialists and the political centralism of the Nazi state. In the absence of

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[21] Sorel, *Reflections On Violence*, p. 8.
[22] Ibid, p.15.
[23] Lewis, Ibid, p.4.
[24] Ibid, p.6.
[25] See Williams, Raymond, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1996), pp38-51, p.62.
[26] Anderson, Perry, "Modernity and Revolution", in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberge (London: MacMillan, 1988), pp.317-333, pp. 323, 325.

"objectively given structures"[27] the emergence of the kind of fractured, oppositional groups cited by Williams is inevitable. As Andreas Huyssen states, the broad culture of modernity which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century developed through the twentieth is characterised by a volatile relationship between high art and mass culture, so that modernism is appears as "a conscious strategy of exclusion". Faced with the threat of becoming engulfed and dissolved by mass culture, these groups separated themselves from the practices of daily life but also engaged in a cultural exercise by launching "a plethora of strategic moves tending to destabilize the high/low [cultural] opposition from within."[28] Vorticism's engagement with the language and imagery of terrorism, which until the moment of literary modernism had traditionally been the stuff of popular fiction (it is also processed as literary capital in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*), amounts to one of these attempts to address the high-low dialectic of modern culture, which began to emerge at this moment, by using imagistic shocks and experimental textual and literary methods to explore the new but disorienting mass culture. What marks Vorticism, and Wyndham Lewis' persistent self-publicising and public posturing as a subversive, is their commodification of terrorism and absorption of it into their own literary culture industry. In its appeal for notoriety the Vorticists' modernist take on political subversion amounts to a modernist version of the publicity-methods of Charles Henry Dent and Francis Bawn, the misguided publicists who used letter bombs to advertise their periodical, *Answers*, in 1894.

Lewis, like Sorel, also indicated the point at which anarchistic ideologies can actually meet with far-right thinking. Pointing to the inevitability of "Class Wars" that are "necessitated by the conditions of the Industrial Age" and "which honeycomb our Western democratic communities today", he claimed that a dialectic of endless struggle emerges from modern industrialised society, making the "endless" class war with its attendant "amusement value", or "news-value", inevitable. In Germany, Lewis argued, Nazi street fighters and militias were triumphing over Marxist "terror"[29] but this fascist preoccupation with struggle-for-its-own-sake was inherited from the anarchists. For example, George Sorel's troubling analysis of class conflict has inspired militant trades unionists, anarchists and fascists alike. Equally, Vorticism's violent modernism functioned as a literary manifestation of this apparently contradictory political phenomenon. Like Sorel, Vorticism stressed shocking content,

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[27] Vattimo, Gianni, *The Transparent Society* (*La società transparente*, Garzante Editore, 1989) Translated from the Italian by David Webb (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp.59, 112, 113.
[28] Huyssen, Andreas, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), viii.
[29] Lewis, *Hitler*, pp. 35, 74, 76,59.

especially that which shocked the bourgeoisie. Even the Italian dictator, Benito Mussolini, began his political career as a left-wing journalist and had admired the anarchists who died in the Siege of Sidney Street in 1910, praising them in his salad days as "anarchists in the classical sense of the word" and as "haters, negators, destroyers of society".[30]

The British prime minister's anxiety at this new literary, possibly even political, gang of rebels might have been due not just to their all-round radicalism but also to their relative youth, Lewis claimed, and, thanks to Ezra Pound's organizing flair, Vorticism had been endowed with the look of "a youth-racket". Given that the First World War was kick-started by young terrorists of the Bosnian Serb anarcho-nationalist youth movement, The Black Hand,[31] Asquith's curiosity as to whether Lewis' group might have had ulterior political motives may not be as far-fetched as it seems. "The men of 1914", Lewis claimed, were influenced by Pound's admiration for Disraeli's "Young England". Pound's "boyscoutery" succeeded "in giving a handful of disparate and unassimilable people the appearance of *Bewegung*" or agitation. Although "Ezra was not a politician *de metier*, and his racket was merely an art-racket", he invented the word "vorticist" and provided the group with the necessary literary and agitational chic:

> All politics to-day, and all the "Youth-racket" element in politics, are put across by means of men-of-letters, journalists, *philosophes*, or the propaganda of intellectualist sects, groups, and phalansteries, rather than via the Clubs or on the floor of the House of Commons... there was a tidy bit of political contraband tucked away in our technical militancy.[32]

For Lewis, Pound was "a born revolutionary, a Trotsky of the written word and the painted shape" and whenever

> he detected the slightest hint of a fractious disposition, expressing itself in verse or pigment, he became delirious. He instructed the incipient

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[30] Quoted in Megano, Gaudens, *Mussolini dal unito al realtor* (Milan: 1947), quoted in Joll, James, *The Anarchists* (London: Methuen, 1969), pp. 161-162.

[31] In Stephen Graham's 1930 novel, *St Vitus Day*, which fictionalises the events leading up to the assassinations of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austro-Hungary and his wife Sophie Chotek, in Sarajevo on June 28th, 1914, the teenage rebel Gavrilo Princip and his colleagues in the Black Hand terrorist organisation are addicted to modern political literature. They share books by Kroptkin and Stepniak and one even reads a translation of Wells' *A Modern Utopia*. See Graham, Stephen, *St Vitus Day* (London: E. Benn, 1930).

[32] Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, pp.254-255.

> roughneck how to construct the infernal machine, he would spare no pains. I have encountered many a carbuncular little protégé of Ezra's who would produce from a breast-pocket a packet letters, full of instructions and admonitions – all typed in a violent blue ink, and written in the most fantastic jargon. He was a tireless agitator. A most healthy destructive force, but more promiscuous than is possible. I have called him a 'Revolutionary Simpleton.'[33]

This scene encapsulates the Vorticicts' militant aesthetic, wherein art functioned as a bomb, or "infernal machine", as Lewis would have it, and Pound's sinister, jargon-filled instructions on how to paint or write poetry took on a violent and agitational character. Pound's style, which might be described as a form of literary terrorism, filtered through the entire group, since he was their "busy Manager, and propagandist"[34] and it was the American poet's technical militancy that came to characterise *BLAST*.

BLAST

Vorticism clearly imagined itself in the tradition of radical literature and activism. Lewis insisted that his movement was of equal if not greater consequence than the political- and art-movements that had come before: "we were the first one this century. And although there have been hundreds since – there is a new one every month or so – ours was the most important."[35] With its publication in June 1914, when "Europe was full of titanic stirrings and snortings", *BLAST* conveyed the impression that "a new art" was "coming to flower to celebrate or announce a 'new age.'"[36] This new age was, of course, cut short by another radical "youth-racket" in Sarajevo, and the Vorticist experiment was drowned out by the real blasts of the First World War. Although a second issue, the aesthetically conservative "War Number", was published in July 1915, the promised third instalment never materialised.

The first number opens with "The Great Revolutionary Vortex", a manifesto that declares "Long Live the Vortex!" and introduces Lewis's movement as one that stands "for the Reality of the Present – not for the sentimental Future, or the

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[33] Ibid., p.285.
[34] Ibid., p.290.
[35] Ibid, p.255.
[36] Ibid, pp.255-256.

sacripant Past."[37] Characterised by this immediacy, Vorticism announced itself as a kind of literary and artistic explosion. Its stylistic "explosiveness" is underlined by Vorticism's insistence upon its separation from other cosmopolitan art movements, and by the emphasis that *BLAST* places upon its art as pure "energy":

> We do not want to change the appearance of the world, because we are not Naturalists, Impressionists or Futurists (the latest form of Impressionism), and do not depend on the appearance of the world for our art. WE ONLY WANT THE WORLD TO LIVE, and to feel its crude energy flowing through us. It may be said that great artists in England are always revolutionary, just as in France any really fine artist had a strong traditional rein. (p.7)

Vorticism's aesthetic character is placed within the tradition of British radicalism, presenting revolution as the natural mode for the British artist. But the manifesto continues by placing Vorticism not just within a politically radical tradition but by identifying the movement as a vehicle for aesthetic terrorism: "Blast sets out to be an avenue for all those with vivid and violent ideas that could reach the public in no other way." There is "no other way", the manifesto tells us, for the avant-garde to make their presence felt. Therefore, just as terrorism appealed to the dynamitards and anarchists of the late nineteenth century because of its publicity-effect, the "vivid" and "violent" terror-effect of Vorticist literature and art made it the chosen method of Lewis and his "*bande*" of avant-garde modernists. The manifesto claims that, like the subversive political spectacles of the Victorian dynamiters and urban anarchists of the *fin-de-siècle*, like the Invisible Man's condition, Vorticism will have its own voyeuristic appeal:

> Blast will be popular, essentially. It will not appeal to any particular class, but to the fundamental and popular instincts in every class and description of people, TO THE INDIVIDUAL. The moment a man feels or realises himself as an artist he ceases to belong to any milieu or time. Blast is created for this timeless, fundamental artist that exists in everybody.
>
> The Man in the Street and the Gentleman are equally ignored.
>
> Popular art does not mean the art of the people, as it is supposed to. It means the art of individuals. (p.7)

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[37] Subsequent quotations are from "*BLAST: REVIEW OF THE GREAT ENGLISH VORTEX*, No. 1, June 20th, 1914.

Echoing Le Bon's anxiety at "the triumph of the atavistic instincts" that characterises the modern crowd[38] and Max Nordau's distrust for the capricious "brain activity of the degenerate and hysterical",[39] as the German sociologist described popular behaviour at the end of the nineteenth century, *BLAST* proposes the alternative of a timeless and universal nature - the art-instinct - that can be found in every individual. Given the historical background to the period which saw the publication of *BLAST*, in which the terror-tactics of subversive groups, such as the anarchists who fired on police during the Sidney Street Siege of 1910, played so prominent a part, Vorticism's attempt at a radical, popular modernist aesthetic, in which artistic fundamentalism plays the central role, pursues the same logic as modern terrorism. *BLAST*'s disdain for the "milieu" and its championing of "the art of individuals" has a very political resonance, making Vorticism appear as an anarchic project: since art has "nothing to do with 'the People'", but is instead in the provenance "of individuals". The movement's goal is to "make the rich of the community shed their education skin" and "to destroy politeness, standardization and academic, that is civilized, vision". (p.7) This aim borders on sedition:

> We will convert the King if possible.
> A VORTICIST KING! WHY NOT?
> DO YOU THINK LLOYD GEORGE HAS THE VORTEX IN HIM?
> MAY WE HAVE ART FROM LADY MOND? (p.8)

But in order to underline Vorticism's function as an aesthetic movement the manifesto stresses that it is as critical of such mass categorizations as "the People" and "the poor" as much as it is "against snobbery":

> The "Poor" are detestable animals! They are only picturesque and amusing for the sentimentalist or the romantic! The "Rich" are bores without a single exception, *en tant que les riches*!
>
> We want those simple and great people found everywhere.
> Blast presents an art of Individuals. (p.8)

Sentiment has no place in the Vorticists' revolt against the system and this opening claim to aesthetic and political individualism presents the artist as a detached and

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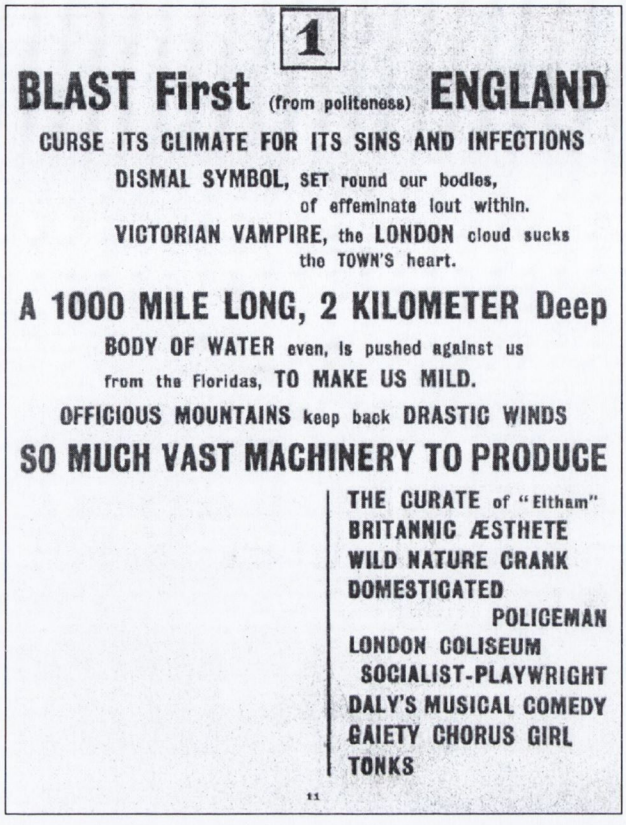
[38] Le Bon, *The Crowd*, p.66.
[39] Nordau, Max, *Degeneration*, translated from the second German edition (London: Heinemann, 1895), p.56.

autonomous free agent in terms similar to those outlined in the anarchist journals that we have already seen. The journal then goes on to outline Vorticism's radical proposals for an overhaul of the British artistic and political scene in a set of manifestoes.

"Manifesto – I" opens by offering a series of "Blasts", or damnations, of various British inadequacies and failings. With such an extensive list of gripes, resented individuals and disliked national institutions, *BLAST*'s opening piece reads like the manifesto of a seriously disaffected revolutionary group. Its targets include the nation's climate, which is blasted "FOR ITS SINS AND INFECTIONS" and the London smog, which is condemned as the "VICTORIAN VAMPIRE" that "sucks the TOWN'S heart." England is criticised for its soft domesticity and its "VAST MACHINERY" which produces the "DOMESTICATED POLICEMAN", the "LONDON COLISEUM", the "SOCIALIST PLAYWRIGHT", "DALY'S MUSICAL COMEDY", the "GAIETY CHORUS GIRL" and "TONKS". Here, popular theatres such as Daly's and the Gaiety are targeted alongside Henry Tonks, who taught at the Slade School of Art (his pupils included the Cubist Christopher Nevinson). The manifesto goes on to curse England's "flabby sky that can manufacture no snow but can only drop the sea on us in a drizzle like a poem by Mr. Robert Bridges." It curses "the lazy air" and hopes that "some vulgarly inventive, but useful person, (will) arise, and restore to us the necessary BLIZZARDS." France is also blasted for its "SENTIMENTAL GALLIC GUSH", its "SENSATIONALISM", "FUSSINESS" and "PARISIAN PAROCHIALNESS". The French hit-list continues in a manner not dissimilar from Émile Henry's courtroom tirade against the entire bourgeoisie, with blasts aimed at everything from aperitifs to bad change. As with the Futurists' manifestos, the Vorticists' list of targets seems endless: "Naively seductive Houri Salon-picture cocottes" receive a blast, as do France's slouching porters, her "Stupidly rapacious people at every step" and the country's "Economy maniacs". "Ubiquitous lines of silly little trees", "Arcs de Triomphe", "Imperturbable, endless prettiness", "Large empty cliques, higher up" and "Bad air for the individual" are also cited among the Vorticist's French targets, as is Paris for serving as the "MECCA OF THE AMERICAN... because it is not other side of Suez Canal, instead of an afternoon's ride from London." (pp.11-14)

Britain's nineteenth century cultural legacy is next. A tirade is opened against the entire Victorian period with a blast against "years 1837 to 1900" for its "abysmal, inexcusable middle class" and its aristocracy and proletariat. By offering such a sweeping "blast" attacking the entire social spectrum, from the aristocracy to the



1

BLAST First (from politeness) ENGLAND

CURSE ITS CLIMATE FOR ITS SINS AND INFECTIONS

DISMAL SYMBOL, SET round our bodies,
of effeminate lout within.
VICTORIAN VAMPIRE, the LONDON cloud sucks
the TOWN'S heart.

A 1000 MILE LONG, 2 KILOMETER Deep

BODY OF WATER even, is pushed against us
from the Floridas, TO MAKE US MILD.

OFFICIOUS MOUNTAINS keep back DRASTIC WINDS

SO MUCH VAST MACHINERY TO PRODUCE

THE CURATE of "Eltham"
BRITANNIC ÆSTHETE
WILD NATURE CRANK
DOMESTICATED
POLICEMAN
LONDON COLISEUM
SOCIALIST-PLAYWRIGHT
DALY'S MUSICAL COMEDY
GAIETY CHORUS GIRL
TONKS

11

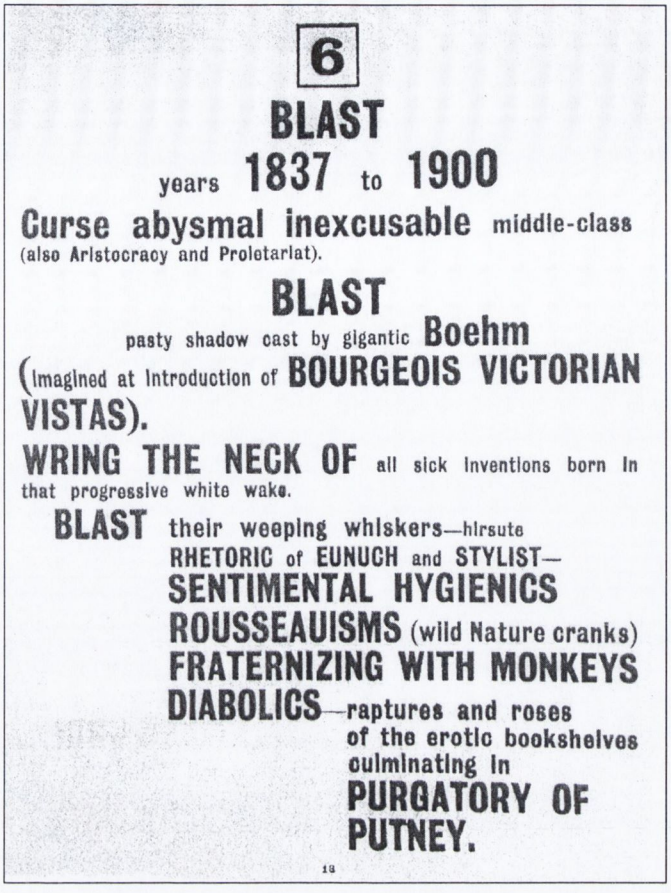
"BLAST First... England" (*BLAST*, No. 1, p.11)

working class, the manifesto appears to try to undermine whatever attempt the reader might make to rationalise its political content, while also achieving a large degree of self-isolation:.here Vorticism also defines itself by excluding anyone who cannot extract a principle from the manifesto, signalling the exclusivity of its group identity. This includes a blast aimed at establishment sculpture as the Victorian plastic arts are targeted for the "pasty shadow cast by gigantic Boehm", the manifesto declaring that one should "WRING THE NECK" of "all such inventions born in that progressive white wake." (p.20) Lewis explained that this sweeping blast was a protest against the "triumph of the commercial mind in England, Victorian "liberalism", the establishment of such apparently indestructible institutions as the English comic paper *Punch*, the Royal Academy and so on". (p.42) Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm, Lewis claimed, was "the sculptor responsible for the worst of the bourgeois statuary". A Viennese by birth, Boehm had risen to become one of the leading establishment sculptors of the late Victorian period, enjoying the patronage of Queen Victoria and the royal family. Boehm's bust and statues include those of the royal family, many of the nobility, artists, such as Whistler, Millais and Holl, satesmen, including Gladstone, Shaftesbury, Lord John Russell (whose statue

stands in Westminster), John Bright and Lord Rosebery, and eminent authors such as William Makepeace Thackeray, Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin. His works also included sculptures of General Gordon and Lord Napier. Boehm also designed the Wellington Monument in Hyde Park Corner, which was erected in 1889. His high-ranking status can be measured by the fact that he modelled the head of Queen Victoria for the Official Jubilee Medal of 1887.[40] Given that the Clan-na-Gael campaign was directed in the main against public monuments and buildings, such as London Bridge, the House of Commons and Nelson's Column (Irish Republican dynamiters were also blamed for hatching the 1887 "Jubilee Plot" against Queen Victoria herself) the Vorticists' rant against one of the most prominent sculptors of the nineteenth century for his "bourgeois statuary" can be interpreted as a form of aesthetic terrorism. The manifesto's protest, in which grand blasts are aimed at the entire system, from the ruling classes down to the workers and the poor, and at the kind of sculpture that comfortably characterised the late Victorian period, is the kind of statement that Asquith found indecipherable and suspected as foreign "revolutionary technique". When considered against Lewis' reception amidst the Mayfair set, the popularity of Vorticism and its anarchic "blasting" serves as an indication of how modish subversion had become by 1914. Although Lewis later claimed that this was not the case the link between terrorism and Vorticism is a clear one and despite his claims to the contrary *BLAST*'s notoriety clearly owes much to this deliberate alignment of its own aesthetic purpose alongside subversive political action.

As the violence of the condemnations increases so does its list of targets drawn from the political and cultural establishment. All of these are condemned "WITH EXPLETIVE OF WHIRLWIND", and "THE BRITANNIC AESTHETE, CREAM OF THE SNOBBISH EARTH" is cursed along with the artistic status quo for its "SIMIAN VANITY", "PLAY", and "STYLISM" which has produced a "LYMPHATIC finished" race of "VEGETABLE HUMANITY". (p.15) The entire spectrum of workers, from the labouring proletariat to the more comfortable bourgeoisie, is also targeted with the "SPECIALIST" and "PROFESSIONAL" receiving a blast alongside the

[40] Grant, Maurice Harland, *A Dictionary of British Sculptors, from the XXIIIth Century to the XXth Century* (London:Rockliff, 1958), p.39.



Manifesto Modernism: "BLAST years 1837 to 1900" (*BLAST*, No. 1, p.18).

"GOOD WORKINGMAN". The manifesto even blasts humour and sport and curses "those who will hang over this Manifesto with SILLY CANINES exposed." (p.17) Nineteenth century culture is again condemned, this time for its "SENTIMENTAL HYGIENICS" and its concern with Darwinism, which is blasted as "FRATERNIZING WITH MONKEYS". (p.18) The Victorians themselves are blamed for turning London into "a provinicial town" filled with "DICKENSIAN CLOWNS" and "TROUPS OF PERFORMING GIPSIES". (p.20) The manifesto also blasts "the Paterists and Wildeites" as "eunuchs and stylists" along with Swinburne for his "literary debauchery".[41] It then goes on to blast a series of individuals, including John Galsworthy, Marie Corelli, Rabindranath Tagore, Sydney Webb, George Grossmith, and Annie Besant, while institutions such as the post office and the British Academy also receive a derisive mention.

The tone of the manifesto changes as it proceeds to "BLESS" England for its isolated position as an Atlantic island. It praises the country's ports, seafaring and

[41] Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, pp.42-43.

trading technologies and its "industrial island machine" within which Englishmen are "cold", magnanimous", "delicate", "gauche", "fanciful" and "stupid". (pp.23-24) Even hairdressers are blessed for trimming "aimless and retrograde growths into CLEAN ARCHED SHAPES and ANGULAR PLOTS" and for "correcting the grotesque anachronisms of our physique." (p.25) Jonathan Swift is also blessed "for his solemn bleak wisdom of laughter", Shakespeare "for his bitter Northern rhetoric of humour" (p.26) and France for its vitality, its "MASTERLY PORNOGRAPHY", "COMBATIVENESS", scepticism, elegance, femininity and the "BALLADS OF ITS PREHISTORIC APACHE". This idealisation of France's criminal and political underground, *des apaches*, is offered alongside praise for the Republic's "GREAT FLOOD OF LIFE pouring out of wound of 1797" and for the "bitterer stream from 1870." (p.27) In tones much less anxious than Carlyle's, France's revolutionary tradition is praised and the vitality of the revolution is measured alongside the defeat, not only of France but also of the Paris Commune, following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. In singling out these events for praise Vorticism identifies with the French tradition of political revolt that horrified the Victorians, adding further subversive context to *BLAST*'s assault on the aesthetic sensibilities of nineteenth century Britain. The individuals that the Manifesto blesses include, among others, James Joyce, the Pope and the radical writer and agitator R.B Cunningham Grahame (but "not his brother"), and the author of the popular 1913 novel *The Lodger* (and sister of the conservative Catholic writer Hillaire Belloc), Mrs Belloc Lowndes. (p.29) Both in its blasts and blessings, then, "Manifesto - I" shows a tendency to punctuate what Lewis described as *BLAST*'s "technical mumbo-jumbo" and "mere pointed 'futurist' absurdities" with decidedly political matter.

"Manifesto – II" rounds on England by criticising the country as "unmusical, anti-artistic" and "unphilosophic". Here, "the thrilling ascendancy and idée fixe of Class" produces "the most intense snobbery in the World". The aristocracy are inbred and their "heavy stagnant pools of Saxon blood" are "incapable of anything but the song of a frog, in home-counties". The result is that "these phenomena give England a peculiar distinction in the wrong sense, among the nations." Yet this conservative pressure is precisely "why England produces such good artists from time to time". The social and political frigidity of the English system "is also the reason why a movement towards art and imagination could burst up here, from this lump of compressed life, with more force than anywhere else." (p.32) England's social and political climate offers "a chaos of imperfection, discord, etc" where the "Art-instinct is permanently primitive". While the "artist of the modern movement is a savage (in no sense an "advanced", perfected, democratic, Futurist individual of Mr.

Marinetti's limited imagination): this enormous, jangling, journalistic, fairy desert of modern life serves him as Nature did more technically primitive man." (p.33) Significantly, the incoherent, "jangling" enormity of modern experiences is journalistic in character, underlining the significance of proclamation and manifesto to the Vorticist project. But it is technically more advanced than simple Nature (this is also a swipe at the poetic sensibility of the Romantics), and offers the artist greater scope. The artist, then, is at large in the politically unstable, virtual desert of modernity and must exploit whatever means, literary or artistic, that are presented to him.

As the manifesto makes clear, the Vorticists were careful to distance themselves from Marinetti's technologically-focussed Futurism, which they deride in "The Great English Vortex" as unsophisticated, "automobilism". (p.8) However the Vorticist aesthetic remained endebted to machinery, which it proclaimed "the greatest Earth-medium" as it "sweeps away the doctrines of a narrow and pedantic Realism at one stroke." BLAST shared the cubist movement's scepticism over realism's rectilinear representations and preferred instead to focus upon the revolutionary poetics of the explosion. Here, modernity is explained as an uncontrolled explosion of technological growth:

> our industries, and the Will that determined, face to face with its needs the direction of the modern world, has reared up steel trees where the green ones were lacking; has exploded in useful growths, and found wider intricacies than those of nature. (p.38)

In this hothouse atmosphere the traditional but revolutionary British aesthetic sensibility is "Chaos invading Concept and bursting it like nitrogen." Because of its explosive, national character England provides the perfect climate for the Vorticists' own "crude" energy because they are suited to "this insidious and volcanic chaos." [42] The Manifesto explains that: "Machinery, trains, steam-ships, all that distinguishes externally our time, come far more from here than from anywhere else."[43] Therefore "the complication of the Jungle, dramatic tropic growths, the vastness of American trees" provides a suitable environment for the Vorticist movement. The industrialised condition of England with its explosion of technology, "in the forms of machinery, Factories, new and vaster buildings, bridges and works," means that the English are "naturally" surrounded by modernity. (pp.38-40) Instead of complaining about urban alienation and dislocation *BLAST* offers a modern organic ideal in which technology

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[42] Ibid, p.38.
[43] Ibid, p.39.

grows just as naturally in England as a tree would do in a forest, and the movement's ideology expresses a residual faith in the Victorian notion of progress. But the new social reality of a radically modernised twentieth-century society, bristling with its industrial and technological forms as a dense forest bristles with tree-branches, is also an explosive place fraught with the possibility of revolution, appearing to the Vorticists as nineteenth-century Paris would appear to Walter Benjamin two decades later as "a menacing hazardous massif, an ever-active hotbed of revolution."[44] However the journal stresses that Vorticism is distinct from other expressions of advanced modernism, such as Italian Futurism: "Once this new consciousness towards the possibilities of expression in present life has come, however, it will be the more legitimate property of Englishmen than of any other people in Europe." Vorticism, then, distinguishes itself from other forms of advanced modernism by offering itself to the British but in doing so mirrors the kind of state-nationalism advocated by the Italian Futurists: "It should also, as it is by origin theirs, inspire them more forcibly and directly." As "the inventors of this bareness and hardness" the English avant-garde "should be the great enemies of Romance" while "The Romance peoples will always be, at bottom, its defenders." Britons have a colder attitude towards the modern and the hard and tough outlines of their aesthetic sensibilities stand in contrast to the softer, sentimental tones of the Romance nations: "The Latins are at present, for instance, in their 'discovery' of sport, their Futuristic gush over machines, aeroplanes, etc., the most romantic and sentimental "moderns" to be found." In contrast to the mainstream of modernist thought of continental Europe, *BLAST* declares that "It is only the second-rate people in France or Italy who are thorough revolutionaries." (p.41)

Despite their dissatisfaction with the Latin variations of modernism, the Vorticists borrowed their aesthetic anarchism from their continental sources and rivals in the Italian Futurist movement. As one newspaper reported, Lewis' grouping amounted to "A New Development of Futurism": "The little group of English painters, about a score in number, who have hitherto associated themselves with the advanced art movement led by Signor Marinetti, are now disavowing allegiance to the Italian school of Futurists. They purpose inventing a more characteristically English form of expression in line and cube and colour."[45] Marinetti praised Mussolini as a walking bomb ("a package full of good gunpowder") while other subversive imagery accompanied the Futurists' "gush" over machines. While both

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[44] Benjamin, Walter, *The Arcades Project*, translated from *Das Passegen-Werk* (1982), by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) p.83.
[45] "'Vorticist' Art. A New Development of Futurism", *The Times*, Saturday June 13th, 1914, p.5.

types of *avant-gardisme* advocate an anarchic response to modernity and its "world of ceaseless shocks"[46], Futurism implicates itself quite comfortably in the corporate structures of twentieth century capitalism but Vorticism, as expressed in *BLAST*, differs from it by remaining significantly estranged from the state and from its entrepreneurial offshoots. According to Gianni Vattimo, modern art reflects the subject's defamiliarisation with the world. This "insistence on disorientation" produces an "aesthetic experience (that) appears to be an experience of estrangement" and, instead of recomposing the subject, "aesthetic experience is directed towards keeping the disorientation alive."[47] In the pages of *BLAST*, Vorticism offers a politicised expression of this estrangement. Futurism was also based on a manifesto-style which, although slangier in tone than Vorticism, nevertheless had a tougher, even more combative edge which had been established by the publication of "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism", which was published in *Le Figaro*, Paris, in February, 1909. These earlier sources suggest that Lewis' subversive modernism was a plagiarised version of the Futurists' early radicalism, and that his distaste for Marinetti contains a hint of artistic jealousy. Despite the "marked singularity"[48] of *avant-gardisme*, Vorticism had little difficulty in cultivating a British version of Marinetti's shocking ideology. While praising automobiles and airplanes for their speed in this document, the Futurists also made sure to "exalt aggressive action" such as "the punch and the slap". "Except in struggle," wrote Marinetti, "there is no more beauty." And as for art, only works of "an aggressive character" could be masterpieces.[49] Poetry, for the Futurists, consisted of "a violent attack" and warfare was "the world's only hygiene." Lewis shared the Futurists' enjoyment of the prospect of urban anarchy and promised to "sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, by riot; we will sing of the multicoloured polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals". They also proposed their own assault on the past by wrecking the "museums, libraries and academies" where they would create a "blaze" with the "books of today":

> So let them come, the gay incendiaries with the charred fingers! Here they are!... Come on! Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!... Oh, the joy of seeing

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[46] Marinetti, "Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine", *Let's Murder the Moonshine: Selected Writings*, Translated by R.W. Flint and Arthur A. Coppotelli (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1991), p.99.
[47] Vattimo, Ibid, , p.51.
[48] Williams, ibid, p.53.
[49] Marinetti, F.T., "Portrait of Mussolini,", ibid, p.166 and "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism", ibid, p. 49.

> the glorious old canvasses bobbing adrift on those waters, discoloured and shredded! Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers, and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly! [50]

For the Futurists art "can be nothing but violence, cruelty, and injustice."[51] Other Futurist manifestos proposed "blowing up all the traditions", levelling Venice[52] and described feminism as "dynamite", democracy as "illusory" and the parliaments of Europe as "sewers" ruled by "the monopoly of useless or harmful eloquence".[53] "Progress," declared the Futurists, "is always right even when it is wrong, because it is movement, life, struggle, hope." And capitalist progress remains the priority for the Futurist, even when it amounts to the desecration of the dead, whose very corpses might be used to provide explosives. Marinetti pointed to the Far East, where capitalism had reached new depths in the search for profit and provided "the plainest, the most violent of Futurist symbols":

> In Japan they carry out the strongest of trades: the sale of coal made from human bones. All their powderworks are engaged in producing a new explosive substance, more lethal than any yet known. This terrible new mixture has as its principal element coal made from human bones with the property of violently absorbing gases and liquids. For this reason countless Japanese merchants are thoroughly exploring the corpse-stuffed Manchurian battlefields. In great excitement they make huge excavations, and enormous piles of skeletons multiply in every direction on those broad bellicose horizons.[54]

This "absolutely Futurist commerce" involves the corporate manufacture of explosives and the creation of a "noble example of synthetic violence."[55] For Marinetti, the absolute rejection and consequent recycling of the dead by Japanese entrepreuners, whose traditionally Shintoist society actually worships its ancestors, enables the production of a destructive commodity that in turn advances Eastern culture to a hyper-exploitative state that outstrips the kind of "bourgeois" Victorianism

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[50] Ibid, p.51.
[51] Ibid, idem.
[52] "Let's Murder the Moonshine", Ibid, p.52, p. 63.
[53] "Against *Amore* and Parliamentarism", ibid, pp.81-82.
[54] "The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic", ibid, p.90.
[55] Ibid, idem.

condemned by the Vorticists. For the Futurists, real "dynamite" lay in the rape of the past. However, the Vorticists' characteristic unease at the capitalist form and structures of the nineteenth century is nowhere to be found in the Futurists' fixation with progress-at-any-cost.

Ezra Pound, Henri Gaudier and Vorticism's Shocking Poetics

The Manifestos in *BLAST 1* are followed by a selection of extreme poetry by Ezra Pound, in which the journal's "hit-list" and "protest" aesthetics are continued. In "Salutation the Third", Pound exacts revenge upon the conservatism and hostile reviews of the daily press:

> Let us deride the smugness of "The Times":
> GUFFAW!
> So much the gagged reviewers,
> It will pay them when the worms are wriggling in their vitals;
> These were they who objected to newness,
> HERE are their TOMB-STONES.
> They supported the gag and the ring:
> A little black BOX contains them.
> SO shall you be also,
> You slut-bellied obstructionist,
> You sworn foe to free speech and good letters,
> You fungus, you continuous gangrene. (p.46)

Pound's poetic "blast" continues with an anti-semitic tirade ("Let us SPIT upon those who fawn upon the JEWS for their money"[p.46]) and then the poet assures his enemies and critics that he will not flatter them "with an early death":

> OH NO! I will stick it out,
> I will feel your hates wriggling about my feet,
> And I will laugh at you and mock you,
> And I will offer you consolations of irony,
> O fools, detesters of Beauty.

I have seen many who go about with supplications,
    Afraid to say how they hate you.
HERE is the taste of my BOOT,
    CARESS it, lick off the BLACKING. (p.46)

Pound's anger at the literary establishment continues in the poem "Monumentum, Aere, Etc.":

You say that I take a good deal upon myself,
That I strut in the robes of my assumption.

In a few years No one will remember the "buffo,"
No one will remember the trival (*sic*) parts of me,
The comic details will not be present,
As for you, you will lie in the earth,
And it is doubtful if even your manure will be rich enough
To keep grass
Over your grave. (p.46)

Pound's violently worded protest against the sterility of the literary scene concludes with a utopian vision in the poem "Come My Cantilations", in which he imagines escaping from the restrictions of city life and from obligations to his publisher by moving to a sunny pastoral location where he might sing his musical chants, or cantillations:

Come my cantilations,
Let us dump our hatreds into one bunch and be done with them,
Hot sun, clear water, fresh wind,
Let me be free of pavements,
Let me be free of the printers.
Let come beautiful people
Wearing raw silk of good colour,
Let come the graceful speakers,
Let come the ready of wit
Let come the gay of manner, the insolent and the exulting.
We speak of burnished lakes,
And of dry air, as clear as metal. (p.46)

As if to underline Pound's protest and desire for a utopian alternative where he might spend time with anti-authoritarian friends in the clear air, the collection includes a censored poem, "Frateres Minares". After the journal was published the first two lines of the poem, along with the closing lines, were inked-out by the painter and poet Jessie Dismoor and by the painter Helen Sanders, as the poem's sexual content was considered controversial, and Lewis hoped that this would boost interest in the journal.[56] The censored lines are given here within parentheses:

> (With minds still hovering above their testicles)
> Certain poets here and in France
> Still sigh over established and natural fact
> Long since nicely discussed by Ovid.
> They howl. They complain in delicate and exhausted metres
> (That the twitching of their abdominal nerves
> Is incapable of producing a lasting Nirvana.) (p.48)[57]

By the fact that it was subjected to the censor's pen this poem indicates the aesthetic modernist subversion that characterises *BLAST*. But like Lewis' claim to political notoriety and his account of his discussions with Asquith, there is a hint of self-publicisation in the censorship of the poem by two of the journal's supporters. Censored for its description of orgasm, the sexual content of this poem, in which the poet deprives his critics of any libido, continues in very phallic terms the embittered tone of the other pieces by criticising what Pound considered to be the sterility and staleness of the contemporary literary scene. At a time when Pound was experimenting with imagism, a form in which "the 'image' is the furthest possible remove from rhetoric", and rhetoric, for the imagist poet "is the art of dressing up some unimportant matter so as to fool the audience",[58] the subversive militancy of *BLAST* afforded him the space to indulge in some poetic anarchism. Yet, at the same time, there is a link between the journal's chaotic insistence upon the shocking and imagism's insistence upon "every emotion and every phase of emotion", which in turn "has some toneless phrase, some rhythm to express it".[59] This poetic style underlines the creative militancy of the Vorticist literary aesthetic. Gianni Vattimo's theory of modern estrangement is apparent here: with its insistence on poetic

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[56] O'Keeffe, Paul, *Some Sort of Genius: A Life of Wyndham Lewis* (London: Pimlico, 2000), p.156.
[57] The first and last two lines have been inserted in the copy of *BLAST* held in the TCD library by a hand unknown.
[58] Pound, Ezra, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir* (London: John Lane, 1916), p.95.
[59] Ibid, p.97.

oscillation, imagistic shock and the textual practices of the mass media, Vorticism underlines what Vattimo terms "the precarious structure of existence in general." In a culture defined by its instability, lack of depth and impermanence, aesthetic experience is dominated by shock.[60]

Pound also provided the journal with his own abstract theory of the vortex, describing it as "the point of maximum energy" and of "the greatest efficiency":

> You may think of man as that toward which perception moves. You may think of him as the TOY of circumstance, as the plastic substance RECEIVING impressions.
>
> OR you may think of him as DIRECTING a certain fluid force against circumstance, as CONCEIVING instead of merely observing and reflecting.

For Pound the vortex is an active process occurring within the passage of time, directing its "fluid force" against the mainstream and producing worthwhile art. This essential energy is its striking content since the Vorticist relies on "the primary pigment of his art, nothing else." This is because "Every conception, every emotion presents itself to the vivid consciousness in some primary form." The propaganda-effect of Vorticism (or of any avant-garde art movement) lies therefore in the shocking but relatively simple form that is taken by its message: "It is the picture that means a hundred poems, the music that means a hundred pictures, the most highly energized statement, the statement that has not yet SPENT itself it (*sic*) expression, but which is the most capable of expressing."[61] Pound repeated this claim in his book on the Vorticist sculptor, Henri Gaudier, in which he defended the tendency to abstraction shared by imagism and Vorticism: The work of art which is most 'worthwhile' is the work which would need a hundred works of any other kind of art to explain it. A fine statue is the core of a hundred poems. A fine poem is a score of symphonies. There is music which would need a hundred paintings to express it.[62] This abstraction amounts to an explosion and it is in this violent release of energy that the message of Vorticism is contained. The political capital of terrorism and the shock-value of the explosion are reprocessed by the Vorticists and presented as literary capital in *BLAST*. Writing to the critic, Edward Garnett, in 1897, Joseph Conrad explained how the written word itself has at once a dangerously subversive

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[60] Vattimo, ibid, p.57.
[61] Pound, ibid.
[62] Ibid, p.56.

quality and a creative imperative: "the illumination, the short and vivid flash" of "words", he wrote, explodes "like stored powder barrels... An explosion is the most lasting thing in the universe. It leaves disorder, remembrance, room to move, a clear space."[63] While the modernists expressed their dislike for Victorian culture, such theories as this draw heavily from Walter Pater's model of aestheticism, in which life consists of "the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment" of "elementary forces" with which the individual must contend. These forces exist in the external world but are all the more pronounced in "the inward world of thought and feeling" where "the whirlpool is still more rapid, the flame more eager and devouring." To appreciate art is to observe these forces in a state of suspended animation: "when reflexion begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like some trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions – colour, odour, texture – in the mind of the observer." The flux of experience, "this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations," is what "analysis leaves off – that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves" - for Pater, art-appreciation occurs during the moment of sense-impression. Despite its rejection of anything to do with nineteenth century British culture the vortex is deeply endebted to Pater's theory of the moment in which "experience itself, is the end." Pater's art is where "the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy", revealing that Pound's Vortex borrows heavily from his earlier model, and the aesthete's instruction: "To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, this success in life."[64]

For Pound, this destructive but simultaneously creative process creates an anarchic void, the "vortex" in which anything is possible: "All experience rushes into this vortex. All the energized past, all the past that is living and worthy to live. All MOMENTUM, which is the past bearing upon us, RACE, RACE-MEMORY, instinct charging the PLACID, NON-ENERGIZED future... All the past that is vital, all the past that is capable of living into the future, is pigment in the vortex, NOW." In Pound's version of the vortex it is the centrifugal power of history, which he terms "RACE-MEMORY" (explaining his association of avant-garde modernism with hatred for "JEWS" and "their money"), that has built up to form the revolutionary moment out of which *BLAST* has emerged. However the poet is also careful to stress that the vortex is not a value-free phenomenon: "Hedonism is the vacant place of a vortex,

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[63] Conrad to Edward Garnett, Friday, 12th March, 1897, in Karle R. Frederick (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 331-332.
[64] Pater, Walter, *The Renaissance*, pp. 150-152.

without force, deprived of past and future, the vortex of a stil (*sic*) spool or cone."[65] Perry Anderson maintains that modernism was "a cultural force field"[66] and as *BLAST* indicates, individual modernisms were fixated with the idea of aesthetic matter serving as a form of energy subjected to opposing forces. W.B. Yeats' own aesthetic theory of opposing vortices, or "gyres", proposes that the forces of Concord and Discord form two spheres whose meeting constitutes "one gyre within the other always". Yeats' "double cone or vortex", which is driven by the conflict that occurs at the meeting of the gyres, one "Primary", the other "Antithetical", updates William Blake's aesthetic theory of inner contraries and leads the Irish poet to view the world "as a conflict" between "Spectre and Emanation": "The antithetical tincture is emotional and aesthetic whereas the primary tincture is reasonable and moral", writes Yeats, and his gyres operate in a double movement, one against the other, in a series of "circlings". As with Blake's celebration of inner conflict and the apocalypse, this continual movement between unity and "turbulent instinct" creates discord and for Yeats, "Discord becomes identity[67]".

A Modernist Force-Field: The Vorticist Cone (*BLAST*, No. 2, p.152)

Pound's Vortex and Yeats' stress on the gyre's turbulence and loss of gravity, whereby "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold", and "Mere anarchy is loosed

[65] Pound, ibid.
[66] Anderson, ibid, p.324.
[67] Yeats, W.B., "The Great Wheel", *A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 68, 70, 72, 94, 105.

upon the world,"[68] are both discussions of the issue of chaos which have political applications (the young Yeats' involvement with the Irish Republican Brotherhood, or I.R.B. is a matter of record[69]). The modernist fascination with literary force fields suggests that modernist poetry, tied as it is to the question of revolution, can be linked to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production. Bourdieu argues that the field of cultural production is a "space of literary or artistic position-takings". The structures and social agents involved in this field include literary and artistic works, political acts, pronouncements and manifestos that are all "inseperable from the space of literary or artistic positions defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital."[70] (p.30) This means that the field of literary production is in fact "a field of forces" and "a field of struggles" that inevitably reflects the political and economic crises of any given era. (pp.36-37) According to this model, writers assume their places within the sphere of power relations and operate within strategic fields, and their work is socially instituted either by publication or by its display within galleries and museums. As well as explaining Vorticism's unease at the artistic and literary mainstream, as we have seen with its blasts against Ezra Pound's enemies, Henry Tonks and even popular music hall entertainment, Bourdieu's theory also goes some way to explain the Vorticists' hatred of Futurism. According to Bourdieu, within a politically and economically determined field of cultural production, polemics such as manifestos *against* an opposing group or art-theory actually implies recognition, no matter how bitter the criticism it contains might be: "adversaries whom one would prefer to destroy by ignoring them cannot be combated without consecrating them." Because of these forces Bourdieu points to a structural affinity that lies between literary *avant-gardisme* and political vanguardism: "the cultural producers are able to use the power conferred on them, especially in periods of crisis, by their capacity to put forward a critical definition of the social world, to mobilize the potential strength of the dominated classes and subvert the order prevailing in the field of power." (pp.42,44) In other words, the role of the artist will become that of the revolutionary messiah, willing to lead other alienated groups and individuals when times of political and economic crisis arise. This, Bourdieu explains, is why the literary field achieved its greatest autonomy in France during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the bourgoiesie, appearing at its most powerful, forced writers into taking sides with the dispossessed. This relationship

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[68] Yeats, "The Second Coming", *Yeats's Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.294.
[69] Brown, Terence, *The Life of W.B. Yeats: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p.51.
[70] Subsequent quotations are from Bourdieu, Pierre, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

between the autonomy of literature and the development of radical aesthetics by writers with political leanings has British analogies (and Irish ones, as we have seen with the case of Oscar Wilde), Vorticism's radical aesthetic being one of these. Ironically, the accumulation of bourgeois capital is what makes aesthetic, or "symbolic" capital possible, while simultaneously producing the subversive aesthetes who criticise the dominant cultural and political forms from within. The artist, according to Bourdieu, accumulates symbolic capital by making a name for himself within the field of production and thereby supporting the "charismatic" ideology that is "the basis of functioning of the filed of production and circulation of commodities." (pp.75, 77) Vorticism's, and Anderson's, stress on art as a series of force fields can be understood as a reflection of the field of power as "a field of latent, potential forces which play upon any particle which may venture into it". It "is also a battlefield" populated by the dominant class, the bourgeoisie, and the politically dominated, between whom bohemian artists vacillate. (p.148) The structural ambiguity of the artists' relationship with bourgeois power and the "people" forms an ambivalent consciousness of their own position within social space and of their "social function". The political ambivalence of artists who fluctuate between an apparently bourgeois identity and a revolutionary one underlines their position within "a dominated universe and the greater or lesser distance of this universe from that of the dominant class". (pp.165, 167) The dominant class is never too far away because the bourgeois is the "customer who is at the same time sought after and scorned", creating not just ambivalence but also deep resentment for the mainstream. Bourdieu's theory explains why avant-garde publications such as *BLAST* provided a platform for complaint against "normal" art, and we are reminded of the journal's lengthy blast against Victoriana: "the opposition between art and money, which structures the field of power, is reproduced in the literary filed in the form of the opposition between 'pure' art... and commercial art". (p.185)

Wyndham Lewis explains that these force-fields impact upon the individual because modern urban life encourages conformity by imposing "fraternal moulds" upon the individual and providing "interstices of a human world." Although these spaces should provide the modern subject with a "multitude, and infinite variety of means of life, a world of elements he controls", the attainment of autonomy is difficult since the world is governed by the "disease" of impersonality. Therefore, while socially, at least, the ego is allowed "to walk around", the modern subject is also contained: "Life is really no more secure, or his egotism less acute, but the frontier's (*sic*) interpenetrate, individual demarcations are confused and interests dispersed." In this dull social reality "THE ACTUAL HUMAN BODY BECOMES OF LESS

IMPORTANCE EVERY DAY" and now "literally, EXISTS, much less." In terms that mirror H.G. Wells' treatment of the individual, in which terrorism and modernity appear as a literally unknown quantity in *The Invisible Man*, Lewis acknowledges that:

> The human form still runs, like a wave, through the texture or body of existence, and therefore, of art.
>
> But just as the old form of egotism is no longer fit for such conditions as now prevail, so the isolated human figure of most ancient art is an anachronism. (p.141)

Just as H.G. Wells' invisible man, once he is disaggregated from the crowd, must be hunted down and defeated by angry townspeople, the artist-figure projected by Lewis is an alienated individual at odds with the forces behind the modern impetus to conform. "Dehumanization", he insists, "is the chief diagnostic of the Modern World." (p.141) Lewis suggests that the kind of artistic and literary chaos celebrated in *BLAST* contains the necessary conditions for individual creation but warns that the potential of this kind of modernism has yet to be realised: "The possibilities of colour, exploitation of discords, odious combinations, etc., have been little exploited... there are fields of discord untouched." (p.142) The individual (ideally an artist), at large within modern society, can exploit these ruptures in the social fabric, turn them against the mass and achieve a positive aesthetic result by creating his own vortex. One reviewer even read this brand of individualism into the textual structure of the journal, interpreting the misprints and spelling mistakes that litter its pages as "an assertion of the Individualism which is the main gospel of the coterie who join in the *Blast*".[71]

Futurism, with its love of corporate capitalism and brute machinery is "the disgorging spray of a vortex with no drive behind it, DISPERSAL." (p.153) Because of its appeal to technology and therefore to the masses affected by it, the ideology of Futurism runs contrary to Vorticism's radical, individualist message: "Impressionism, Futurism, which is only an accelerated form of impressionism, DENY the vortex. They are the CORPSES of VORTICES. POPULAR BELIEFS, movements, etc., are the CORPSES OF VORTICES. Marinetti is a corpse." (p.154) Unlike early Futurism, with its relatively popular, headline-grabbing techniques, Vorticism carries a consistently élitist and radical message so that only its followers can decode its "cipher" and "jargon". Marinetti gave readings in Britain in 1912 and in 1913 he

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[71] ""BLAST." The Vorticists' Manifesto", *The Times*, July 1st, 1914, p.8.

spoke to an eager audience at the Poetry Club in London, although in 1914 he was finally heckled when he and a troupe of Futurist "noisicians" were challenged by the audience during a performance "of Futurist principles" at the Coliseum, when "an orchestra of weird funnel-shaped instruments" made Futurist "music" that more "resembled the sounds heard in the rigging of a Channel Steamer during a bad crossing" were met with cries of "No More!" from the auditorium.[72] Although trying to emphasise the novelty of Vorticism, Pound's theories, like Yeats' are modelled on earlier aesthetic theory. Even though "The vorticist relies not upon similarity or analogy, not upon likeness or mimicry", Pound quotes from Walter Pater to explain the movement's "ancestry" and reminds the reader that "All arts approach conditions of music." He then adds his own observation that the Vorticists are merely serving art since "An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Less willing than Lewis to disown the "Paterites" and the poetic legacy of the nineteenth century, Pound nevertheless locates his own vortex within a grander, already established aesthetic scheme.

Pound concludes by stressing that Vorticism is an essentially poetic phenomenon and adds a poem by the American Imagist Hilda Doolittle:

> The vorticist will use fully only the primary media of his art.
> The primary pigment of poetry is the IMAGE.
> The vorticist will not allow the primary expression of any concept or emotion to drag itself out into mimicry.
> In painting Kandinski, Picasso.
> In poetry this by, "H.D."
>
> Whirl up sea –
> Whirl your pointed pines,
> Splash your great pines
> On our rocks,
> Hurl your green over us
> Cover us with your pools of fir. (p.154)

The first issue of *BLAST* closes with a manifesto written by the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. Prior to moving to London, Gaudier had lived on the fringes of the Parisian radical scene, where he kept a notebook entitled *Le Chaos* in which, claimed Pound, he enunciated "what might be considered the germ of his first

[72] "Art and Practice of Noise: Hostile Reception of Signor Marinetti", *The Times*, June 16th, 1914, p.5.

'Vortex'".[73] After his arrival in England Gaudier argued with Pound over his "scepticism as to the impracticability of anarchy",[74] while the sculptor told the poet extraordinary tales about his experiences of life in bohemian Paris. In one of these, he recounted being caught up in an abortive jail-break in the Quartier Latin in 1910:

> An artist had a mistress and the sub-chief of police or some such person desire (*sic*) her, and either took her or tried to, and the artist assaulted the police and got three years, and in that time the sub-chief was successful. And when the artist came out he accumulated pistols and cartridges and did in more than a score of police (I forget the exact figure), and the Quartier Latin rose in riot and broke into the gaol on the morning of the execution and tore down the scaffold and still the artist was guillotined and many students arrested, including H. Gaudier, who slipped under someone's arm and escaped.[75]

Gaudier's story of jilted anarchist love, with its consequent police-killings, jailbreak and political repression was the reason that he gave to Pound for his moving to London in 1911 with the Polish writer, Sofia Brzeska, whose surname, in a radical gesture, he adopted. By the time that the second number of *BLAST* was being written Gaudier the bohemian subversive had immersed himself in the chaos of the front line in France, where, in letters sent to English friends, he described how he found himself "obsessed by fighting", and realised that throwing "magnificent little bombs" at German troops was "great fun".[76] The sculptor's fixation with urban combat and his sculpture of a pair of knuckle-dusters at his studio in Putney draws on the popular imagination of tough, continental anarchism and, as happened to Lewis, his anarchic streak came into its own on the battlefront where he found himself, in uniform, defending the state.

Gaudier's piece, entitled "Vortex", provides the movement with an historical perspective of its artistic aims and explained the Vortex as an essential life-force: "VORTEX IS ENERGY! And it gave SOLID EXCREMENTS in the quattro é cinquo cento, Liquid until the seventeenth century, gases whistle till now. THIS is the history of form value in the West until the FALL OF IMPRESSIONISM." (p.156) Gaudier claims that the pure energy of this Vortex has only been recognised by those modernists who view their art as related to the warfare that has taken hold of the

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[73] Pound, Ezra, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, p.42.
[74] Ibid, p.47.
[75] Ibid, p.49.
[76] Ibid,p.82, p.78, p.67.

metropolis: "And WE the moderns: Epstein, Brancusi, Archipenko, Dunikowski, Modigliani, and myself, through the incessant struggle in the complex city, have likewise to spend much energy." (p.156) Gaudier's theory of Vorticism amounts to a dialectic of endless urban conflict. The new "form value" of art, unlike its more vapid antecedents, has assumed a thoroughly combative expression making Vorticism less abstract than it initially appears. Like Gaudier's sculpted knuckle-dusters and the "magnificent" experience of throwing bombs at the front, Vorticist modernism is all about having a fight. These conflicts and deadly weapons are "the elements" of "our civilisation" that Gaudier's group has "mastered". Echoing Pound, the sculptor goes on to explain that the Vortex is characterised by the individualism of each member of the group:

> We have been influenced by what we liked most, each according to his own individuality, we have crystallised the sphere into the cube, we have made a combination of all the possible shaped masses – concentrating them to express our abstract thoughts of conscious superiority.
>
> Will and consciousness are our
>
> VORTEX (p.156)

Given Gaudier's involvement in student politics on the fringes of Parisian anarchism, his own manifesto has a particularly politicised edge. The aesthetic abstractions of "possible shaped masses", through which the sculptor and his literary colleagues express their own "thoughts of conscious superiority", constitute the "Vortex" to which their movement is so committed, but the Vortex is also the result of the artistic endeavours of a group that was very closely associated with the radical underground, both in imaginary and in real terms. Therefore even the artistic efforts of a modernist sculptor like Gaudier serve a political as well as an aesthetic purpose. Perry Anderson has indicated "the imaginative proximity" of European modernism to the political issue of social revolution, a process which he perceives as having its origins in the old European régimes' fear of disintegration, an anxiety which became particularly pronounced during the period running up to the Great War: as bourgeois democracy was an incomplete form, subjected to the temporality of the market, it was a fractured, uneven and "protean" phenomenon subject to the threats posed by labour, which constituted an unpredictable political force in its own right. As labour

had never been fully co-opted into the bourgeois democratic system it amounted to its political other. This meant that the political atmosphere was unclear: "The possible revolutionary outcomes of a downfall of the old order were thus still profoundly ambiguous. Would a new order be more unalloyedly and radically capitalist, or would it be socialist?" Anderson points to the troubling example of the Russian Revolution of 1905-1907, which created "an upheaval at once and inseparably bourgeois and proletarian." Against this background "insurgent forms of art", such as Vorticism, articulated themselves by appropriating the language and imagery of political subversion while at the same time maintaining an élitist character. This dual consciousness, Anderson explains, led to the schizophrenic character of modernism as European avant-gardes were coloured both by their revolutionary ardour and by their deliberately aristocratic appearances. Modernism contained these radical components because it was formed "at the intersection between a semi-aritocratic ruling order, a semi-industrialized capitalist economy, and a semi-emergent, or semi-insurgent, labor movement."[77] Anderson's theory of a shifting and unstable political surface explains the political ambivalence of figures like Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, who flirted with anarchism before the outbreak of the First World War and then embraced fascism afterwards.

The first number of *BLAST* also includes *Enemy of the Stars*, a fictional piece by Wyndham Lewis in which Vorticism's clear-cut and specifically British aesthetic is emphasized in the protagonist's preoccupation with violence and energy:

> Will energy some day reach Earth like violent civilisation, smashing and hardening all? In his mind a chip of distant hardness, tugged at dully like a tooth, made him ache from head to toe.
>
> But the violences of all things had left him so far intact. (p.64)

The piece ends with a murder and suicide that are the result of the "swift anarchist effort" of impulsive violence. (p.74) The violent, meteor-like energy of civilisation that Lewis reflects upon in this story is the force that will mould a new consciousness. Yet despite this fixation with extremism and explosions the journal also features contributions from more conventional modernists, such as Rebecca West, whose short story "Indissoluble Matrimony" was published in *BLAST* 1. The journal also carried the opening section of Ford Madox Hueffer's classic *The Saddest Story*, which was given the more optimistic title, *The Good Soldier,* in 1915. Vorticism,

[77] Anderson, ibid, pp. 323, 325-326.

then, was not all about making a completely clean sweep of the literary scene but sought to incorporate itself with more "mainstream" (or comprehensible), if distinctly avant-garde, modernist writers.

Another manifesto by Wyndham Lewis, "Vorteces (*sic*) and Notes", continues in Pound's vein and offers a further explanation of Vorticism. Declaring that "Life is the Important Thing!" Lewis outlines the revolutionary role of the artist in his struggle against sterility:

> In the revolt against Formula, revolutionaries in art sell themselves to Nature. Without Nature's aid the "coup" could not be accomplished. They, of course, become quite satisfied slaves of Nature, as their fathers were of Formula. It never occurs to them that Nature is just as sterile as a Tyrant. This is what happened with the Impressionists. (p.129)

Lewis' literary and artistic "coup" aims to avoid the mistakes of the Impressionists, whose alleged sell-out to naturalism compromised their own attempt at revolt. In suggesting that they ought to be considered in the same terms that an out-and-out revolutionary would consider "conformist" reform-based politics, his condemnation of naturalism as "a Tyrant" is the kind of radicalised discourse that Asquith found so alarming in *BLAST*. Expanding upon Pound's condemnation of reviewers, poets and newspapers Lewis' also criticises Impressionism and its insistence upon the natural as an outdated formula:

> NATURE IS NO MORE INEXHAUSTIBLE, FRESH, WELLING UP WITH INVENTION, ETC., THAN LIFE IS TO THE AVERAGE MAN OF FORTY, WITH HIS GROOVE, HIS DISILLUSION, AND HIS LITTLE ROUND OF HABITUAL DISTRACTIONS. (p.129)

Characterised by the sheer boredom that makes life "a hospital for the weak and incompetent... a retreat for the defeated" wherein "Amusements are provided" for the average man in his groove of routine, society requires new and shocking art forms. Nature provides a retreat only for the weak artist "whose imagination is mean and feeble, whose vocation and instinct are unrobust." (p.180) In contrast, Vorticism is predicated on the transformative effect of its violently spiralling energy and upon the modern, technologically advanced culture from which it has emerged.

BLAST's offer of an aesthetic explosion designed to grab the attention of middle-aged men and anyone else sufficiently dismayed by their existence proposes

to excite a normally bored, popular consciousness. This new force is one of violent social and artistic change, as explained by Lewis in his essay "Futurism, Magic and Life", in which he comments that "Killing somebody must be the greatest pleasure in existence: either like killing yourself without being interfered with by the instinct of self-preservation – or extermining the instinct of self-preservation itself!" (p.133) Murder or suicide might be the ultimate expression of autonomy for Lewis, but it can be made all the better if it is accompanied by some unpredictable, incendiary event: "Surprise is the brilliant and prodigious fire-fly, that lives only twenty minutes: the excitement of seeing him burn through his existence like a wax-vesta makes you marvel at the slow-living world." This stress upon the temporary and candescent phenomena of modern life has its analogue in painting, where "The most perishable colours... (such as Veronese green, Prussian Blue, Alizann Crimson) are the most brilliant." (p.134) Burning itself out like a match or fading away to nothing, Lewis presents the "perishable" but brilliant nature of the Vortex alongside the violent "pleasure" of auto-destruction. This suicidal logic adds to the crudity of the British avant-garde, making theirs the most extreme and complete form of modernism and distinguishing them from their soft "romantic" Latin counterparts, such as the Futurists, with their automobile-worship.

Another manifesto, "Our Vortex", repeats the significance of "the new vortex":

> Our vortex is not afraid of the Past: it has forgotten it's (sic) existence.
>
> Our vortex regards the Future as as sentimental as the Past.
>
> The Future is distant, like the Past, and therefore sentimental.

The vortex "plunges into the heart of the Present" because "The chemistry of the Present is different to that of the Past." It suggests that "this different chemistry" will "produce a New Living Abstraction" and the manifesto proposes an active, or ontic, present:

> We wish the Past and Future with us, the Past to mop up our melancholy, the Future to absorb our troublesome optimism.
>
> With our Vortex the Present is the only active thing.
>
> Life is the Past and the Future.

Vorticism's concern with time-theory, or the "chemistry of the Present", offers an almost Heideggerian perspective on modernity. "The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest", states *BLAST*, and it is within this frozen moment of being that his subversive literary and artistic action occurs. This allows the Vorticist to be "not the Slave of Commotion, but it's (sic) Master." Therefore he "does not suck up to Life" but instead "lets Life know its place in a Vorticist Universe!" The anarchic quality of the Vorticist, filled with potential energy and locked in a permanent Present while the rest of society wallows in the "Impressionist Past" is cultural dynamite: "We have no Verbotens... everything is permitted." This "great Vorticist age" is "a great still age of the artists"[78] and the Vortex "will hear of nothing but its disastrous polished dance", desiring only "the immobile rhythm of its swiftness." Lewis explains that this is why "Our Vortex is white and abstract with its red-hot swiftness."[79] Vorticism again repeats its stress on Pater's notion of the momentary "passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations"[80] and brings to mind William Wordsworth's notion of sense impressions as:

> ...spots of time
> Which with distinct preeiminence retain
> A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
> By trivial occupations and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds -
> Especially the imaginative power –
> Are nourished and invisibly repaired.[81]

The fleeting "chemistry of the Present" makes possible the Vorticists' art-as-abstraction. Claiming to accept no limits on their "red-hot" art the Vorticists propose burning a hole in the fabric of the Present, so that the "Living Abstraction" of the Vortex operates like a modernist "dirty bomb", threatening to contaminate Present by the means of the simple presence of its radical aesthetics. The radicalism of the vortex is such that it simply ignores the "sentimental" Past and Future. An "immobile" phenomenon, its influence spreads by means of its agents who detach themselves from the flux to remain still in time by means of their obliviousness to "Life" and

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[78] Ibid, p.148.
[79] Ibid, p.149.
[80] Pater, ibid, p.152.
[81] Wordsworth, William, "The Two Part Prelude of 1799", *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850* (New York: Norton, 1979), p.8, ll 257-264.

"Commotion". This idea of an explosive free-floating, ever present radical aesthetic is what lies underneath the apparent surface of *BLAST*. Combined with the political consciousness of anarchy and its cultural impact upon late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century discourse, the first issue of BLAST was interpreted as a politically frenzied piece where "the one thing, of course," as *The Times* noted, "is to be in a state of revolt; and for England, so these gentlemen think, this is the normal state."[82]

The *War Number*

The second and final issue of *BLAST* appeared in July 1915. While the first number stressed the responsibility of the individual artist in the context of a revolutionary, modern urban conflict, the subversive context of the second was overwhelmed by the impact of the Great War and the second issue is, politically, a rather cautious effort. "BLAST finds itself surrounded by a multitude of other Blasts of all sizes and descriptions", states the editorial but the journal promises to "try and brave the waves of blood, for the serious mission it has on the other side of World War", where art "has to spring up again with new questions and beauties when Europe has disposed of its difficulties." The editorial promises that when the war ends

> Blast will be there with an apposite insistence. Art and Culture have been more in people's mouths in England than they have ever been before, during the last six months. Nietzsche has had an English sale such as he could hardly have anticipated in his most ecstatic and morose moments, and in company he would not have expressly chosen.[83] (p.5)

Confident of its suitability as a radical aesthetic voice in what was becoming an increasingly nihilistic world, the Vorticists saw *BLAST*'s role as one of continuing to raise subversive questions about art and culture. Despite the slaughter going on at the front the war fuelled the journal's demand for change and the more moderate aesthetic utopianism of this number underpins the manifesto modernism of the first. Therefore, the Vorticists believed that the war appeared to be serving Vorticism's radical purpose as it has allied Britain and France against stifling "Official Germany", which "has stood for the old Poetry, for Romance". If the Kaiser's state was anti-

[82] ""BLAST." The Vorticists' Manifesto", *The Times*, July 1st, 1914, p.8.
[83] Subsequent quotations are from *BLAST: REVIEW OF THE GREAT ENGLISH VORTEX, War Number*, No. 2, July 1915.

modern, then at least the Vorticists were able to draw some comfort in supporting the most progressive side: "This paper wishes to stand rigidly opposed, from start to finish, to every form that the Poetry of a former condition of life, no longer existing, has foisted upon us." However this is not just a matter of wiping out the backward Hun, since it is acknowledged that German culture does have its progressive underside: "unofficial Germany has done more for the movement that this paper was founded to propagate, and for all branches of contemporary activity in Science and Art, than any other country." Instead of wishing to annihilate Germany, the Vorticists acknowledge that they are "debtors" to this "tribe of detached individuals." (p.6)

The tension between patriotism and avant-garde propaganda is evident in this issue and in an attempt to draw attention away from the subversive tone of the previous edition the journal claims to be "run chiefly by Painters and for Painting" who "are only incidentally Propagandists". (p.7) The shock-manifesto of *BLAST* 1 is now replaced by more careful articles that continue to call for aesthetic advancement but in considered tones. Instead of the staccato propaganda effect of the first number, pieces such as "Sport and Blood" offer more subtle explanations of Vorticism. Lewis' fixation with the pitfalls of democracy, which became notorious with the publication of his pro-Nazi book *Hitler* sixteen years later in 1931, are already apparent and receive an airing in a series of "War Notes". In one piece, entitled "The God of Sport and Blood", Lewis compared the War to competitive sport:

> Most people have a sneaking admiration for this desperateness. In fact the conditions of the Primeval Jungle are only thoroughly unfavourable to one type of man – the best in any way of life. "Civilization" (which means most favourable conditions for him) is of his making, and it is by his efforts that it is maintained.
>
> But civilization, that fortress he has built to dream in, is not what he dreams about... What he dreams about is the Primeval Jungle, twelve colours and a thousand forms. The only thing that the average man has brought away from his primitive state is admiration of ferocity... (p.9)

The fierceness of the war is perfectly suited to the modern man, who can revert to his primitive state in the throes of combat. Lewis stresses that despite the conventions of law that dictate the pace of life away from the front, "this modern Jungle is not without its beauty... and has very little that is civilized about it":

> It is at present, too replete with a quaint and very scientific ferocity... The thinkers and Lords of the Earth, then, have fortified themselves in a structure of law. The greatest praise the really wise Lord can bestow on the man in the street is that he is "actual," "of his time," "up to date." Men must be penned and herded into "Their Time," and prevented from dreaming, the prerogative of the Lord of the Earth. They must also be prevented from drifting back in the direction of their Jungle. And the best way to do this is to allow them to have a little contemporary Jungle of their own. Such a little up-to-date and iron jungle is the great modern city. Its vulgarity is the sort of torture and flagellation that becomes the austere creator. (p.9)

Conditions at the home front, then, are not as civilised as they might appear and Lewis' claim, made in the first number of *BLAST*, that civilisation is a "dangling" techno-jungle in which the individual might circulate more freely than he believes is normally possible, is repeated. His criticism of "structure" and its conformist ethos, which is at odds with man's natural and ferocious state, is utopian and libertarian in nature: the "scientific ferocity" of modernity clashes with, and prevents men from drifting back towards, their primal origins which lie in the kind of pastoral golden age of the past ruled by "natural" justice that is celebrated by anarchist writers like Joseph Pierre Proudhon, who argued that "it is the essence of revolutions to destroy the most modern principles and to respect the most ancient."[84] The outbreak of war adds a critical edge to Lewis' synthetic city-jungle which is described as the natural environment both for the Vorticist and for the British subject in the first issue of *BLAST*; it is no longer an imitation of an earlier, organic system but is instead a containment device, wherein men are "penned" and "herded". For Lewis, the war has awakened his pessimistic consciousness by amplifying on the front line the restrictive conditions of modern civilisation. The destruction and death that he would later witness as an artillery officer and the big artillery pieces that he commanded in 1917, two years after *BLAST* had folded, appear as an extension of the urban jungle, with its "dramatic tropic growths" of machines and buildings, that the first issue of *BLAST* optimistically envisioned for Britain.

Now the mass-destruction of the Great War embodies the modernist dystopia. Yet *BLAST* is careful not to alienate its aristocratic fan-base at Mayfair so instead of offering modernist slogans and "blasting" the establishment the Vorticists offer it their advice: "No wise aristocratic politician would ever encourage the people

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[84] Proudhon, Joseph Pierre, *What is Property?*, Translated from *Qu'est-ce que la propriété* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.20.

of his country to be conservative, in the sense of 'old-fashioned' and over-sentimental about things of the Past. The only real crime, on the contrary, would be to dream or harbour memories. To be active and unconscious, to live in the moment, would be the ideal set before the average man. "[85] Perhaps Lewis' meetings with Asquith, coupled with the crisis of war, led to this stylistic watering down of the Vorticist method. While less forceful in its claims the journal remains nonetheless elitist as it continues to address itself to "the fashionable crowd".[86] Quite reassuringly, Germany is held up by the magazine as the backward foil to a progressive Britain, and it is claimed that Prussian "medievalism and historic consciousness" have led to an insensitive "exhibition of democratic feeling": "They have become infernally philosophic and democratic, their heads being too weak to resist... Their wicked and low degeneration and identifying of themselves with the people will recoil on their own heads." Lewis claims that this cultural difference explains why the aristocratic "modern Englishman is naturally better liked abroad than the modern German, apart from politics". (pp.10-11)

In another article, "A Super-Krupp – Or War's End", Lewis opines that the world should exist in a permanent state of conflict, while taking care to define his interest in the anarchic to the realm of artistic argument:

> Perpetual War may well be our next civilization. I personally should much prefer that, as 18 months' disorganization every 40 years and 38 ½ years' complete peace, is too anarchic except for art squabbles. In the middle ages a War was always going on somewhere, like the playing of perpetual football teams, conducted by trained arquebussiers, etc. This permanent War of the Future would have a much more cynical and professional character. (p.13)

Rather than being a matter of morality, this new dispensation would simply be "a matter of Taste": "There is a tragedy of decay and death at the end of all human lives. It is all a matter of adjustment and tragedy: a matter almost of Taste – where to place the Tragedy, like where to place the blackness in a picture. But this is perhaps rather consolation than anything else." (p.14) So, despite the mass, large-scale nature of the war in France, Lewis was more concerned with its impact upon the individual and upon his consciousness, style and art. The Futurist response, he suggested, would be different to that of the Vorticists: "There is one man in Europe

[85] Lewis, Wyndham, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p.55.
[86] Ibid, idem.

who must be in the seventh heaven: that is Marinetti: From every direction come to him sound and rumours of conflict. He must be torn in mind, as to which point of compass to rush to and drink up the booming and banging, lap up the blood! He must be a radiant figure now!" (p.25) In its insistence upon corporate action, which, he believed, suited Marinetti, Lewis warned that the war would also make the writing of good verse a difficult accomplishment:

> The quality and uniqueness is absent from the present rambling and universal campaign. There are so many actions every day, necessarily of brilliant daring, that they become impersonal. Like the multitudes of drab and colourless uniforms – these in their turn covered with still more characterless mud – there is no room, in praising the soldiers, for anything but an abstract hymn. (p.25)

Troop masses are thrown together in big battles that are "like ant-fights", while individual soldiers must at the same time come to terms with the censor who "throws further obstacles in the way of Minor and Major Verse." With this emphasis upon the solitary trooper Lewis counters "Marinetti's Occupation" as a "platform boomer" and advocate of "war-noise" (pp.25-26) with an aesthetic that is, he claims, far more deeply immersed in the process of modernity. "Futurism and identification with the crowd," Lewis complains, "is a huge hypocrisy" because "Futurist propaganda, in its pedantry, would tend to destroy initiative and development." Lewis likens Futurism's stylistic weaknesses to the structural faults that he finds in democracy, which he describes as "cowardice or muddle-headedness". Its mandate amounts to a primitive "worship of 'the people'" that is compared to Marinetti's backward praise for the "God-Automobile". This technology-fetish of the Italian modernists has "a merit similar to Strauss's Waltzes, or Rag-Time; the best modern Popular Art, that is." (pp.41-42) Again, Lewis stresses the artistic alternative of disassociating oneself from society: "One man living in a cave alone can be a universal poet. In fact solitude is art's atmosphere, and its heaven is the Individual's. The abstract artist is the most individual, just as genius is the only sanity." This distinguishes serious art from popular and democratic forms such as Futurism, "Folk Art", "Music Hall Songs" and "Viennese Waltzes". (p.72) In advocating that the modern subject should become divorced from popular culture Lewis indicates that reverie, might counter the dominant structures that such forms represent and support. Reverie is central to Pater's theory of the aesthetic: "Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream

of a world."[87] As Anderson has noted, the avant-garde was sometimes resistant to mass culture and presented modernism as an "adversary" form.[88] In this light, reverie can be considered in terms of Jonathan Crary's suggestion that it functions as a form of resistance; a state of dissociation and trance that characterises the manner in which bourgeois culture liberate the modern subject from the everyday.[89] This adds a hint of subversion to Vorticism's rejection of the cultural expressions of commodity capitalism, which range from Marinetti's indulgence in techno-fantasy to the kitsch of folk art and popular dance.

The "War Number" also includes a manifesto written by Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, "Vortex Gaudier-Brzeska", while serving in the French army. In the midst of large-scale troop movements and grand offensives he maintained that military activity should in no way reduce the importance or influence of the artist:

> WITH ALL THE DESTRUCTION that works around us NOTHING IS CHANGED, EVEN SUPERFICIALLY. LIFE IS THE SAME STRENGTH, THE MOVING AGENT THAT PERMITS THE SMALL INDIVIDUAL TO ASSERT HIMSELF. (p.33)

Instead of disenfranchising the individual the war provided "A GREAT REMEDY" because on the front line "IT IS THE VORTEX OF WILL, OF DECISION, THAT BEGINS." (p.33) Gaudier himself was killed before his piece saw publication in *BLAST* when he took part in the bloody charge at Neuville St. Vaast on June 5th, 1915, during which he was shot in the head. His obituary appears in *BLAST* 2 underneath this final art manifesto. As well as giving him the opportunity to indulge in front line chaos, the War provided Vorticism with a martyr, that focal point of sympathy and romantic imagination required by every revolutionary group. With Gaudier's death *BLAST* achieved a degree of patriotic purchase with which it might rival the more mainstream Georgian Poets, whose popular and more legible poetry countered the cultural élitism of literary modernism. Gaudier's death and the War Number's opening political disclaimer, in which the journal claimed to provide a platform for "incidental" propagandists indicates that this radical art movement was indeed more indebted to the dominant political systems of state and nation than would have liked to admit.

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[87] Pater, ibid, p.151.
[88] Huyssen, ibid, viii.
[89] Crary, Jonathan, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp.45-46.

While Lewis' and Gaudier's contributions are concerned with the war in France Ezra Pound's poetic contributions suffer from no such preoccupations. Instead, Pound continues to strike blows against his literary enemies with the poem "Et Faim Sallir le Loup des Boys", by comparing them to his associates being killed at the front:

> I cling to the spar,
> Washed with the cold salt ice
> I cling to the spar –
> Insidious modern waves, civilization, civilized hidden snares.
> Cowardly editors threaten: "If I dare"
> Say this or that, or speak my open mind.
> Say that I hate may (sic) hates,
> Say that I love my friends,
> Say I believe in Lewis, spit out the later Rodin,
> Say that Epstein can carve in stone,
> That Brzeska can use the chisel,
> Or Wadsworth paint;
> Then they will have my guts;
> They will cut down my wage, force me to sing their cant,
> Uphold the press, and before all a model of literary decorum.
> Merde!
> Cowardly editors threaten,
> Friends fall off at the pinch, the loveliest die.
> That is the path of life, this is my forest. (p.22)

While Lewis' modern subject struggles in the ever-changing "jungle", Pound, in his rebelliousness, refuses to desist from fighting with the literary status quo. In a closing manifesto, "Chronicles", the poet summed up the Vorticists' achievement, declaring that "BLAST alone has dared to show modernity its face in an honest glass". It did so, he claimed, by refusing to ignore the fissures, or "interstices" as Lewis described them in the previous issue, that rent modern society:

> While all other periodicals were whispering PEACE in one tone or another; while they were all saying "hush" (for one "interest" or another), "BLAST" alone dared to present the actual discords of modern "civilization," DISCORDS now only too apparent in the open conflict between teutonic atavism and unsatisfactory Democracy. (pp.85-86)

Pound's wartime abhorrence of German backwardness and the short-fallings of liberal democracies indicates the persistently subversive role of a journal that was still committed to much more than radical aesthetics. Lewis concluded his own blasting with a similar attack on democracy. In an article on the Allied Artists Association, in which he complains about "the question of promiscuous voting by head"[90] Lewis suggests that artists should stand in opposition to the democratic processes of the group wherein subscribers could show work without submitting to a selecting jury. Founded in 1907, the Association, "based on co-operation instead of competition", aimed to "give the chance of exhibiting his works to any one who chooses to pay for it."[91] In Lewis' estimation this practice undermined the elite position of the artist. Since artists are more worthy as individuals than as a group, he asks:

> Must we stick to the system by which the dog with the biggest litter, though not necessarily the biggest dog, gets it's (sic) way? The best is notoriously unprolific. And it is a fact, that in any open society like the Allied Artists (as indeed in any society of a considerable size at all) the disgusting and rabbit-like fecundity of the Bad overwhelms the exclusive property of the Good... For the health and possibility for future growth of the Allied Artists, they would do well to keep their 'advanced' members. And as Vorticists or Cubists are temperate propagators, their interests should not be measured by their numbers, as their utility to the State is not that of so many men-at-arms, but as individuals. They should be recognized as a necessarily self governing community, and given privileges equal at least to the privilege of numbers.[92]

Being more discriminatory in accepting artists and writers into their ranks than this populist British salon, the Vorticists and the Cubists, insists Lewis, are less likely to produce bad art than are the members of the Allied Artists group. In stressing the uniqueness of the Vorticists and the singularity of their identities as individuals over the collective and democratic identity of the Allied Artists, Lewis underlines his belief in the potential of the figure of the individual, esoteric anarchist and artist. Writers, painters and sculptors, he insists, should be regarded as subject to an alternative but

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[90] Lewis, "History of the Largest Independent Society in England", ibid, p.81.
[91] "Exhibition of The Allied Artists Association", *The Times*, July 8th, 1911, p.13.
[92] Lewis, ibid.

nonetheless élitist sovereignty, be allowed independence from the state and enjoy their own aesthetic prerogatives.

The Great War and Libertarian Individualism: "The Crowd Master"

While the First World War is associated with images of vast troop movements and new and increasingly depersonalised methods of mechanised warfare, Lewis' wartime experience as a gunner in the Royal Artillery actually intensified his belief in the significance of the individual. In *A History of Bombing*, Sven Lindqvist notes the "high-tech inhumanity of modern warfare",[93] a process of desensitisation that impacts upon soldiers serving in any modern army. This feature of the modern military can be seen in their organisational structure, whereby every national army amounts to a necessarily totalitarian system incorporating its troops into various divisions and squadrons, with specific hierarchies and with their own group-identities (the navy, the infantry, the engineering corps, the infantry, the air-force and so on), not to mention the literal incorporation of troops into modern weapons-systems such as the artillery battery. Unsurprisingly, Wyndham Lewis' experiences while serving as an artillery officer on the French front had an alienating effect upon him but rather than distancing the artist and writer from his former, radical political consciousness the Great War served to distance him even further from the liberal democratic system and intensified his libertarian consciousness. Rather than undergoing a process of psychic trauma, such as shell-shock, Lewis instead experienced a process of intellectual and political isolation which underlined his belief in the anarchic potential of the individual. The impersonal nature of "bombardiering", whereby huge guns fire blankets of shells at the opposing side, stands in opposition to the more "intimate" methods of killing that are associated with infantry combat such as bayoneting and sniping (although this "rule" is overridden by the mass carnage that was inflicted during the Great War by the machine-gun). The troops who operated these guns performed a very functional role in loading large shells and firing their weapons over great distances, and the persistence of Lewis' personally anarchic streak during his time as an artillery officer provides a further insight into the literary and political commitments that led to the creation of *BLAST*.

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[93] Lindqvist, Sven, *A History of Bombing*, Trans. from *No dug do*, published by Albert Bonniers Forlag, by Linda Haverty Rugg (New York: The New Press, 2001), p.60.

This political stance is evident in Lewis' fictional fragment, "The Crowd Master", which can be read as an explanation of the magazine's radical purpose. The original story appeared in the second number of *BLAST* and was intended as part of a longer sequence but instead it was rewritten later on and republished by Lewis in his 1937 war-memoir *Blasting and Bombardiering*. The original version opens in London in July, 1914, where, despite their obvious patriotism the anxiously "black London war-crowds" are viewed with suspicion by the police, in whose eyes any urban crowd is a potentially revolutionary threat:

> THE CROWD
>
> Men drift in thrilling masses past the Admiralty, cold night tide. Their throng creeps round corners, breaks faintly here and there up against a railing barring from possible sights. Local ebullience and thickening: some madman disturbing their depths with baffling and recondite noise.
>
> THE POLICE with distinct icy contempt herd London. They shift it in lumps here and there, touching and shaping with heavy delicate professional fingers. Their attitude is as though these universal crowds wanted some new vague suffrage. (p.94)

Moving by the politically sensitive space of the Admiralty offices (which was bombed by Clan na Gael Dynamiters in 1884), the crowd functions as an uncomfortable reminder of the democratic process developed by the British liberals since the 1850s. But as well as serving as a signal motif of the liberal tradition, the crowd has a flip-side in the democratic state as it is at the mercy of any subversive individual with the wit to manipulate it. Blenner, an invalided ex-soldier, is exposed to "the continuity of the Crowd-spirit" that has emerged during the period "since the war began blowing up seriously". He travels to London in the hope of enlisting and finds himself absorbed in the milieu of excitement and war-fever: "Great national events are always preparing, the Crowd is in its habitual childish sleep. It rises to meet the crash half awake and struggling, with voluptuous and violent movements." Everyone Blenner meets is transformed by events, each becoming "a new person" in "this temporary Death and Resurrection of the Crowd" but he is satisfied with this impersonal process of generalisation: "Blenner was not too critical a man to penetrate their disguises or ferret out their Ego. He was glad to see so little of it for once." He finds sanctuary in the mass conformity of the war-crowd and its "Delightful

masquerade of everyone." The lack of identity is comforting: "The certainty of feeling alike with everyone else was a great relief for over-paradoxical nerves." But amidst the amorphousness of the expectant and excitable crowds he meets an unusual man, a "Crowd-proof" individual, or "professional Crowd-officer", the American sociologist Brown Bryan Multum, whose interpretation of modern man is very similar to Gustave Le Bon's, as expressed inhis book *The Crowd*. Multum, "appeared the only conscious atom of the Crowd. A special privilege with him: to be of the Crowd and individually conscious. He was the King of the Future." (pp. 97-99) Blenner remembers buying a book written by Multum from "The Bomb", an anarchist bookshop on Charing Cross Road. This shop was a favourite with radicals during this period and with its "defiant name, red doors and window frames" it had a reputation for selling anarchist and communist books and newspapers and for printing left-wing pamphlets.[94] Sharing its name with the title of one of the Rossetti's fictional anarchist newspapers in the novel *A Girl Among the Anarchists*, the bookshop serves an equally subversive function in Lewis' modernist text. A "small altruistic Book-Bazaar", it is dedicated to satisfying the needs of politicised and estranged avant-garde types like Blenner:

> On leaving His Majesty's forces, after a concussion, and become definitely, to his family's distress, a crank and very liberal, he began reading sociological books and wandering about London. On passing the Bomb shop he was attracted by a poster advertising a new book:
>
> THE CROWD MASTER
>
> By BROWN BRYAN MULTUM
>
> THE CROWD MASTER, What might that mean? His bright astonished eyes fixed on the words, drinking up a certain strength from them.
>
> An opposition of and welding of the two heaviest words that stand for the multitude on the one hand, the Ego on the other.
>
> That should be something! (p.99)

[94] Groves, Reg, *The Balham Group: How British Trotskyism Began* (London: Pluto, 1974), p.45.

On reading Multum's sociological book Blenner finds that it the ideal has a deeper meaning than "Master of the Crowd in the sense of a possessive domination by an individual". (p.100) Having purchased his text in a famous, radical bookstore, Blenner finds in its pages the kind of subversive individualism that lies behind Lewis' literary aesthetic.

Multum's natural anti-authoritarianism and his ability to remain detached from the crowd characterises the protagonist of Lewis' later version of "The Crowd Master", which was published in *Blasting and Bombardiering* in 1937. The rewritten piece shows how his anarchic thought was sharpened by the war. Lewis prefaced this version of "the Crowd Master" by blaming the Liberals for allowing the war to occur in the first place ("it is always a liberal government that makes war").[95] The ex-serviceman Blenner is replaced by Cantleman, "a rough Bohemian" who reads about the declaration of war in Scotland and the piece describes the subsequent mobilisation in greater detail. Lewis also remembers the ominous possibilities that emerged from the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian archduke, Franz Ferdinand, and points out that it had greater implications than any of the literary political intrigues he had encountered so far:

> Up in Scotland there was an Olympiad, it seems. Macbeth's witches had gathered at Sarajevo, to preside at a diabolical brew beside which the plots of Shakespeare were storms-in-teacups. Scotland was free of all such presences at the moment, Morpeth living in a golden age.
>
> Meanwhile I watched the papers coming in from London with their crashing headlines.[96]

The subversive Cantleman reads the headline, "MORPETH OLYMPIAD, RECORD CROWD", advertising a sporting event and also announcing the inevitable onset of war:

> The crude violet lettering, distillation of suffragetic years of minor violence! Celebrated for minor violence, too, was *he*, a rough bohemian – he savoured violence for its own sake, as a coarse joke, or the crepitation of a Chinese cracker. He was not a man of blood. – He did not understand – he was very stupid. He was a suffragette.
>
> Eager for news, he went into a shop and got all the popular London papers. *Mails* and *Expresses*, the loudest shouters of the lot.

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[95]. Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p.67.
[96] Ibid, p.69.

> How they hollered "War" to a thrilled universe! He found all his horizons, by the medium of this yellow journalism, turned into a sinister sulphur. He was as pleased as Punch.[97]

Announced in the pages of the jingoistic, rabble-rousing "yellow" press and arriving after years of low-intensity but publicity-conscious subversion, including the Suffragettes' militant campaign for women's right to vote, Lewis proposes that the "thrilling" outbreak of the Great War has been prefaced by the political disturbances of the Edwardian period. Mediated through the popular press, the news of war promises the bohemian even more of the kind of excitement that was provided by radical feminists during their campaign for universal suffrage.

The Vorticists' anxiety over the revolutionary methods employed by the Suffragettes was expressed in the second issue of *BLAST*, in which an appeal, "To Suffragettes", offered "A WORD OF ADVICE":

> IN DESTRUCTION, AS IN OTHER THINGS,
> stick to what you understand.
> WE MAKE YOU A PRESENT OF OUR VOTES.
> ONLY LEAVE WORKS OF ART ALONE.
> YOU MIGHT DESTROY A GOOD PICTURE BY ACCIDENT
> THEN! –
> MAIS SOYEZ BONNES FILLES!
> NOUS VOUS AIMONS!
> WE ADMIRE YOUR ENERGY. YOU AND ARTISTS ARE THE ONLY THINGS (YOU DON'T MIND BEING CALLED THINGS?) LEFT IN ENGLAND WITH A LITTLE LIFE IN THEM.
>
> IF YOU DESTROY A GREAT WORK OF ART you are destroying a greater soul than if you annihilated a whole district of London.
>
> LEAVE ART ALONE, BRAVE COMRADES! (pp.151-152)

In April 1913 the Suffragettes added art to their list of targets when they slashed paintings in the Manchester Art Gallery (that month, an artist, Olive Hockin appeared in court charged with conspiring to burn down a croquet pavilion in Roehampton, vandalising an orchid house in Kew, cutting down telephone wires and setting fire to

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[97] Ibid, p. 70.

a post box[98]). A year later the movement chose a literary target when an activist vandalised Sargent's painting of Henry James in the Royal Academy.[99] For the Vorticists, these attacks on high culture underlined how the shock-value of terrorism might also have an aesthetic purchase: as well as serving blows against the male-dominated artistic establishment they provided the suffrage movement with a particularly avant-garde form of notoriety. Rather than attacking public buildings or prominent individuals representing the status quo, the Suffragettes chose instead to attack art itself and their radical gesture in this direction is not far removed, in its imaginative terms, at least, from the "startling fact" of tossing "a bomb into pure mathematics" that is proposed by Mr Vladimir, the malignant eastern European ambassador in Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel, *The Secret Agent*.[100] Therefore, while the Vorticists facetiously promise their votes to the Suffragettes they also address the radical feminists as their "comrades" and the piece acknowledges the radicalism of their actions. Despite their aesthetic "blasts" against the establishment the reality of Suffragette knives tearing across canvasses in the art galleries challenged the Vorticists' theoretically radical agenda. By its undeniably "practical" methods the suffrage movement gave Vorticism something to compete with. In contrast to the Vorticists' concern at this policy of attacking museum pieces, Cantleman's tough brand of aestheticism allows him to enjoy subversion and conditions him for the coming conflict. While *BLAST* warned that vandalising valuable works of art can be as heinous an act as levelling entire portions of the British capital, Cantleman's stupidity and status as "a suffragette" allows him to look forward with the anticipation of a real extremist to the anarchy of the front line.

Reading the "three inch capitals" of the newspaper headlines, Cantleman interprets the various typefaces as "the grand messengers of death" but his exposure to this kind of radicalism has prepared him for world war:

> The news brought into relief a novel system of things. Everything was going to be delightfully *different*. There was the closing of the Stock Exchange. What would happen as regards the Banks? Would there be a shortage of small change? No sixpence for a shoe-black, or penny to buy a paper! A host of fascinating contretemps presented

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[98] "Suffragist Conspiracy: Lenient Sentence On An Artist", *The Times*, Saturday, April 5th, 1913, p.4.
[99] Houen, Alex, *Terrorism and Modern Literature*, p.128.
[100] Conrad, Joseph, *The Secret Agent* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 61, 67. Vladimir proposes this outrage by comparing it to the uselessness of a similar gesture against art: "Of course, there is art. A bomb in the National Gallery would make some noise. But it would not be serious enough… There would be some screaming of course, but from whom? Artists – art critics and such like – people of no account. Nobody minds what they say." (p.67)

> themselves to the readers of the newspapers... Food supplies had better be laid in at once. And what of course of invasion? What a change an invasion would be! Back to William the Conqueror! The exciting novelties foreshadowed pleased everybody, such a delicious earthquake made children of the party... The next few days was a gay carnival of fear, or conventional horror.[101]

Cantleman reverses *BLAST*'s complaint against the Suffragettes and their politically motivated cultural vandalism by enjoying the possibility of some wartime anarchy. Disasters for capitalism, such as the closing of the stock exchange, with its consequent inconveniences and shortages for the middle classes excites Cantleman's radical imagination and the likelihood of chaos only encourages his subversively bohemian mind. Cantleman's (and Lewis') imagined ideal, wherein widespread terror at the outbreak of war serves as an amusement is not at all dissimilar from the pleasures expressed by anarchist writers at the possibility of dynamite outrages during the 1880s and 1890s.

The story updates the terrorism genre by adding the possibilities of a spy-thriller (outlined during the late Victorian, Edwardian and war years by authors such as the popular novelist and self-proclaimed amateur spy-hunter William Le Queux) as Cantleman, travelling by train to England for enlistment, reflects on the possibility of sabotage. This contrasts with Blenner's eventless train journey to London in the original version:

> When he woke he was evidently upon a bridge. Newcastle-on-Tyne, he found it was. There were sentries on the bridge. It might be blown up otherwise – we were speeding towards all bridges with infernal machines ready for use. Stacks of rifles on the railway platform. More "mobilization scenes" to delight the *Mail* or *Mirror*.[102]

The ever-present newspapers fuel the mass anxiety and in Cantleman's imagination everyone is implicated in the planting of bombs at railway bridges, while the newspapers' "delight" at mobilisation is equalled by their delight in any train-wrecking that might occur. Cantleman's subversive imaginings counter the wider atmosphere of paranoia and as hysteria takes hold the unfolding of events shocks the British masses with a violence akin to an explosion, or of a sexual assault:

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[101] Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, pp.72-74.
[102] Ibid, p.74.

> The "great historical event" is always hatching; the Crowd in its habitual sleep. Then the appointed hand releases the clutch, the "great event" is set in motion: the crowd rises to meet the crash half awake and struggling, with voluptuous spasms. It is the Rape of the Crowd. Every acquaintance Cantleman met was a new person. The only possibility of renewal for the individual is into this temporary Death and Resurrection of the Crowd, it appears. The war was like a great new fashion. Cantleman conformed. He became a man of fashion.[103]

Lewis' fictional reflection on the war offers a modernist big bang theory in which the autonomous individual emerges from a tumult of hysteria, chaos, killing and mass destruction. Like Multum, Cantleman's incorporation into the amorphous crowd does not eradicate his ego and as Lewis explained, the significance of "The Crowd Master" lies in its stress upon the individual:

> what was meant by "Crowd-master" was that I was master of myself. Not of anybody else – that I have never wanted to be. I was master *in* the crowd, not master *of* the crowd. I moved freely and with satisfaction up and down its bloodstream, in strict, even arrogant, insulation from its demonic impulses.
>
> This I regarded as, in some sort, a triumph of mind over matter. It was a triumph of the individualist principle. I believed a great deal in the individual. And I still prefer him to his collective counterpart, though recognizing his shortcomings.[104] (*B&B*, PP.89-90)

Comfortably at large within the throng, Cantleman, like Lewis, goes to war expecting an experience that will be tailored to his individual needs. In his essay "The *Bohème*", Walter Benjamin describes modern literature's fixation with "the metaphysics of the *provocateur*", a politico-literary presence that has influenced writing of the unstable historical bourgeois period described by Perry Anderson: "Each person was in a more or less obscure state of revolt against society and faced a more or less precarious future. At the proper time he was able to feel with those who were shaking the foundations of this society." Under these terms the *flâneur* assumes a politically subversive character: his idleness makes him appear "as if he had learned from Marx that the value of a commodity is determined by the working

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[103] Ibid, p.81.
[104] Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, pp.89-90.

time socially necessary to produce it."[105] In another essay, "The *Flâneur*", Benjamin describes modern writing as "a panorama literature" in which "everyone is something of a conspirator". This literature is an urban mode, characterised by the "poetry of terror". In his absorption into the city crowd, Cantleman proves Benjamin's central point that "(t)he harder a man is to find, the more suspicious he becomes." Like the Invisible Man, Cantleman is lost in the crowd, where "(i)nvisible things flit through the teeming immensity."[106] Despite the outbreak of war, when it is presumed that a state of emergency will provoke feelings of patriotism, the crisis provides wanderers like Cantleman with even more opportunities for causing chaos.

Even though Lewis was famously ostracised for admiring Nazism in his 1931 book, *Hitler*, and was given to declaring his support for the far-right (he declared in his 1926 book, *The Art of Being Ruled*, that, "if anything, I favour some form of fascism rather than communism"[107]) he adopted the public persona of a literary and political anarchist during the period running up to the Great War. The war made this tendency all the more pronounced. Lewis thought of himself and his anarcho-syndicalist friend, philosopher, and fellow-soldier, T.E. Hulme, as "a couple of fanatics" who "preferred something more metallic and resistant than the pneumatic surface of the cuticle. We preferred a helmet to a head of hair. A scarab to a jelly-fish." While Lewis' preference for biological hardness and tough metallic surfaces was an aesthetic judgement by which he measured "the fluxions in stone of an August Rodin" to be inferior to "the more concentrated abstractions" of ancient Egyptian art, his defence of the abstract and radical style that he and Hulme emulated alongside the work of the other Vorticists was also imagined in terms of their extreme political thought. The political origins of Lewis' artistic fanaticism surface in *BLAST* but his experience of the First World War, in which Hulme was also killed, crystallised his political and artistic extremism. While Blighty was a "soul-less machine, of big-wig money-government" and the population no more than "masses of half-dead people for whom personal extinction is such a tiny step out of half-living into no-living",[108] at least life on the front was more interesting. After his own enlistment, Lewis passed quiet hours at Ballieul in 1917 reading anarchist literature and watching the bombs fly:

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[105] Benjamin, Walter, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Translated by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1999), pp.14, 20, 29.
[106] Ibid, pp. 35, 40, 42, 48, 62.
[107] Lewis, Wyndham, *The Art of Being Ruled* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1926), p.27.
[108] Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, pp.110, 115.

> I could never find anything to do. I read Proudhon ("*la propriete c'est un vol*") my favourite political philosopher, and attempted to compute the cost of shells discharged daily on either side. I was not enough of an economist to fathom the depth of ruin this spelled for European society. But I did see that the merely military outcome was by this time meaningless. It was perfectly clear that we should all be ruined, and that some people meant us to be.[109]

Then, "making ready to follow Proudhon over into the pages of Karl Marx, his great opponent (and later, I found, mine)" Lewis read *Das Kapital* in his dug-out at Ypres.[110] Writing in 1840, Proudhon considered nineteenth century bourgeois society to be one great unproductive "catastrophe" and warned writers that "To seek literary glory in a society such as ours seems to me an anachronism... we would do best to precipitate the catastrophe; the most deserving of us is the one who plays his part." Therefore, "filled with disgust for everything that exists and with projects for its destruction", Proudhon's foundational anarchist writings expressed and encouraged a "boundless" hatred for "privilege and authority"[111] while maintaining that democracy is "always tyranny."[112] Asking rhetorically "What is property?" he answered, bluntly, "It is theft."[113]

Proudhon's absolute opposition to nineteenth century democracy, capitalism and commodity culture adds a particularly anarchistic tone to the estrangement from democracy that Lewis experienced underneath the shadows of the big guns, even if it eventually led to his conversion to fascism by the early 1930s. His position on an exposed battery on the front-line allowed him the necessary perspective, away from the deadening influence of the "masses", to observe the European powers discharging their economic capital and their respective futures by the very expensive means of shelling one another's armies. The Great War saw the realization of the technological fantasies that had been imagined in popular fictions of the fin-de-siecle, such as E. Douglas Fawcett's *Hartmann the Anarchist: Or The Doom of the Great City*, in which large-scale (usually aerial bombardment) reduces principal cities such as London to rubble. Fictional dynamite guns, such as those that appear in Donald MacKay's 1885 techno-fenian novel *The Dynamite Ship*, had become real-life Howitzers and other large-scale field-pieces. While these weapons pounded the

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[109] *Ibid*, p.152.
[110] Ibid, p.159.
[111] Proudhon, Joseph Pierre, *What is Property?*, pp.6-7.
[112] Ibid, p.60.
[113] Ibid, p.13.

troops, zeppelins, "bright silver fish, which dropped egg after egg upon London"[114] were carrying out to the letter the kind of mass destruction that *BLAST* had warned would be en par with slashing a valuable painting. For Lewis, war was anarchy, and not just in a metaphorical sense. Despite its unforgivingly massive scale the war allowed for this kind of personalised, if murderous, contact between individuals. Michel Foucault has pointed out that while panopticism "automatizes and disindividualizes power" in its abstract "arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" it is also productive of a "concern with individualizing observation, with characterization and classification".[115] For Lewis, reading Proudhon's *Property Is Theft* on the front line, the battlefield recreated this aspect of the modern surveillant state.

This kind of apparently anonymous, but actually highly personalised aerial warfare reverses the surveillance dialectic offered by H.G. Wells in *The Invisible Man*, allowing agents of the state to terrorise on a scale similar to that outlined by Griffin in his threatening letter to Dr Kemp. As fraudulent as Proudhon's hated nineteenth century democracy, the war "settled nothing" and "meant nothing" for Lewis' generation, nor did it offer "any meaning, or... advantage, to the general run of man". However it did produce and perfect the kind of technologies of terror, from surveillance balloons to machine guns mounted on fixed-wing aircraft, that his "modernist" predecessors writing in the late Victorian era predicted would dominate the coming century. The meaninglessness of this new age of random political terror (the Great War was, after all, initiated by the actions of Serbian terrorists in Sarajevo) corresponds with the random literary style of *BLAST*. With its manifestos and radical tone, the journal's first issue gave an aesthetic voice to the political unpredictability that characterised the pre-war months. Lewis' commitment to political and aesthetic anarchy did not end with his absorption into the British army and, as illustrated in the Cantleman fragment, his experiences at the front exacerbated his sense of libertarian individualism. Although he eventually veered toward the right-wing extremism, this too was characterised by *Proudhonesque* scepticism of large-scale political organisation. Thus he quickly went off Bolshevism because it had "such a top-dog look about it" and complained that "the so-called 'revolutionary' artists – who have been regarded by the Royal Academician as the 'Reds' of the painting world – as 'bolsheviks' of art – turn out to be anything but *persona grata* with the highpriests of Social Revolution. They are 'anarchists,' merely. And if there is one thing any

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[114] Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p.192.
[115] Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish,* pp. 202, 203.

good communist dislikes more than another it is an anarchist."[116] In 1926 Lewis even predicted that the era of extended conflict ushered in by the First World War and about to be concluded by another global conflict would spell the end of the "sovereign state",[117] while he described his book *The Art of Being Ruled* as a "Leftwing" book written "to save people from being 'ruled' too much – from being 'ruled' off the face of the earth" Lewis also expressed his preference for the "Marxian playboys" of the 1930s, such as W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood against the right's "hardboiled crowd", including Douglas Jerrold, G.K. Chesterton and Hillaire Belloc. "For impressive literary output," he wrote, "you must go to the Radical Camp." Here, "the free movement of particles... is an extremely encouraging sign."[118]

In *Blasting and Bombardiering* and in his political essays collected in *The Art of Being Ruled*, Wyndham Lewis projected himself as a subversive anarchist and insisted upon the aesthetic potential of this kind of individual, whom he represented as railing against the totalising formations of the state, of the military and of warfare. When war broke out the literary explosions of *BLAST* were subsumed within a wider conflagration but this did not rule out the possibility of individual autonomy, as Lewis' war memoir shows. The conflict only increased his aesthetic consciousness, and by association, his political incendiarism and when Lewis was demobilised after the war he quickly hatched a scheme with the surviving Vorticists to "begin the 'post-war' with a bang" as "some were very anxious indeed that we should all do a bit of 'blasting' again." Lewis was asked "to up and 'blast' a way for them through the bourgeois barrage" but "X Group", as the project was named, turned out to be a damp squib and Lewis finally gave up on group projects. Determined to continue with his individualist literary and artistic ethos he went "underground" and buried himself "in the Reading Room of the British Museum or out of sight in some secret workshop."[119]

Rather than following through its own programme *BLAST* petered out after the June 1915 edition, doubtlessly as a result of the outbreak of war and of the concentration of political chaos at the front where, as Lewis explained, there was still plenty of potential for the individual anarchist to run foul of the system. Radical literature was sustained after the war by "the gallant rear-guard actions spasmodically undertaken in the British Isles by literary sharpshooters steeped in the heroic 'abstract' tradition, usually termed avant-garde, for want of a more appropriate word". Lewis felt that the new modernism was doomed, and that the readers of the

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[116] Ibid, pp. 205, 208, 268.
[117] *The Art of Being Ruled*, p.191.
[118] *Blasting and Bombardiering*, pp.303, 306, 307.
[119] Ibid, pp.211, 303.

future would consider "the period of *Blast*, of *Ulysses*, of *The Waste Land*... an island of incomparable bliss." This was because the "pre-war dawn" could never be recreated since "the day was lost, for art, at Sarajevo."[120] As well as sustaining modernist writing such as that showcased in *BLAST*, terrorism had its drawbacks and despite its place in the modernist imaginary political violence could also be detrimental for art. So, despite Lewis' prediction in the first issue that the orchestration of chaos would "provoke Art" (p.146), *BLAST* only ran to two numbers thanks to the desperate actions of young Serbian nationalists. However, in its very short-livedness the journal remained true to its anarchist origins, with its unpredictability, spontaneity and incompleteness.

[120] *Blasting and Bombardiering*, p.256., 258, 261.

Conclusion:

The Popularity of Terrorism

In his 1979 book, *On Terrorism and the State*, the Italian Situationist, Gianfranco Sanguinetti, argues that, thanks to its susceptibility to political violence, society has become enthralled by "its own terrorist delirium". Drawing on Guy Debord's analysis of modern capitalism and its relationship with technology and the media in *The Society of the Spectacle*, Sanguinetti claims that postmodern society is no longer concerned with reality but instead "only wants to be looked at, contemplated, admired". Central to Debord's thesis is appeal of "the spectacle", or the deliberately conspicuous nature of capital, centered around the commodity fetish, which demands that it be continually observed and contemplated by modern subjects. The spectacular appeal of terrorism lies in the visually-oriented nature of capitalist modernity that Debord describes and it is this voyeuristic feature of global capitalism that, as witnessed live on television screens across the world on 11th September, 2001, has made capitalism and its symbols so vulnerable to terrorist attack, and is the reason why the imagination of disaster has become a central concern in modern society. Like the dynamiters of the 1880s, the Al Qaeda hijackers of 2001 chose as their target a building that was replete with its own symbolism and which served as a global monument to the economic and imperial systems that they opposed. But because of its symbolic status, the destruction of the World Trade Center also underlined Walter Laqueur's assertion that terrorism is, at bottom, an ultimately value free phenomenon: ultimately, the terrorist is more committed to creating a spectacle than he or she is to the service of a particular cause. Despite the revolutionary ideology and political grievances that drove the Al Qaeda hijackers to strike the United States, their actions will be remembered more for the shocking, iconic imagery that they generated.

While Sanguinetti prefers to view terrorism as a deceitful simulation in which radicals are manipulated by state power, in much the same terms as the London anarchist, D.J. Nicholl, did in 1892, such an interpretation ignores the claim, made by radicals like Stepniak, that subversive political violence is an inevitable result of modern capitalism, its supporting systems and its oppressive structures. Clearly, the "terrorist infection"[1] that has taken hold of the popular imagination, and has rooted itself firmly in the modern mind since the attack on the United States is more than a simple police

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[1] Sanguinetti, Gianfranco, *On Terrorism and the State*, translated by Lucy Forsythe and Michel Pringent from *Del Terrorismo e Dello Stato* (1979), (London: Aldgate, 1982), p.22, 27, 57.

"gin", as Nicholl described it, and more than a scheme designed by governments to protect capitalism and distract their critics. But as Sanguinetti points out, terrorism is an "enigma" that requires decoding: as "an unsolved riddle that ... provisionally maintains itself",[2] it requires, like the Invisible Man's scientific formula, to be made readable. As shown in Chapter Three, with the nihilists' attempts to decode their own cipher in Stepniak's novel, *Career of a Nihilist*, and with Cuss and Bunting's efforts to break the multi-layered code that obscures the chemical secret of invisibility in H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*, and in Chapter Four, with Vorticism's shocking typography and deliberately obscure manifestoes, the apparent indecipherability of terrorism is central to modern experience and is a key component of modern literature.

As we have seen throughout the course of this thesis, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century literature explains the relationship between terrorism and the wider phenomena of industrial, political and cultural modernity. Situationists such as Debord and Sanguinetti have added their own interpretation by pointing to the spectacle as a free-floating form and expression (but a vaguely-defined one, at that), of modern capital, in which media imagery is linked to and supports economic structures. This thesis has offered an explanation as to how the shocking and explosive spectacles of subversive political violence, designed to subvert this dialectic of the society of the spectacle, have become literary ones, and how modernism, in its broadest sense (which includes popular fictions and journalism of the 1880s-1890s alongside the classical, or 'high', 'literary' expressions of later years) is concerned with the range and effect of political terror. The "dynamite novels" and the sensational newspaper discourse that responded to the bombing campaign of Clan na Gael, and the anarchists who, with their clandestine presses, called for revolution, along with the Invisible Man and his campaign of revolutionary terror, and the avant-garde modernism of the Vorticists, with its explosive poetics and "blasting" of mainstream literature and culture (a concern shared with Edgar Wallace's novel, *The Four Just Men*, which describes the "poetical idea" of anarchism[3]) - all of these are literary responses to (and in the case of anarchist journalism, a direct example of) the emergence of terrorism as a counter-strategy to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century society of the spectacle, and to its imperialist and capitalist drives.

Sanguinetti, like Baudrillard, overstates the case for popular involvement in terrorism but his complicity theory can illuminate our reading of the relationship that exists between literature and the shocks of revolutionary political violence. Occurring as they do within the spectacle, he holds that the results of outrages "are their finality" and

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[2] Ibid, p.26.
[3] Wallace, Edgar, *The Four Just Men* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.66.

that terrorism becomes its own message. As with the obscure literary shocks of the modernist journal, *BLAST*, the political meaning of the explosion is contained in the shock itself. Terry Eagleton has pointed out that these tactics have a permanently nihilistic character, because "'pure' terrorism is not just an assault on ... hotels, nightclubs and office blocks; it is an assault on meaning as such."[4] It amounts to a self-reflexive and voyeuristic process, wherein "a much sought-after spectacle" is provided "for the pleasure of the most lurid of bourgeoisies", as Edmund Burke complained.[5] In the light of the destruction of the World Trade Centre, and the repeated broadcasting of the moment of its collapse into Lower Manhattan, it is worth remembering Burke's theory that revolutionary terror provided entertainment for "torpid" imaginations, in order to assess how enduring the appeal of shocking, subversive political violence is. In contrast to the overwhelming symbolic capital of the New York attack, the far more politically focused strike on the Pentagon has almost evaporated from popular memory.

The essential meaninglessness of the "pure" terrorist outrage is explored in *Underground* (2000), Haruki Murakami's study of the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo attacks on the Tokyo subway, when members of the apocalyptic religious cult released nerve gas on train carriages packed with commuters, killing twelve. The novelist interviewed a former cult member who pointed to modern Japan's consciousness of impending disaster, which was taken advantage of by the cult when it carried out the attack: "inside all Japanese", he told the author, "there is an apocalyptic viewpoint: an invisible, unconscious sense of fear."[6] Tokyo's hyper-modern, technology-fixated culture is represented in Murakami's book as being highly susceptible to the kinds of revolutionary political violence explored in the popular fictions of the late nineteenth-century. Plastic packages containing sarin gas were wrapped inside popular newspapers by "nondescript" cult members and left on subway trains in much the same, random, way as was the unclaimed dynamite bomb that was deposited on the London underground carriage in 1897: once more, an underground railway system, symbolic of modern urban circulation, was targeted for indiscriminate attack. The victims were "salarymen", either commuters or underground railway workers, average citizens who could not comprehend why the random attacks took place. As one victim complained, the attack had no political meaning: "Even with the IRA, I could at least see things from their side and maybe begin to understand what they hoped to achieve. But the gas attack was

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[4] Eagleton, Terry, "The Art of Terror", *The Guardian*, Saturday, November 30th, 2002, p.24.
[5] Sanguinetti, ibid, pp. 65, 70, 73-74.
[6] Murakami, Haruki, *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*, Trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel from *Andaguranndo* (Kodansha, 1997) and *Yakusoku sareto basha de* (Bungeishunjusa, 1998) (London: Harvill, 2000), p.298.

simply beyond all comprehension."[7] Murakami examines why Tokyo's modern urban culture was susceptible to being terrorized, and finds the answer at the very centre of modern Japanese culture: after the subway attack, he wrote, the Aum cult became part of "our metabolism" because "something in that encounter, in their presence, must also have been present in us... some details seem almost to conspire together... These subconscious 'shadows' are an underground that we carry around within us".[8]

In Glenn Meade's recent popular novel, *Resurrection Day* (2002), Al Qaeda exploit the susceptibility of another modern city to terrorist attack when they threaten to spray Washington D.C. with "a powerful weapon of mass destruction", VX gas. Realising the difficulty of keeping such weapons out of the hands of terrorists, the American President admits that "(i)t's at times like this that you realize how vulnerable we are in this technological age of ours."[9] Such fictional representations of terror, and their real-life analogues in events such as the Tokyo gas attacks or the destruction of the World Trade Centre, underline the continuing presence of terrorism in the modern consciousness. But this fear, with its attendant pains and miseries, also becomes pleasurable in the modern period. While Edmund Burke's readers speculated over the nature of the sublime from a safe distance, the modern subject has become completely immersed in the culture of fear. A more immediate fascination than Burke's model, terrorism has become central to modern experience, and its striking and uncontrollable aspects inscribe popular culture more than they have ever done before: the voyeuristic and "bloodthirsty spectacle", as Sanguinetti describes twentieth-century terrorism, and its relationship with global capitalism, reminds us of Stepniak's belief in the terrorist as "a certain type of modern humanity". He or she has emerged as the individual who has come to characterize the modernity's traumas: "this period requires certain men to practice terrorism," warns Sanguinetti, and it is "capable of creating the men terrorism has need of."[10]

Cinema is ideally equipped to highlight the postmodern interplay of terrorism, surveillance and the spectacle. In Phillip Noyce's 1992 film, *Patriot Games*, based on Tom Clancy's 1987 novel of the same title (prefaced by a quotation from Edmund Burke), the continuity between late Victorian newspaper discourse and popular fiction is updated and given an equally self-reflexive thrust with the showcasing of video surveillance technologies. The film replaces the traditional, literary rhetoric of terrorism with a stylized, and intensively visual version of political revolt, as the technologies and

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[7] Ibid., pp.91,109,113.
[8] Ibid, pp. 197,199.
[9] Meade, Glenn, *Resurrection Day* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002), pp. 84,101.
[10] Sanguinetti, ibid, pp. 74-75, 91-92.

strategies of counter-terrorism are employed by an "ultra-violent faction of the I.R.A.", the Ulster Liberation Army, as it extends its campaign of terror from Ireland to the United States. Opening in Whitehall, London, the film introduces a military historian, Jack Ryan (played by Harrison Ford), who, after giving a lecture to British intelligence officials, finds himself in the middle of an attempt to kidnap Lord Holmes (Edward Fox), a member of the English royal family. Once the attack begins, Ryan attempts to save the royals and in doing so, kills one of the terrorists and captures another, Sean Miller (Sean Bean). It turns out that the dead terrorist, "Paddy Boy", is Miller's younger brother and when he escapes from custody Miller vows to exact revenge upon Ryan and his family. He does so by traveling to Maryland, where he almost kills Ryan's wife and daughter in a motorway drive-by shooting. The American responds by returning to the C.I.A., for whom he had previously worked as an analyst (the U.L.A., meanwhile, proceeds with its own plan to displace the Provisional I.R.A. in Ireland, and the audience is given a hint of the film's dramatic finale as the R.U.C. [Royal Ulster Constabulary] use fibre-optic cameras to spy on, and then raid, a bomb factory). It is with Ryan's return to "the company" that we are presented with a stylish representation of Debord's spectacle, as he is granted access to sensitive satellite surveillance images. Ryan examines digital photographs of a series of training camp in the Libyan desert and eventually finds one where he believes that Miller's and his men are training for their next operation. Once he identifies it as a U.L.A. base, the C.I.A. hand over the intelligence to the British S.A.S., who descend on the Irish terrorists. What follows is a stylized representation of a counter-terrorist massacre, as heat-sensitive satellite imagery is played to Ryan and his colleagues at C.I.A. headquarters in Langley. As "LIVE FEED" flashes above their video screens, silent digital images of S.A.S. soldiers, their bodies illuminated by glowing graphics, annihilate everyone they find in the camp. Lit up in the night darkness, they are obscured with each explosion and the massacre ends with the burning camp glowing on the screens at Langley, the imagery finally switching off as the spy satellite passes by the scene.

Convinced that his family is safe, Ryan agrees to accept an award for his bravery from Lord Holmes at his home in Maryland, but during the ceremony another attempt is made by the U.L.A. to abduct the royal. This time the surveillance dialectic is reversed as the electricity supply to the isolated house is cut off and the U.L.A. men and woman arrive, equipped with night-vision goggles and machine guns. The lightly-armed F.B.I. and British bodyguards are killed and Ryan finds himself having to evade the terrorists in his own house. As he moves from room to room, he is pursued by U.L.A. members and the audience is treated to the villains' omnipotent point of view: the green-light perspective of the night-vision goggles allows them to hunt Ryan down as he has

already done to them with the satellite images of the Libyan camp. The high-technology perspective of the terrorists' visual equipment is returned to several times before Ryan's wife disarms one of the group, allowing her husband and child to escape. The film ends conventionally enough: Ryan has a climactic fight with Miller, who is gruesomely killed with an anchor, and then blown up in a crashing speed boat. The *finale* is reminiscent of Carker's violent demise in Charles Dicken's novel, *Dombey and Son* (1848), in which the villain is struck by a train and reduced to "mutilated fragments",[11] suggesting that modernity requires that spectres such as the villain, and his political equivalent, the terrorist, be most positively laid to rest.

But the uniquely postmodern sensibility of *Patriot Games* is captured not in Miller's spectacular death but in the film's scenes of high-tech surveillance and pursuit: Clancy's novel is far less concerned with technology than Noyce's film adaptation as it does not feature the film's spectacular scenes of night-vision, opting instead for a low-tech shoot-out in the Maryland shipyards and ending with Miller's capture and Ryan's reflection on the nature of American justice. Like H.G. Wells' Invisible Man, who makes himself omnipresent by becoming invisible, Miller and his team defy the modern surveillant state and its agencies in Noyce's film (their methods are resurrected by Glenn Meade's Russian terrorist, Nikolai Gorev, who leads the Al Qaeda cell at large in Washington D.C., the only record of whom is a series of images captured on "grainy black-and-white photographs of a man whose features were barely distinguishable"[12]). Noyce's postmodern terrorism fantasy is based in the reversal of the kind of visual technologies associated with U.S. military might: the night vision goggles that featured heavily in coverage of the 1991 war against Iraq are used, on American soil, by an invading force of subversives, and the invisibility that their equipment endows them with updates Wells' representation of the Invisible Man as an unseen subversive and representative of *fin de siècle* terrorism.

In *Patriot Games*, technology has a double mobility as it can be used by terrorists and agents of the state alike. Night-vision devices, like the dynamite slabs and high explosive detonators of the 1880s, are a commodity that can be used to any political end within the modern society of the spectacle. As one Clan na Gael sympathizer claimed, "the mysterious dread of unseen danger unhinged society" during the dynamite campaign because the average Briton had been, like Jack Ryan, "attacked continually at home with his own weapon".[13] The film suggests the manipulative possibilities of

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[11] Dickens, Charles, *Dombey and Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.823.
[12] Meade, ibid, p.152.
[13] Tynan, Patrick J.P., *The Irish National Invincibles and Their Times* (London: Chatham and Co., 1894), p. 328.

surveillance, as the terrorists in the Libyan desert are visually cornered and then attacked, while the survivors attack Ryan in the same manner. Owing to their "tentacular"[14] ability to disappear from the sight of the C.I.A. and then reappear, complete with the kind of night-vision technology associated with the policing and military wings of the state, they function as emblems of modernity. and as commodities, gone wrong. Citing the importance of early "broadcast" technologies in policing, such as the wireless radio, Julie English Early has highlighted an important feature of modernity, in that these apparatus (and, it can be argued, by extension, their more modern equivalents, the satellite, the supercomputer and the omnipotent intelligence archive) serve an important ideological function, in that they support the authority of the police and make inevitable the capture and conviction of the criminal.[15] The failure of Ryan's satellite technology to track down the U.L.A. cell entertains because it indicates that these methods might not always protect the modern, politically conservative subject.

Like the Invisible Man, they are resistant to the technological prowess of the state but are vulnerable to the efforts of the individual CIA. operative, Ryan. His failure to find Miller, despite the aid of satellite surveillance, reinforces Paul Virilio's point about the growing "derealization of military engagement" in the postmodern age, when, due to the "logistics of perception... images", not bullets or bombs, "become ammunition." Miller's violent return to the United States appeals to the voyeuristic popular pleasure at observing terrorism, and of being observed by revolutionary subversives: despite the preponderance of satellites and other "sight machines",[16] and despite the protection afforded to Ryan by the F.B.I. and the army, the individual terrorist is able to defy the state, up until a certain point. With their preoccupation with politics and visibility, modern fantasies such as *Patriot Games* reintroduce audiences to the concerns about terrorism raised by H.G. Wells in his 1897 novel, *The Invisible Man*. In both fantasies, the reversal of surveillance is key to overthrowing the system: for Wells invisibility is a subversive, political condition achieved through research in chemistry while, in Noyce's film, the terrorists master the hardware that is normally associated with the omnipotence of the state.

Like other popular films dealing with terrorism, such as Mark Pellington's *Arlington Road* (1999), Stuart Baird's *Executive Decision* (1996), Wolfgang Peterson's *Airforce One* (1997) and John McTiernan's *Die Hard* (1988) and its sequels, *Die Harder* (1990) and *Die Hard With a Vengeance* (1995), *Patriot Games* fulfills the modern

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[14] Sanguinetti, ibid, p.78.
[15] Early, Julie English, "Technology, Modernity and 'the Little Man': Crippen's Capture by Wireless", *Victorian Studies*, Vol.39, no.2, pp.309-337, p.310.
[16] Virilio, Paul, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, translated by Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1989), pp.1-2.

audience's need for pure shock. A mainstream Hollywood genre, the terrorism 'Blockbuster', with its spectacular violence and themes of political hysteria, underlines the continuity between earlier forms of popular entertainment and recent cinema. As Sergei Eisenstein suggested in 1924, cinema exerts "a series of calculated pressures"[17] on the psyche of the audience. This achieved by means of montage which, as well as being fundamental to cinema, is also firmly grounded in characteristics of perception. Like the newspaper press that circulated images of terrorism alongside opinionated stories throughout the 1880s and 1890s, popular film continues to satisfy the modern subject's need for shocks, irregularity and frights. Terrorism remains a particularly *mediated* form of political violence, and it has found its own medium in the contemporary 'terrorist thriller'. Tom Gunning has pointed to the relationship between the urban spectator, at large in the "modernizing city",[18] and early cinema; the excitements provided by these films, with their crescendos of increasingly spectacular violence (*Die Hard* concludes with the near-destruction of a Los Angeles sky scraper) satisfy the visual and "physiological"[19] needs, or sensation-requirements, of modern, cinema-going audiences. Cinema's insistence upon the spectacular proves that these needs are not distant from those of the generation that first encountered moving pictures. The language of the film industry also reflects the persistence of the popular, cultural desire for shock: the image of the Hollywood "Blockbuster", with its promise of cinematic 'shock and awe', continues to pander to this demand.

Noyce's popular film testifies to the lingering role of the terrorist in modern culture, both as a figure of fear and of fascination, and more "middle-brow" films, like Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*, which was released in the same year as *Patriot Games*, are evidence that this fascination is not confined solely to the Hollywood mainstream. These fictional and cinematic instances of subversion, in which the terrorist terrorizes the modern state by manipulating its blind spots, continue to entertain readers and audiences. The shock-value of terrorism has also inspired popular writers to develop the sub-genre of terrorist literature, providing readers with very contemporary literary-political thrills. From the dynamite fictions of the 1880s to the explosive poetics of *BLAST*, the political enigma of terrorism plays an important role in the modern imagination. Its influence is enduring and the literary concerns about terrorism that were first raised in popular fictions of the *fin-de-siècle* have enjoyed a considerable afterlife. From the popular novels of recent years, such as Tom Clancy's *Patriot Games* (1987)

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[17] Eisenstein, S.M., "The Montage of Film Attractions", in *Selected Works, Vol. 1: Writings, 1922-34*, translated by Richard Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1988), pp.39-58, p.39.
[18] Gunning, Tom, "From the Kaleidoscope to the X-Ray: Urban Spectatorship, Poe, Benjamin and *Traffic in Souls* (1913)", *Wide Angle*, Vol.19, no. 4 (October, 1997), pp.25-61, p.30.
[19] Eisenstein, ibid, p.42.

and Glenn Meade's Resurrection Day (2002), to more literary works, including Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987) and *Anil's Ghost* (2000), Anne Patchett's *Bel Canto* (2001) and Janet Turner-Hospital's *Due Preparations for the Plague* (2004), terrorism and the imagination of urban political chaos have received new expression. It is hoped that this thesis will provide, at least, an initial and opening critique of this under-appreciated literary phenomenon.

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