THEMES IN THE EDWARDIAN POLITICAL NOVEL

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THMES IN THE EDWARDIAN POLITICAL NOVEL

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CHAPTER I
THE EDWARDIAN NOVEL AND POLITICS

Moral purpose, ranging in flavor from the pointedly satiric to the broadly humorous to the downright didactic, has been an essential ingredient of the English novel since its beginning and has catered to the taste both of the author and his audience. The dollops of morality with which Defoe soothed the half-guilty pleasure taken in prose fiction by the new middle-class reading public, the sugar-coating of virtuous purpose with which Richardson cut the spiciness of Pamela's struggle against a fate worse than death, the generous layers of social and political satire and pleas for reform in the Victorian three-deckers, all have reflected the biases and aims of the authors; they also have permitted the public to indulge its taste for reading novels with the comfortable feeling of having received instruction as well as pleasure.

One Edwardian literary critic regarded this tendency as a national characteristic and a mandate from the reader:

In England, politics and religion are the two absorbing fields of discussion, and the novel which deals intimately with the real life of the people was bound in this country to concern itself with political ideas....the average Englishman prefers his books of amusement to possess a moral or a political thesis.¹

This flattering opinion of the reading audience was not unanimous; Arnold Bennett professed to believe that the public read novels "not with any artistic, spiritual, moral or informative purpose, but simply in order to pass time...the dullest class in England takes to novels simply as a refuge from its own dullness."²

H. G. Wells, on the other hand, interpreted his era as one of a changed viewpoint:

...the theory that the novel is wholly and solely a means of relaxation...was the dominant view of the great period that we now in our retrospective way speak of as the Victorian, and it still survives to this day....The reader is represented as a man burthened, toiling, worn....He wants to forget the troublesome realities of life....to be taken out of himself, to be cheered, consoled, amused--above all, amused. That is the Weary Giant theory of the novel. It ruled British criticism up to the period of the Boer War--and then something happened to quite a lot of us, and it has never completely recovered its old dominance.³

Whether or not they believed in a mandate from the public, the Edwardian novelists gave a prominent place to the problems of man in society. Political criticism was far from new to the English novel, but after the turn of the century it was given broader scope; where the Victorians had in the main directed their criticism against concrete examples of incompetence, chicanery, injustice, and hypocrisy and had satirized individual foibles by embodying them in one-sided


characters, the Edwardians questioned the very foundations of
the social structure—capitalism, class hierarchy, the Par-
liamentary system—and studied the whole man instead of one
objectionable side of him.

In England, the Boer War might well have been the moti-
vating factor in the era of public soul-searching which began
in the last years of Victoria's reign. The spectacle of the
mightiest nation in the world being fought to a standstill by
a few South African farmers, coupled with severe criticism of
England in other countries, led the public to look for a
scapegoat on whom to blame the war; the soldier was sacro-
sanct, so politicians got more than their share of blame. 4
The moral rights and wrongs of imperialism and colonialism
were widely debated, and there was speculation as to the abil-
ity of the traditional party system to produce leaders
capable of handling international crises and the new domestic
social problems. Britain was being challenged industrially
and militarily by Germany, socialists were advocating State
interference with the individual for the individual's own
good, the validity of the doctrine of Free Trade was being
questioned, women were clamoring for equal rights and Ireland
was demanding Home Rule—all of these combined with the spirit
of scientific agnosticism to produce an atmosphere of disen-
chantment and doubt.

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4 Esme C. Wingfield-Stratford, The Victorian Aftermath
(New York, 1934), p. 35.
The spread of literacy which followed the Education Act of 1870 had an undoubted effect in increasing discussion of political affairs, but to many it seemed that the halfpenny press excited public opinion and stimulated the war of nerves in the imperialist struggle, creating an atmosphere of sensation rather than reflection. As Conrad complained,

"Journalists can't speak the truth,--nor even see it as other men do. It's a professional inability, and that's why I hold journalism for the most demoralizing form of human activity, made up of mere daily opportunities, of shifting feelings."

Serious critics and novelists believed the novel to be the one suitable vehicle for a judicious interpretation of public affairs.

"Fiction is becoming what poetry was once truly said to be, and what the newspaper merely pretends to be--a criticism of life....To prejudice, of course, all men are liable, but in the choice and use of facts the novelist is less constrained than the journalist. He desires to put things in his own way, to make life seem to support his own contention, but his mental habit, ill-advised as it may be, is less likely to distort the truth than the journalist's slop-suit of ready-made opinions, and will admit, as the other does not, of continual amendment and modification."

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5Ibid., p. 157.


Wagenknecht states that Wells contended that the reason few really adult readers read modern novels was that most novels assumed that people's lives and actions are never determined by political and social conditions, but only by personal reactions. He envisioned a more comprehensive approach on the part of the novelist:

We are going to write about it all...about business and finance and politics and precedence and pretentiousness and decorum and indecorum, until a thousand pretences and ten thousand impositions shrivel in the cold, clear air of our elucidations....We are going to appeal to the young and the hopeful and the curious against the established, the dignified, and defensive. Before we have done, we will have all life within the scope of the novel.

Galsworthy took a more moderate approach, writing that it was not the business of the imaginative man to dogmatize as to definite solutions: "All a writer can do is to hang on to the edge of the national tablecloth as it disappears over the edge of the table and try to keep it from altogether sagging to one side or the other." He considered the novelist to have a vast influence, though that influence was by its very nature almost impossible to evaluate.

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11 Ibid., p. 260.
The novel is the most pliant and far-reaching medium of communication between minds, just because it does not preach, but supplies pictures and evidence from which each reader may take that food which best suits his growth....the novel supplies revelation in...the most secret, thorough and subtle form—revelation browsed upon, brooded over, soaked up into the fibre of the mind and conscience....it has changed the currents of judgment in a man's mind before he even suspects there is any change going on; the more unaware he is, the more surely he is undermined, for he has no means of mobilizing his defenses. 12

Conrad regarded his work as an outpouring of emotional sensibility rather than an active attempt to produce a didactic effect upon his reader. 13

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is before all, to make you see. That—and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed you shall find there, according to your deserts, encouragement, consolation, fear, charm—all you demand—and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask. 14

The Edwardian novelists abandoned the Victorian political criticism of some of the inhabitants or some of the subsidiary arrangements of the social structure; 15 they turned instead to an investigation of the effects of political theories, habits of mind, and actions both on collective society and on the individual. The man who represented a constituency or held

12Marrot, p. 720.
public office or attempted to influence politics in any way was deemed worthy of study as a whole man. The novelists viewed the side of him which called forth criticism as an effect, not a cause. H. G. Wells asserted that it was equally as important to evaluate the effects of politics on the man as of the man upon politics:

On every hand we are creating officials... and private life in a dozen fresh directions comes into contact with officialdom. But we still do practically nothing to work out the interesting changes that occur in this sort of man and that when you withdraw him as it were from the common crowd of humanity, put his mind if not his body into uniform and endow him with powers and functions and rules. It is manifestly a study of increasing importance....We must have not only the fullest treatment of the temptations, vanities, abuses, and absurdities of office, but all its dreams, its sense of constructive order, its consolations, its sense of service and its nobler satisfactions.

Wells was the most subjective writer among the Edwardians; his overwhelming interest in ideas and his belief in the ultimate perfectibility of both the individual and society led him to present legislative panaceas in his political novels and to express a hope for radical change in human nature in his scientific romances. Conrad and Galsworthy were objective in their approach to the political problems of their age; they gave major emphasis to the analysis of development and change in their characters rather than to solution of the problems.

The specific influence of the Edwardian novelists on political movements it is not the business of this thesis to trace. It is rather the purpose of this study to record the political attitudes of the major Edwardian novelists as they surveyed their contemporary world, diagnosed its maladies, offered suggestions for reform, and attempted to predict the course political life would take in the future. The preoccupation of these writers with political questions is a subject which appears not to have received isolated treatment, although there have been previous studies on politics in the English novel.

A number of English novels published between 1900 and 1915 have been considered, all primarily political in the sense that they are

...prose fiction which leans rather to 'ideas' than to 'emotions'; which deals rather with the machinery of law-making or with a theory about public conduct than with the merits of any given piece of legislation;...where the main purpose of the writer is party propaganda, public reform, or exposition of the lives of the personages who maintain government, or of the forces which constitute government. 17

The emphasis is upon political themes as they were developed through the medium of fictional characters who were political figures, a "political figure" being defined as an individual who affects or attempts to affect politics in any way, whether he be a government official or legislator, a

businessman, a secret agent, an anarchist, a propounder of abstract political theories, or an advocate of political rights for women.

The importance of the political attitudes of those who lived and wrote sixty years ago lies in the correspondence between their basic political problems and those of the present day. The novelists who analyzed the political climate at the beginning of the century manifested a concern with the reciprocal effects of the individual on politics and politics on the individual in a modern world which has tended increasingly to be dominated by larger and larger concentrations of power. This is a problem which is apposite today, for although many of the external features of life have changed, and balances of power have shifted both in domestic and international politics, the health of the interrelationships between man and the society in which he lives and works remains basic to the effectiveness of any political system.
CHAPTER II

NON-ENGLISH POLITICS

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Great Britain was the greatest country in the world. The ubiquitous splashes of red on maps of the day attested the extent of her "dominion over palm and pine"; she was also the world's banker, the ranking industrial nation, and owner of the most powerful navy and largest merchant marine. Englishmen served all over the globe as diplomats and colonial administrators, in the armed services and merchant fleet, and as representatives of English business interests in developing the backward countries of the world. It was inevitable that they should be concerned with politics outside their own country.

The English novelists of the day reflected this concern in varying ways. Some treated with the challenges offered to England's pre-eminence by the rivalry of foreign nations, or by the forces of revolution and nationalism in countries in which Englishmen operated; others were more preoccupied with the individual and collective effects which such movements had on the English character; still others went beyond the confines of narrow patriotism and dealt with the political problems of modern man as a whole.
**Kim**

British imperialism received its greatest glorification in the poems and short stories of Rudyard Kipling. His novel *Kim* (1901), although it deals with politics, stands, as does its author, outside the prevailing trend of Edwardian fiction. Kipling occupied an unique position as the depicter of British India during the period which saw the beginnings of imperial decline, but his primary interests were not political, his ideals were in sharp contrast to those of his literary contemporaries, and he treated his characters in a more superficial manner than did Conrad, Galsworthy, and Wells.

Kipling himself did not conceive of *Kim* as a novel, saying that it was "nakedly picaresque and plotless--a thing imposed from without." At least one critic wishes it were; Croft-Cooke believes that Kipling's sense of pattern and plot forced him to invent the "Great Game," *Kim's* work for the British Secret Service, which "never ceases to be a tiresome distraction from the nakedly--and magnificently--picaresque." It was not Kipling's intention to write a political novel.

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Politics, the Empire, the Law, are taken for granted. It is not "Kim's" affair, nor the reader's to question the credentials of the Pax Britannica, but to savour life within its borders. Nothing is explained or excused or justified.

Though they are nowhere explicitly stated, however, the political beliefs underlying this novel are those of all of Kipling's work on India. The Law as he saw it was simple: the world is divided into two classes, those incapable of managing affairs and those almost divinely appointed to manage for them. The White Man is obligated to take up this Burden, not with any Christianizing or economic motive, but because he was born knowing and understanding the Law. Kipling's belief goes beyond mere jingoism and racial superiority, however; his White Man must so conduct himself that his hegemony will require no maintenance by force but will arise from an instinctive recognition of his merits by the Brown Men, who will acquiesce permanently in their role of an underprivileged majority. Kipling preached Duty, Service and Sacrifice to the complacent, self-satisfied Englishmen of the end of the century; his ideal British colonial was the strong, silent, solitary man who did his duty, lived by the code of his class, and never looked for, much less revealed termites or dry rot in the edifice in which the British Raja dwelt on Indian soil.

In Kim this ideal is embodied in Strickland, the District Superintendent of Police, and Colonel Creighton, whose work in

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the Ethnological Survey serves as a mask for Secret Service activities. Both are active administrators, in contrast to the ponderous, remote bureaucracies of Whitehall and Simla which they represent; they work in relative seclusion from their countrymen, in intimate contact with the people and country which they are helping to civilize. The old Kulu woman expresses her appreciation of Strickland's ability to exchange insults and exaggerated compliments with her, saying,

These be the sort to oversee justice. They know the land and the customs of the land. The others, all new from Europe, suckled by white women and learning our tongue from books, are worse than the pestilence.  

Creighton realizes the value to the Service of an understanding of the speech and the customs of the "black men"; it also suits the personal scholarly inclinations of one whose ambition it has been for years to win the initials, F.R.S., after his name. But he is deeply committed to Duty; "no money and no preferment would have drawn Creighton from his work on the Indian Survey."  

Kipling invests his native secret agents, Mahbub Ali and Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, with personal contradictions and idiosyncrasies which redeem them from being stock characters, but as participants in the Great Game they display the identical boldness, single-mindedness and chivalry of their white


employers. Kipling's Game is a purely romantic one, in which there exist none of the bores, the bogus mumbo-jumbo, the double-cross, and petty jealousy of actual underground and security organizations.  

Kim, known in his childhood as the Friend of all the World, retains as he grows into manhood his capacity for being all things to all men. He is able in turn to identify himself with the crafty native agents, with the dedicated British Secret Service officers, and with his peace-minded, inner-directed lama. As master of the two worlds, East and West, he is the ideal Kipling hero. He enters upon the Game through sheer delight in his inborn capacities for intrigue, but also at the insistence of the lama, who pays for the education of his Sahib-disciple, though he does not know its ultimate objective. At maturity Kim makes the one possible Kipling decision—to accept his active mission as a Sahib, rather than to follow the lama in a life of contemplation. He is the one developing character in the novel, "a credible, well-modeled, living character....The reader does see him grow, during the three years or so which the book covers, until he is ready to support the trial which is its climax."  

Wilson contends that this trial, the choice which Kim must make between antagonistic allegiances, never develops

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into a fundamental conflict; it simply ceases to figure as such.

...the reader tends to expect that...Kim will come eventually to realize that he is delivering into bondage to the British invaders those whom he has always considered his own people, and that a struggle between allegiances will develop....But the parallel lines never meet; the alternating attractions felt by Kim never give rise to a genuine struggle.....The adventures of the Lama and of Kim simply arrive at different consummations, without any final victory or synthesis ever being allowed to take place.

Considering that in 1901 the prospect of self-government by the peoples of India was remote in the extreme, the objection that Kim betrayed his own people derives from hindsight rather than from the realities of the contemporary political situation. The vital question was whether India was to be ruled by Britain or Russia; Kim's choice of an active role on the side of the British involves no moral conflict, nor is there any aesthetic discrepancy displayed by a character who pursues a realistic course in his public life while continuing an idealistic search in private.

Kipling's preoccupation with the appearances of things produced a picture of a stable society destined never to change. "Even his subversive movements and foreign intrigues on the frontier are but elements which make the plot more exciting; he envisioned no possibility of such movements succeeding or changing the nature of society."\(^9\) He failed to

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\(^9\) Hollis, p. 9.
consider the economic basis of imperialism, and to realize that the very civilizing tendencies which it fostered and which he glorified were nurturing Indian nationalism and laying the foundations for a decline in British power. He painted British India at its apogee, preaching opportunities at a time when the more perceptive of his contemporaries were concerned with a growing complex of problems arising from imperialism.

According to Hollis, this blindness toward political realities accounts for the brilliance of Kipling's portrait of India. Citing the respective failures of Chaucer and Shakespeare to foresee the Reformation, and the Civil War and Commonwealth, he declares,

In such stable societies, most of the world's great descriptive literature was written... If the writer and artist can never talk about man as they see him, but must always be talking about man as a problem, man as a voter, about the vote that man will give for the rearranging of society, art is killed.

This contention that a preoccupation with political problems is inimical to art is difficult to justify in the light of the fact that just three years after the publication of *Kim* there appeared a work which treated extensively the effects of economic imperialism and nationalism which Kipling had so completely ignored, and which demonstrated an uncontestable art in its characterizations and its memorable evocation of a completely fictional country and society.

Ibid.
**Nostromo**

Joseph Conrad was one of the Edwardian writers whose interest was in modern man, irrespective of national origins and boundaries, in the society which modern man has developed, and in the effects of that society upon his ideals and actions. In *Nostromo* (1904), he was concerned with the economic effects of imperialism, portraying them in a South American country which he developed completely from imagination, his only personal experience of that part of the world having been derived from a few hours ashore at ports on the Gulf of Mexico in 1875 and 1876. His fictional Costaguana nevertheless displays a many-sidedness lacking in Kipling's picture of India; the disparate and conflicting effects of materialism, capitalist imperialism, and nationalism on the ideals and aspirations of a variety of national types and individual characters were explored to such an extent that the result far exceeded Conrad's avowed "ambition to render the spirit of an epoch in the history of South America."  

Although the setting and some of the characters, particularly the Creoles and the natives, do conform faithfully to the indicated milieu, the life and events described in *Nostromo* transcend a particular time or place; the novel is, in effect, an interpretation—and a condemnation—of the forces at work in modern life.

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"In its absurd rhythm of exploitation and misrule, or revolution and counterrevolution, Costaguana may evoke almost any South or Central American republic....The forces of deception and self-deception are the same as those at work anywhere." 12

Conrad recognized that the greatest force and the only real source of political power in modern collective society is material wealth. In Nostrromo he demonstrated that ideas alone, particularly the abstract theories of nineteenth-century liberalism, are insufficient to affect the course of history unless implemented by economic power. The new political state which brings peace and stability to Costaguana is not achieved by the enlightened liberals but is imposed by force by the businessmen for whom such conditions are essential.

But it was also Conrad's thesis that "Political institutions, whether contrived by the wisdom of the few or the ignorance of the many, are incapable of securing the happiness of mankind." 13 To his way of thinking, any institution or instrument--capitalism, imperialism, revolution, or experiment in social justice--was futile and self-destructive because it carried within itself the seeds of corruption, "Something inherent in the necessities of successful action


13 Baines, p. 311.
which carried with it the moral degradation of the idea."\textsuperscript{14}

The order brought to Costaguana by a successful revolution was a false and impermanent order; it established a dangerous precedent and, changing men while it changed society, gave rise to a nationalism which conceived of the materialist forces as a new tyranny.

This disillusioned and pessimistic view of man's collective attempts at bettering his lot is presented through a complex of individual stories in which Conrad investigates man's dreams, follies, vanities, and greeds, and the deceptions and self-delusions with which they are masked. It is "a study in the definition and necessity of "illusion".... Each character lives by his necessary idealization...each character is also a carrier of an attitude toward, a point of view about, society; and each is an actor in a crucial historical moment."\textsuperscript{15}

Charles Gould and not Nostromo is the central character in the novel; his political power, derived from material wealth, is the subject of the novel; that wealth as the basis of all effective social and political power is the theme of the novel. It is Gould's decision which brings the material interests to Costaguana to exploit the San Tome mine;


his policy, to protect the enterprise from extortion by bribing government officials; his support, when he tires of bribery, which brings the liberal and honest Ribiera government to power. The economic asset which he has developed and the money he supplies for arms purchases to be used against the subversive War Minister, Montero, inspire the greed and fear of the rebel leaders, resulting in their invasion of the Province. His determination to blow up the mine rather than surrender it to the rebels is completely egotistical and would in effect leave high and dry the Moderates he has supported, but the squabbling over the mine among rebel factions and their search for the silver he has already extracted gain time for the counter-revolutionary forces to arrive and, in concert with Gould's miners, defeat the rebels. His actions affect the lives of all the other characters and determine the future history of the country, but when Antonia Avellanos tells him, "It is your character that is the inexhaustible treasure which may save us all yet --your character, Carlos, not your wealth," \(^{16}\) it is because she and most of the others have not yet realized that Gould no longer has a character separate from that of his silver mine, which has enslaved him.

Beginning with the simple idea of restoring the mine to usefulness, Gould gradually allows the necessity of success to determine his every action, and Conrad comments

\(^{16}\text{Nostromo, p. 402.}\)
ironically, "In this his instinct was unerring. Action is consolatory. It is the enemy of thought and the friend of flattering illusions. Only in the conduct of our action can we find the sense of mastery over the Fates."\textsuperscript{17}

Gould feels that exploitation of the mine is justified by its service in the cause of social progress and public morality.

What is wanted here is law, good faith, order, security....Only let the material interests once get a firm footing, and they are bound to impose the conditions on which alone they can continue to exist. That's how your money-making is justified here in the face of lawlessness and disorder. It is justified because the security which it demands must be shared with an oppressed people. A better justice will come afterwards.\textsuperscript{18}

The point Conrad makes in his characterization of Gould is that the real power of evil, working here through wealth, capitalism, or material interests, lies in its ability to override, not wicked men, but good men.\textsuperscript{19} Gould's ideas of public service become subordinated to the importance of the mine, and he adopts the very means of expediency and corruption which he originally had opposed in Costaguanan politics. His wife watches with misgiving while the idea of the mine turns into "a wall of silver bricks" between them, but Conrad is concerned with more than a study of greed which causes

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 72.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., pp. 92-93.

\textsuperscript{19}Winifred Lynskey, "The Role of the Silver in Nostromo," Modern Fiction Studies, I, No. 1 (February, 1955), 20.
estrangement between man and wife, or even the conflict between material interests and personal integrity. His aim is to uncover the idealizations which cloak follies and corruption in both public and private life. Decoud says of Gould that "he cannot act or exist without idealizing every simple feeling, desire, or achievement. He could not believe his own motives if he did not make them first a part of some fairy tale." 20

Gould has become so deeply subjected to the material interests and his idealization of them that when the futility and evils of his political actions become obvious even to him, he finds he cannot be diverted from his course.

To him, as to all of us, the compromises with his conscience appeared uglier than ever in the light of failure....The mine had corrupted his judgment by making him sick of bribing and intriguing merely to have his work left alone from day to day....He had gone forth into the senseless fray...in the defence of the commonest decencies of organized society. Only, his weapon was the wealth of the mine, more far-reaching and subtle than an honest blade of steel fitted into a simple brass guard.

More dangerous to the wielder, too, this weapon of wealth, double-edged with the cupidity and misery of mankind, steeped in all the vices of self-indulgence as in a concoction of poisonous roots, tainting the very cause for which it is drawn, always ready to turn awkwardly in the hand. There was nothing for it now but to go on using it. But he promised himself to see it shattered into small bits before he let it be wrenched from his grasp. 21

20 *Nostrero*, pp. 237-238.
Once the secession of the Occidental Province from Costaguana has taken place, the economic interests are unhampere in their exploitation and the liberals seek vainly for their help in annexing the rest of the country in order to rescue the people from the war lords; as Dr. Monygham cynically comments, "...material interests will not jeopardize their development for a mere idea of pity and justice."22

It is Monygham also who pronounces the verdict of history upon Gould and all he has striven for:

There is no peace and rest in the development of material interests. They have their law and their justice. But it is founded on expediency, and is inhuman; it is without rectitude, without the continuity and the force that can be found in only a moral principle....the time approaches when all that the Gould Concession stands for shall weigh as heavily upon the people as the barbarism, cruelty, and misrule of a few years back....It'll weigh as heavily, and provoke resentment, bloodshed, and vengeance, because the men have grown different.23

Conrad suggests an interesting parallel between Gould, who is often referred to as the King of Sulaco, and Charles IV, whose statue is the only remaining vestige of royalty in the country. Conrad frequently uses stone to represent life frozen through a decline in human feeling;24 the natives have forgotten the name and significance of the statue, and there is an indication of Conrad's pessimistic view of

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22 *Nostromo*, p. 569
history in the suggestion that in the future Gould, that "other Carlos," and the part his silver mine have played in the course of events will also be forgotten.

Holroyd, the American financier, is not only Gould's silent partner in the mine but his parallel as an idealist. He takes up Gould, Costaguana, and the mine as a diversion, sentimentalizing his action as the "introduction of a pure form of Christianity" into the South American continent. The man has the temperament of a Puritan and an insatiable imagination of conquest, and behind his businessman's whim in sponsoring the Gould Concession and the moralization of his purpose there lies an ideal of his country's imperialist destiny:

We can sit and watch. Of course, some day we shall step in. We are bound to. But there's no hurry. Time itself has got to wait on the greatest country in the whole of God's universe. We shall be giving the word for everything--industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion....We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. The world can't help it--and neither can we, I guess.

Holroyd's influence in political affairs is indicated by Gould when he identifies him with the silver,

...a man of that sort can take up a thing or drop it when he likes. He will suffer from no sense of defeat. He may have to give in, or he may have to die to-morrow, but the great silver and iron interests shall survive, and some day shall get hold of Costaguana along with the rest of the world.  

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25 *Nostrromo*, p. 84.
Conrad's native generals and politicians are the equal of the material interests in their greed and ruthlessness; it is their political heritage, since in countries which have exhausted themselves to achieve independence, the victorious generals will often mimic the oppressors they have expelled. Guzman Bento, the Citizen Savior of the Country...

...had ruled the country with the sombre imbecility of political fanaticism. The power of supreme government had become in his dull mind an object of strange worship, as if it were some sort of cruel deity. It was incarnated in himself, and his adversaries...were the supreme sinners, objects of hate, abhorrence and fear, as heretics would be to a convinced Inquisitor.

His political descendants are also cruel, but they are self-seeking buffoons rather than fanatics. Their master motive is greed; they play upon the nationalist feelings of an uneducated populace with the eternal war-cry of the colonial world against the exploitations of the foreigners, hoping to gain the sources of wealth for themselves. Montero's revolt is "rooted in the political immaturity of the people, in the indolence of the upper classes and the mental darkness of the lower." He himself could probably have been bought off or pacified with flattery, but his brother, "the abominable Fedrito," egged him on, dreaming

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29 Nostromo, p. 151.
30 Ibid., p. 431.
of the establishment of an empire in which he would play the role of another Duc de Mornay, a power behind the throne, with the object of securing a serious fortune for himself. "His ability to read did nothing for him but to fill his head with absurd visions. His actions were usually determined by motives so improbable in themselves as to escape the penetration of a rational person." Rendered insecure and ineffective by the realities of the political situation—the absence of the splendid trappings of office of which he had dreamed—Pedrito is incapable of action and is easily defeated by the counter-revolution.

The other native opportunists spend their time squabbling over precedence or attempting to secure wealth for themselves. Turncoats, cowards, and liars, they are either killed in the revolution or as the result of private quarrels, or are chased into exile. Such are the ends Conrad envisions for the men who initiate revolutions for their own profit, or who take over revolutions which were begun by others on idealistic grounds.

At the opposite end of the political spectrum are the idealistic liberals, the thoughtful, righteous parliamentarians who confront the realities of political and economic life with intellect alone. Their leader is Don José Avellanos, the philosophic historian of Costaguana, who is admirable in his personal characteristics, but a figure of

31 Nostromo, p. 430.
political impotence. Conrad suggests that his liberalism is irrelevant in a country like Costaguana; his one effective achievement comes when he acts as the agent of American capitalism to bring the reform government of Ribiera to power. With the success of the Monterist rebellion, Avellanos loses the sustaining illusion that his life has meant something and he dies.

Ribiera, the puppet brought to office by means of Gould's silver in order to free the material interest from government interference with their operations, is enlightened and honest, but weak. "He was more pathetic than promising, the first civilian Chief of State Costaguana had ever known, pronouncing ...his simple watchwords of honesty, peace, respect for law, political faith abroad and at home." The democratic interlude of his rule soon collapses in futility, for it does not rest upon an educated electorate and takes little hold of the popular imagination; by its very character of moderation it can accomplish little for fear of alienating its domestic supporters on one hand or its foreign backers on the other.

The equivalent of Ribiera on the local level is Don Juste Lopez, an earnest parliamentarian concerned with maintaining the outward show of things. Conrad uses him to demonstrate the futility of parliamentary institutions and the men who support them in a country like Costaguana,

\[32\text{Ibid., p. 32.}\]
Illustrating the folly of "putting all their trust into words of some sort, while murder and rapine stalked over the land."

Decoud, the skeptical Costaguanan reared in Europe, stands outside all the political movements, and is used by Conrad to comment on the parlous state of the country:

There is a curse of futility upon our character: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, chivalry and materialism, high-sounding sentiments and a supine morality, violent efforts for an idea and a sullen acquiescence in every form of corruption. We convulsed a continent for our independence only to become the passive prey of a democratic parody, the helpless victims of scoundrels and cutthroats, our institutions a mockery, our laws a farce.

He is capable of perceiving and avoiding the mistakes of an idealist like Gould; he cannot hide the actual situation from himself by disguising his true motives. He is drawn into political affairs through his love for Antonia, and champions the cause of independence for Sulaco because it provides the only solution to their personal problems.

In the end, even Decoud is destroyed by allowing himself to become involved with the silver. When left in solitude to guard it, the man who has placed all his faith in his own intellect comes to question his own identity; he falls prey to his very skepticism and is led to suicide.

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33Nostrimo, p. 409.
34Ibid., p. 89.
through his lack of faith in others and lack of belief in the validity of his own actions.

In *Nostromo*, which has been described as "one of the mastering visions of our historical moment and our human lot," Conrad has asserted his belief that historical events are caused by a combination of the unpredictable whims and illusions of individuals, and by vast, predetermined economic movements. Man's reason is discounted as a valid force; neither the individuals who make up the state, nor the institutions which they compose, have any lasting effect upon the course of history. History fails to make any sense, and at the end of the novel Costaguana is back at the point where the action began, standing on the brink of a new cataclysm of violence.

It is in his deeper character analyses and his explorations of the causes of political behavior that Conrad differs most from Kipling. The latter took his political ideals for granted; Conrad portrayed a society in flux and made no attempt to proclaim a solution, nor even to "apprehend a coherent view of the universe which would afford positive significance to human motives."

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36 Guerard, p. 195.
Under Western Eyes

In the years which intervened between the writing of Nostromo and Conrad's next novel of non-English politics, there occurred the Russian Revolution of 1905, the outcome of which confirmed his belief in the futility of revolution. But Russia provided the stage for a further study of the effects of politics on individual character, offering the atmosphere of instability and tension which Conrad desired for a drama of political violence, personal treachery, and the illusions which lead to such irrational conduct.

Under Western Eyes (1910) is "a passionate outcry against the hardening and narrowing of character that is enforced by political life. The diseases of dogma, the corruptions of power, the impoverishment of fanaticism...."38

As in Nostromo, Conrad is skeptical of the power of political institutions to contribute to the good of mankind, but he is equally critical of attempts at violent change, contending that revolutions inevitably fail to bear out their original promise.

...in a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues. The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane and devoted natures; the unselfish

and the intelligent may begin a movement—but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims, the victims of disgust, of disenchantment—often of remorse. Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured—that is the definition of revolutionary success.

Nine years later, after the Russian Revolution of 1917 had become history, Conrad prefixed an Author's Note to this novel, in which he equated the lawlessness of revolt with the autocracy which inspired it, and expressed again his conviction of the ultimate futility of all political action.

The ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism provokes the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand, in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of hearts must follow the downfall of any given human institutions. These people are unable to see that all they can effect is merely a change of names.

In its main character, an isolated Russian youth, and in its theme of the effects of remorse, Under Western Eyes is reminiscent of Crime and Punishment, but it investigates the more universal problem of the conflict between personal loyalty and loyalty to the state. The protagonist, Razumov, represents modern man caught up in the tide of political controversy against his will. Isolated and self-centered

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40 Ibid., p. x.
more than most individuals because of his illegitimacy, he is

...one of those men who, living in a period of mental and political unrest, keep an instinctive hold on normal, practical, everyday life. He was aware of the emotional tension of his time; he even responded to it in an indefinite way. But his main concern was with his work, his studies, and with his own future. 41

The whole direction of his life is changed because of one decision, when in a moment of irrational impatience at having his future endangered, he betrays a fellow-student, the assassin Haldin, who has sought asylum with him. He rationalizes his selfish aims into a patriotic duty, persuading himself that Haldin is a disruptive force who endangers Russia, the only parent of one like himself who has nothing else to love and put his faith in. 42

His "decision" is little more than what he has intended to do all along, but once it is taken Razumov finds he has but exchanged physical for moral solitude, and the man who attempted to stay clear of politics remains in a No Man's Land between the politics of the oppressors and those of the oppressed. Both groups attempt to manipulate him for their own designs, and he becomes the point upon which are focused the moral issues and the pressures of

41 Under Western Eyes, p. 10.
42 Ibid., p. 34.
Russian society which are Conrad's theme. Rendered impotent by feelings of guilt and remorse, and by fear of both the police and the revolution-minded students who persist in the illusion that he was Haldin's accomplice, when he becomes a secret agent in Geneva Razumov finds he can neither do his work as a police spy nor make common ground with the revolutionaries. When he finally confesses his treachery to Haldin's sister and the revolutionaries, it is not because of a change in his convictions; it is an attempt to regain the moral freedom which he has destroyed in himself. It remains for his one last illusion to be destroyed; his assertion that by confession, "I have made myself free from falsehood, from remorse—-independent of every single human being on this earth," is premature; maimed and crippled by the revolutionaries, he is made incapable of further political action, and for the rest of his short life remains dependent upon the care of Tekla, the erstwhile slavey of the subversives.

The effectiveness of Conrad's characterization of Razumov is only partially assessed in the comment,

Our inability to form a concrete and deeply realized picture of Razumov's mind is to be seen as a positive success. We are not asked to understand; we can only join the narrator in his uncomprehending observation in what he calls "my

\[\text{43} \text{Douglas Hewitt,} \text{ Conrad: A Reassessment (Philadelphia, 1952), p. 83.} \]

\[\text{44} \text{Under Western Eyes, p. 368.} \]
character of a mute witness of things Russian unrolling their Eastern logic under my Western eyes." 45

Conrad is interested in more than a revelation of the Russian mind and soul; he has investigated the motives, rational and irrational, which impel the political actions of any man in the complexities of the modern world.

Conrad's revolutionaries are caricatures; his deep-seated antipathy toward revolution led him to represent them as foolish visionaries, cruel fanatics, and buffoons. There is an echo of another Dostoevsky work, The Possessed, in Conrad's picture of the fatuous ineptitude of the subversives and in the utter futility of all their actions.

Haldin is a noble, disinterested idealist:

Men like me leave no posterity, but their souls are not lost....This is not murder, it is war, war. My spirit shall go on warring in some Russian body till all falsehood is swept out of the world. The modern civilization is false, but a new revelation shall come out of Russia....The Russian soul that lives in all of us...has a future. It has a mission. 46

But Conrad delivers his scorn of such fanaticism through the lips of Razumov: "Visionaries work everlasting evil on earth. Their Utopias inspire in the mass of mediocre minds a disgust of reality and a contempt for the secular logic of human development." 47 Conrad portrays in Haldin a character

45 Hewitt, p. 83.
46 Under Western Eyes, p. 220.
47 Ibid., p. 95.
like Charles Gould who, in seeking to realize the ideal in a corrupt world, ultimately causes more evil than good.

Another idealist is the woman, Sophia Antonovna, who has no rational basis for her revolutionary fervor and who accepts her fellow-conspirators with the same simple faith with which she maintains that everything is bound to come right in the end; she just simply believes it.

The leader whom she believes to be inspired, Peter Ivanovitch, is a pompous fool, alternately tyrannizing over those who are in his power and acting the flunky for the wealthy woman who affords him the means of an easy life. Capitalizing upon his early experience of imprisonment and escape in Siberia, he has built up his authority in the subversive organization by sheer power of reputation and volume of words. His sound and fury end in a cipher once his protectress dies; he marries a peasant woman, makes his peace with the authorities, and settles quietly in Russia.

The rest of the conspirators are stereotypes of cunning and cruelty. Conrad describes the hatchet-man, Nikita, as "the perfect flower of the terroristic wilderness," adding however, that what troubled him most in dealing with him was not his monstrosity but his banality. 48

It has been objected that by mocking and scorning his revolutionists, by rendering them alternately infantile and

48 *Under Western Eyes*, ix.
sinister and foolishly fanatical, Conrad has undermined the
 dramatic integrity of his book: "Conrad has failed to ac-
 cept the challenge of his own book, to confront the
 revolutionists in their strength and not their weakness, to
 pit Razumov against men of serious if wrong-headed commit-
 ment." On the other hand, since it was Conrad's
 intention to depict the fatuity of the illusions and ration-
 alizations by which the actions of such a group are governed,
 the portraits are perhaps not grossly exaggerated.

The opposition, the forces of autocracy, demonstrate
 in their senseless tyranny an equal measure of cruelty and
 lack of foresight. General T. is preoccupied only with
 stamping out all vestige of rebellion: "I've always said it;
 one effort, pitiless, persistent, steady—and we are done
 with them for ever." The methods are left to such under-
 lings as Councillor Mikulin, "one of those powerful officials
 who, in a position not obscure, not occult, but simply incon-
 spicuous, exercise a great influence over the methods rather
 than over the conduct of affairs." His power was derived
 from his ability to seize upon that "certain side by which
 must be got hold of if one wants to obtain a solid
 grasp and a perfect command." Sensing Razumov's lack of

49 Howe, "I. Order and Anarchy," p. 520.
50 Under Western Eyes, p. 51.
51 Ibid., p. 305.
52 Ibid., p. 307.
direction, he employs alternate threats and flattery to enlist him in government service, inducing him to believe it is the only way of life left open to him. But for all his perspicacity, Mikulin somehow left his own flank exposed, and he too ends as a figure of ineffectuality, falling a victim of political intrigue. Conrad does not fail to point the moral: "It seems that the savage autocracy, no more than the divine democracy, does not limit its diet exclusively to the bodies of its enemies. It devours its friends and servants as well."53

Because of the similarity in the subjects which they treated, comparisons between Conrad and Dostoevsky seem to be inevitable. It is apparent, however, that the two authors represent totally different approaches to the problems of man and society: Under Western Eyes is an indictment of society and the political attitudes of modern man, written in a fatalistic mood; Dostoevsky is compassionate toward humanity, asserting that it is ultimately good. Conrad lacks Dostoevsky's hope and his faith in universal salvation, and is able to find consolation neither in man's present nor in his future.

53 Under Western Eyes, p. 306.
CHAPTER III

DOMESTIC POLITICS: CYNICISM AND DESPAIR

When they turned to look at political conditions in their own country, the Edwardian novelists saw a hodgepodge of institutions and customs which had grown gradually over the years or which had been initiated in response to definite conditions which no longer were applicable. These institutions had ceased to represent the real sources of political power in the country and were incapable of dealing effectively with new problems. Although the authors who dealt with politics found much to criticize in timeworn methods of government and with the traditional ruling classes, the greater part of their indictment fell upon the lack of moral sanity in the modern world. One group of these writers painted their society in flat and somber tones which rarely were alleviated by any light of hope; they reflected the fearful, doubting side of Twentieth-Century Man—he whom Max Beerbohm pictured in a cartoon as thin and wasted, shrinking before the question mark which represented his future.

1Max Beerbohm, A Survey (London, 1921), p. 5.
A Change in the Cabinet

Ridicule and satire have been time-honored methods of political criticism, and the Edwardian era possessed two writers eminently capable of their use. Routh says of Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton that "they became a centre and an example for those who loved England but hated what England was trying to become, and still believed that most evil things could be proved to be silly." Satire has always concerned itself with Vice and Folly, but since "Folly is sometimes too artless to be condemned and Vice is often too serious to be ridiculed, the element which makes them both criticizable is Deception."

Belloc drew beads on political aspects of all three of these reprehensible characteristics in A Change in the Cabinet (1909), a satire on party politics and oligarchic government which was drawn from his personal experience in the House of Commons from 1906 to 1910. As the representative of a workingman's constituency, Belloc made it his policy to back the individual against vested interests, refusing to become a cog in the Liberal Party machine and rattling the mechanism badly by voting according to his own convictions instead of at his party's call. The hypocrisies, insincerities, and maneuverings of the politicians, and the

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archaic forms of legislative procedure disgusted Belloc, and although he was elected as an Independent in 1910, he refused to stand for the second election in that year. He summed up his feelings in a final speech in the Commons in which he declared that elected representatives were rendered ineffectual by the present system, and followed it with a typical Bellocian outburst in public: "Perhaps they did not bribe me heavily enough, but in any case I am relieved to be quit of the dirtiest company it has ever been my misfortune to keep."^4

His novel is a more subtle condemnation, treating satirically both politicians and the party system which control the governing of England. Belloc felt that there no longer was any clear-cut difference between the Liberals and Conservatives because of their social and family interrelationships and their identity of outlook on religion, morals, and economic and political affairs. He believed that the governing class had degenerated into a vulgar plutocracy, in which "social influences" were paramount in securing and maintaining government office and military command. Further, he contended that this cabal, strongly influenced by big business, governed England in secret so that the average M.P., much less the individual voter, had no knowledge of what was going on.

A Change in the Cabinet presents the edifying spectacle of political maneuvering by a group of figures who are motivated solely by nepotistic and pecuniary considerations. A young man of "the governing class" is groomed for Cabinet office because it is the only means of support his relatives can envision for him after his American tycoon father-in-law has suffered a reverse in fortunes. The only previous claim to political fame of the amiable, awkward, and slow-witted George Mulross Domaine, fittingly nicknamed "Dimmy," is that he is the only man who ever fell right off a bench in the House of Commons. His qualifications for office consist in the fact that he has never thought of thinking for himself at all, and that he can hold his tongue ("in fact he couldn't help it"\(^5\)); and so, being the ideal man to run in harness, he has a sinecure prepared for him.

The power behind the scenes in Dimmy's rise in public life is Mary Smith,

...the friend, the confidant, the cousin, the sister-in-law or the aunt of at least three-quarters of what counts in England....related to all of them and they were all related to each other, and in their relationship there was friendship also, and they governed England and the taxes bore them on.\(^6\)

She persuades her "cousin" the Prime Minister, known as "Dolly" to the initiates, to make room for her "sort of

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\(^6\)Ibid., pp. 17-18.
nephew," Dimmy, as Warden of the Court of Dowry, where all the work will be done by subordinates and there will never arise the necessity of his speaking in the House of Commons (it is notorious that Dimmy is incapable of making a prepared speech of more than two lines). The Court of Dowry is one of those anomalous departments which has mushroomed outside the legal frame of government, unobtrusively assuming control over various functions and sources of wealth until it has become "second only to the Foreign Office in the matter of public interest, and, like the Foreign Office, largely removed from the wrangling of Party."\(^7\) Besides, as Mary calmly remarks to Dolly, "the House will know nothing about it one way or the other. The House doesn't meddle with government—thank God!"\(^8\)

Dolly, a martyr in his devotion to duty (during the four years in which "he had held the highest of human offices he had spent but one winter on the Riviera"\(^9\)), lives for the day when his "other cousin," the Leader of the Opposition, will succeed him as Prime Minister, and he himself can enjoy the leisure of Opposition. In the meantime, loyal to family ties however remote, he acquiesces in Mary's plan, and they proceed to build up their protege in the public eye with a

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 55.
\(^8\)Ibid., p. 65.
\(^9\)Ibid., p. 46.
succession of eulogistic squibs in the Press, and by coaching him in inconsequential questions which he asks in the House to show he is keeping a careful eye on the minutiae of public affairs.

Dimmy's appointment will be effected by the removal of the present Warden, Sir Charles Repton, to the House of Lords. Repton, a calculating and efficient businessman who attends to the affairs of government in his spare time, accedes gladly to an arrangement which will leave him free for his many business enterprises while affording him the prestige of title and an open door to every official source. He stipulates, however, that his annual gift to the Party coffer must remain exactly the same, much to the disgust of the fastidious Dolly, who views with repugnance the detestable but necessary "kitchen side of politics."

The whole maneuver is thrown into confusion when Repton is afflicted with an obstruction of his "Caryll's Ganglia," those organs peculiar to humans which are the seat of all the restraint and balance upon which human society depends. The result is a lamentable case of "veracititis," during which Repton speaks the complete truth about politicians in both their public and private lives, about the party system and government, and about his own imperialist business dealings. The horror of his utterances lies in "the violence of contrast between his absurd affirmations and the quiet current of the national life. The printing of one tenth of
those simple, easily delivered words might have ruined the country." After a few hectic days devoted to government denials and throttling of the Press, calamity is averted by a simple operation in which the Caryll's Ganglia are restored to their normal functions, ensuring that Repton will never again tell the truth. He is last seen in the House of Lords, defending the government against the accusation that places in that august body have been purchased. By careful enumeration of statistics, he demonstrates how many of the Lords are imbeciles, minors, or invalids, how many are in jail, and scornfully asks whether such base actions can be imputed to the remainder—the great champions of industry, the great heads of the military forces (including the Salvation Army), the great imperialist benefactor who has built the reservoir at Sing Yan, or "that world-famous Englishman who by his organizing ability, his untiring industry and his knowledge of men, has built up the United Sausage Company's emporiums throughout the length and breadth of the land?"

Dimmy, who has been in danger of losing his carefully-wrought public stature through another of his absurd adventures, is redeemed by its representation in the Press as a feat of personal courage and patriotism, and thus he is saved for his great mission of government service.

10 Ibid., p. 203.
11 Ibid., p. 231.
It might be said that Belloc has written the modern
equivalent of a morality play, in which Dimmy stands as the
figure of Folly, Repton of Vice (or at least of Chicanery),
and Dolly and Mary Smith as Deception. Such characters are
inevitably one-sided, and it may be that in his choice of
satire as a vehicle and his invention of flat caricatures,
Belloc blunted some of his desired effect; contemporary
critics doubted that his novels would be understood because
of their sustained irony.  

Some of the evils against which Belloc inveighed dis-
appeared in the course of years as the result of reforms
and the replacement of the Liberals by the socialist Labour
Party, so that his assertion of complete identity between
Government and Opposition was no longer valid. But although
the specific subject matter of A Change in the Cabinet seems
at first glance to render the novel as dated as the clothing
its characters would have worn, it is timeless in depicting
the recurrent threat of a ruling class which comes to regard
government as a tool for its own private advancement regard-
less of the larger consequences to the nation.

The Patrician

Belloc's study of the behavior of the ruling class was
carried both forward and inward by John Galsworthy in The
Patrician (1911), a novel in which he investigated the

\[12\] Speaight, p. 185.
political and social views of the aristocracy and the effects of this frame of mind on the lives of its individual members.

Surveying his own period, Galsworthy finds it a time between two ages from which the "Spirit of Balance" has fled. The struggle between a dying faith in autocracy and the coming faith in complete democracy led to extremes which he deprecated, characterizing them as "the great Half-Truth Authority" and the great Half-Truth Liberty."13 He saw the doom of the patrician type in "a certain dried-ness born from too many generations of authority and assured position,"14 while its opposite extreme, the Liberalism which elevates democracy "into the whole truth and nothing but the truth is an amusing piece of fanfaronade."15

The Patrician is an account of the struggle between the aristocracy, with its emphasis on tradition in closing its ranks against the enemy, and the democratic forces which tend to break up the aristocratic organization, throwing its individual members back on their own resources. The human prizes for which they contend are ultimately victims; in The Patrician, Lord Miltoun and his sister, Lady Barbara, are pulled in two directions, their tragedy lying in the fact that when they eventually scurry back to the ancestral fold, they have "given up the captaincy of their own destinies"

14 Ibid., p. vii.
15 Ibid., p. x.
and forever turned their backs on the possibility of self-fulfillment.\(^16\)

It is the static quality of the aristocratic mind which Galsworthy condemns:

> the essence of a leading caste is power of quick and firm decision, which means doors slammed on doubts, sympathies, rumination, and the faculty of understanding. Where the power of quick decision is bred in the bone, it comes out in the meat—the meat is dry, its emotional sympathy starved or withered.\(^17\)

Miltoun is the embodiment of his family and class tradition. Passionately determined on a career in politics and on only one role in politics—that of leadership—he is hard, unyielding, and narrow, capable of envisioning as his ideal only an England "where each man should know his place, and never change it, but serve in it loyally in his own caste."\(^18\) He has a profound distrust, even hate, of the common man, seeing in him only the necessity for being led—by himself.

Galsworthy paints a satirical picture of a parliamentary election characterized on Miltoun's side by the old shopworn slogans of divine right and jingoism, and on the other by radical harangue mixed with yellow-journalistic innuendoes as to Miltoun's relationship with a married woman. Once

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\(^{17}\) The Patrician, p. viii.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 96.
launched upon his promising career, Miltoun finds himself caught up in a conflict between his aristocratic ideals and the physical realities of life, represented by his love for Mrs. Noel. He fiercely desires both love and his career in politics, but his austere concept of rectitude forbids the possibility of an illegal liaison:

...only those who conform to authority have the right to wield authority. A man is a churl who enforces laws when he himself has not the strength to observe them. I will not be one of those of whom it can be said: "He can rule others, himself--!" 19

It is characteristic of the willful blindness of his class that he will not compromise, nor even recognize that there is more than one possible line of action. In acceding to the wishes of his family and giving up his love, he comes eventually to believe that he has saved himself. It is clear that Galsworthy believes instead that Miltoun has but returned to a servitude from which he had the opportunity to free himself, and that he will forever be less of a man and politician because of the inhibiting weight of his aristocratic inheritance.

There is a touch of the inhuman in him. Cruelty is never far away from cast-iron discipline however high the motive....When a man shuts the door on tolerance and understanding, even on a certain compromise in conduct, he is never far from cruelty to himself or to others. 20

20. Ibid., p. x.
Miltoun's father, Lord Valleys, is a moderate conservative; politically shrewd, practical, and efficient, he is neither narrow nor puritanical so long as his own interests are not endangered. He himself occupies a soft spot in the Government, "one of those almost nominal offices necessary to qualify into the Cabinet certain tried minds, for whom no more strenuous post can for the moment be found." He finds his son's "reactionaryism" rather disquieting, and the oligarchic temper of Miltoun's mind and political convictions almost shocking.

His son had a way of forcing things to their conclusions which was dangerous....Why! He even admitted that he acted on his principles! It was almost indecent; worse--ridiculous! The fact was, the dear fellow had unfortunately a deeper habit of thought than was wanted in politics--dangerous--very! 22

Far more to Valleys' political taste was the man who he hoped would become his son-in-law, Viscount Harbinger, a young man who was far from being a reactionary, but whose class standards and prejudices insured him against ever looking at life from any other point of view than that to which he had been born and bred.

In his aristocrats, Galsworthy has pictured a group of people inherently good and well-meaning, but "spoiled for the larger purposes of the world by the ineffaceable imprint

21 The Patrician, p. 29.
22 Ibid., pp. 102-103.
of class limitations. The temperament and views of Charles Courtier, who represents opposition to the authoritarian point of view, are more sympathetic to Galsworthy who, nevertheless, sees a lack of rule in his life and creed which would be inimical to good government.

In more than one place Galsworthy likens Courtier to Don Quixote, travelling about the world fighting lost causes which he deems holy, but of which Lady Barbara, in a moment of exasperation, tells him, "You only think their cause holy because they happen to be weak."

It is clear that if Galsworthy depicts the aristocracy as a class inhibited and limited through a sheer will not to recognize or compromise with reality, he also interprets idealistic liberalism as a force which constantly overleaps itself by expecting more than is reasonable of human nature. Intellectually, the radical may be on the side of the angels, but in reality he must retreat before custom and convention, which are tacitly supported by the passive, unthinking mob which he hopes to benefit. Courtier's venture on the side of Peace in the parliamentary election is defeated by its very novelty for the electorate:

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23 Follett, p. 765.

24 The Patrician, p. 317.
...his adventure to these parts seemed to them an almost ludicrous example of pure idea poking its nose into plain facts—the idea that nations ought to, and could live in peace being so very pure; and the fact that they never had, so very plain!25

In the end, like Mrs. Noel, Courtier retires before the aristocracy, which has beaten him down by the sheer weight of its authority and solidity.

Bjorkman suggests that Galsworthy has asserted the need for compromise in life as in politics by condemning Miltoun and Courtier, the representatives of the two extremes, to lives of symbolic sterility after they lose the women they love; the life of the race will be carried on by Lady Barbara and Harbinger, who stand for compromise.26

Wingfield-Stratford believes that Galsworthy's characters are ideally suited to represent their era of transition and uncertainty:

There is a curious ineffectiveness about Galsworthy's creations which makes his work more than ever representative of his time. Life as he visualizes it, does not reply to environment. His characters drift, are whirled helplessly along the rapids of their destiny...the best of them can do no more than go down with colours flying. But not even the best can be a hero in the true sense of commanding his fate.27

In contrast to Belloc, whose ideas can readily be found if the reader will but turn his picture of political life

25 The Patrician, p. 52.
upside-down, Galsworthy is completely detached in his novel, keeping himself out of his canvas of contemporary life; he did, however, add some interpretive comments in his preface which was written at a later date.

**The Inheritors**

Dissatisfaction with traditional political systems and politicians, the conviction that they were outworn and inadequate in the new age of the twentieth century, led to speculation on possible changes in rulers and forms of government. Violent change, however, imminent though it might seem at times on the Continent, was viewed as an extremely remote danger in England itself by its writers. The Edwardian novel tended to poke fun at anarchists and revolutionists or to dismiss them as futile fanatics; it was much more concerned with the larger problems of good and evil, and the loss of moral integrity in the modern world, of which anarchy and revolution seemed symbols.

*The Inheritors* (1901), a collaboration by Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Hueffer, fulfilled its sub-title, "An Extravagant Story," only in its fantastic plot of the seizure of the English government by inhabitants of the Fourth Dimension. Its ruling idea, that such a seizure could be effected through the exploitation of the greeds, vanities, and self-delusions of those creatures who now rule the world, reflected a serious concern of the novelists of the time.
The "Dimensionists" are a race exactly like human beings in mind and body, but completely without scruple; "a race clear-sighted, eminently practical, incredible; with no ideals, prejudices, or remorse; with no feeling for art and no reverence for life; free from any ethical tradition; callous to pain, weakness, suffering and death." Miss Etchingham Granger, their leader, explains that humans have contracted diseases—beliefs, traditions, fear, ideas of pity, and of love; they have grown luxurious and sorrowful in their worship of ideals, solacing themselves with creeds and arts, and have forgotten the methods by which they overran the earth and treated the inferior races, the methods by which they themselves will be conquered by the Dimensionists. In the ironical outcome, the people of the world are not steadfast enough in their faith and adherence to ideals, and are defeated through their own self-centeredness and materialism. The Dimensionists have the power of making all of man's physical accomplishments on earth look contemptible; by the same means, the altruism, ethics, and faith in moral order in which he believes are undermined by bringing down a great man who stands as the representative of all these virtues.

29 Ibid., pp. 10, 13.
Churchill, the Foreign Minister, is a gentle, almost timid aristocrat with scholarly inclinations and little aptitude for the ruthless in-fighting necessary for success in politics:

He had a dainty, dilettante mind, delicately balanced, with strong limitations, a fantastic temperament for a person in his walk of life... his heart was not in his work... circumstances had driven him into the career of politics and ironical fate had set him at its head... I had an intense contempt for the political mind, and it struck me that he had some of the same feeling. 30

It is evident that Churchill had engaged in politics because it is the duty of a man of his class; it is his aunt who is the motive power behind his career and who makes the decisions for him. Churchill, seeing his influence on political affairs waning, makes a desperate effort to get in touch with the spirit of the times by lending his influence and that of the British government to an unsavoury scheme for the development of Greenland. The timeworn imperialist reasons are advanced: the bringing of light to a dark spot of the earth, the advantage of gaining an eligible harbor, the wealth of gold and oil which will enrich Britain,—and the fact that if Britain does not step in some other power will. Churchill is forced against his will to take this step; it is his last chance for success in a struggle for power within the Cabinet between himself and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

30Ibid., p. 68.
The latter, Gurnard, is a cynically immoral politician.

His adherents called him an inspired statesman; his enemies set him down a mere politician.... He was indifferent to attacks upon his character, but crushed mercilessly everyone who menaced his position. He stood alone, and a little mysterious; his own party was afraid of him. 31

Far from being beaten by Churchill's involvement in the Greenland scheme, Gurnard will be immeasurably helped, for he is a Dimensionist and the man designated by that group to become the ruler of England. He is a sinister figure, but his type of cold, calculating, scientific mind is the type necessary for political success in the modern world.

"When a man of such ability believes in nothing, and sticks at nothing, there's no saying how far he may go. He has kicked away every ladder. He doesn't mean to come down." 32

The Duc de Mersch, megalomaniac founder of the Greenland enterprise, is actually a tool in the hands of the Dimensionists; standing between Miss Etchingham Granger and Gurnard, "he seemed like a country lout between confederate sharpers." 33 The ruler of a little German grand-duchy which had been handed over to him because none of the great powers would let any other of the great powers possess the country, he is a pompous, self-seeking fool posing as a philanthropist. He hopes to make enough money in Greenland to enable

31 Ibid., p. 80.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 85.
him to laugh at half a dozen elective grand duchies like his own, which is threatening to eject him for misuse of the public moneys. For all his obtuseness and ultimate ineffectiveness, he is a contaminating influence in politics, leading the little people of England to ape his materialism as they invest their savings in his venture; he represents "the modern spirit that must be purified away by burning before things could return to their normal state." 34

The popular press plays an unscrupulous role in The Inheritors, as it does in many of the Edwardian novels. A journal is founded by the Dimensionists for the express purpose of fostering "the boom in de Mersch," and it plays a great part in stimulating the demand for official and private backing of the scheme. Then, in accordance with the preconceived plan, it exposes the horrors of imperialist exploitation in Greenland at the same time that the Dimensionists have engineered revolutions around the globe and pulled the financial props from under de Mersch by involving the greatest banking house in the world in ruin. The public outcry is tremendous; Churchill is given the blame for the loss of savings and national prestige, and Gurnard, with speeches of outraged conscience in Parliament, takes over the government. Churchill and all that Churchill has stood for, "the probity; the greatness and the spirit of the

34 Ibid., p. 157.
past from which had sprung...the consciences of the millions"^35 have been brought to nothingness. The revolution has been effected by the singleminded ruthlessness of the Dimensionists, through their manipulation of the fears of Churchill, the vanity and greed of de Mersch, and the delusion of the journalist narrator, who has believed that by furthering the schemes of the Dimensionists he will gain the love of Miss Etchingham Granger, a being incapable by her very nature of loving anyone.

The novel ends on a gloomy note: "...it is not a very gay world. Gurnard, they say, is the type of the age—of its spirit."^36 It is the spirit of scientific materialism which has triumphed, overriding all the good impulses which have grown out of man's heritage from the past.

**The Secret Agent**

The moral and spiritual emptiness of the modern world received further extended treatment by Conrad in *The Secret Agent* (1907). In this novel he turned his lens to focus on life in the big city, characterizing London as a drab world built by the spirit of materialism and corruption prevalent in modern life, "a monstrous town more populous than some continents and in its man-made might as if indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles; a cruel devourer of the world's

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^36Ibid., p. 211.
light." The anarchists are its political equivalent, symbolizing the lawlessness and moral impoverishment which has spread throughout the social order.

The story, which concerns an anarchist plot, is no more than a physical framework within which Conrad presents his ideas. He himself disclaimed any intention of dealing primarily with the theme of anarchy: "I had no idea to consider anarchism politically, or to treat it seriously in its philosophical aspect;" "I don't think I've been satirizing the revolutionary world. All these people are not revolutionaries—they are shams."

The anarchists are not the only shams; every character in the novel hides his true motives from himself as well as from others as he is forced by circumstances to commit actions which often are hostile to his own nature. None of the characters is a hero in the sense that the action or meaning of the story revolves exclusively around him; none is the main character in terms of sympathy, liking, or identification, which Conrad deliberately eschews in order to maintain the detachment necessary for his indictment of modern life.

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38 Life and Letters, II, 37.
39 Ibid., p. 60.
Vladimir, the First Secretary of the Russian Embassy, is a ruthless exponent of repressive action who does not hesitate to plan and subsidize an outrageous crime by the radicals in order to arouse the people and police of England against them. Conrad expresses his dislike of Russians and Russian methods in Vladimir, who is an amoral bully and coward priding himself on a grasp of political affairs which exists only in his own mind. Recognizing that the fetish of the hour is neither royalty nor religion but science, he sets in motion a plot to bomb the Greenwich Observatory, hoping by this act of senseless violence to bring home to the English the danger represented by maniacal anarchists in their own country. For all his vaunted insight into the bourgeois mind, Vladimir is completely ignorant of the real aims, thoughts, and methods of the revolutionary world, and although he professes contempt for Western institutions, particularly the sentimental regard for individual liberty, and for the police who embody these ideals, he quails before those very police when he comes under suspicion.

Descended from generations victimized by the instruments of an arbitrary power, he was racially, nationally, and individually afraid of the police. It was an inherited weakness, altogether independent of his judgment, of his reason, of his experience. He was born to it. 41

Verloc, the secret agent employed by the Russian embassy to spy upon the radicals, is simultaneously also a trusted

40 The Secret Agent, p. 136.
member of the radical Future of the Proletariat society and
an informer for the English police. He has been led both
by deviousness and laziness to adopt his profession:

...his dislike of all kinds of recognized
labour [was] shared with a large proportion of
revolutionary reformers of a given social state.
For obviously one does not revolt against the ad-
vantages and opportunities of that state, but
against the price which must be paid for the same
in the coin of accepted morality, self-restraint,
and toil. The majority of revolutionists are the
enemies of discipline and fatigue mostly. 42

Although Verloc is fond of drawing fine distinctions
in his mind between himself and the anarchists with whom he
associates, for "the instinct of conventional respectability
was strong within him, being overcome only by his dislike of
all recognized forms of labour," 43 he had about him "the air
common to men who live on the vices, the follies, or the
baser fears of mankind; the air of moral nihilism." 44

Betrayed by his own sloth and his inability to commu-
nicate with any of his associates, when Verloc's bluff is
called by Vladimir and he is condemned to bomb the observa-
tory, he sets in motion a chain of circumstances which leads
to his own death. "He is an ineffectual Prufrock, as impo-
tent as the gloomy city which enfolds his activities....An

42 Ibid., p. 55.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 25.
isolated counter-agent who can turn to no one,...a lost figure in a heartless city." 45

The persistent failure of the characters in *The Secret Agent* to understand and communicate with each other has been interpreted as a symbol of the inability of science to come to terms with human emotions:

Conrad is forcefully suggesting that a failure in understanding is a concomitant of a failure in morality, and to communicate effectively with each other, human beings must have not only minds and feelings but also a sense of ethical conduct that can rise above immediate needs. 46

With but one exception, Conrad's anarchists are inept and ridiculous. Michaelis, who has spent fifteen years in prison for his very minor part in a rather mad attempt to rescue some prisoners from a police van, has relapsed into an ineffectual Marxist dreamer, trustfully counselling, "Patience," while he waits for the capitalist system to prepare its own doom. Yundt, who like Michaelis is passive and parasitical, depending upon a woman for his livelihood and care, has been a "posturing shadow" all his life.

The famous terrorist had never in his life raised personally as much as his little finger against the social edifice. He was no man of action; he was not even an orator of torrential eloquence....With a more subtle intention, he took the part of an insolent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses

46[Ibid., p. 205.]
which lurk in the blind envy and exasperated vanity of ignorance, in the suffering and misery of poverty, in all the hopeful and noble illusions of righteous anger, pity, and revolt. 47

Ossipon is an unprincipled sensualist and rogue who preys upon lower-class women who possess a little money, a writer of scurrilous and obscene pamphlets, the wordy proclaimer of the invincibility of science and knowledge.

None of these three conspirators has ever accomplished one effective revolutionary action, and the discrepancy between their words and actions is Conrad's ironic comment on the validity of their outlook.

The Professor is a different matter; he is the only man of action in the group, a fanatical nihilist, the embodiment of all that is anti-social and destructive. Baulked in his ambition of rising through sheer merit to a position of authority and affluence, he has determined to gain power and prestige through a singleminded devotion to destruction, and Conrad comments, "The way of even the most justifiable revolutions is prepared by personal impulses disguised into creeds." 48

47 The Secret Agent, p. 51.
48 Ibid., p. 77.
anarchists in broad daylight, the police would be violating the moral and legal institutions on which the social system is based—an idea reminiscent of The Inheritors.

To destroy public faith in legality was the imperfect formula of his pedantic fanat-
icism; but the subconscious conviction that the framework of an established social order cannot be effectually shattered except by some form of collective or individual violence was precise and correct. He was a moral agent—that was settled in his mind.49

The little megalomaniac hates and fears the mass of mankind which swarms around him in London; he is oppressed by the sheer weight of numbers of those who may be imperv-
ious to his logic or even to his threats. His only answer is mass destruction, the elimination first of the weak and flabby and slavish of mind, then of the only relatively strong, until at last only he will be left.

The police have no defense against a will so bent on destruction that it is careless of its own death; "the question is not how justice can be made to apply to an indi-
dividual beyond the social pale, but how it can survive in a world yielding everywhere to the rule of unreason which operates according to its own inhuman law."50 It is on this note, and with the image of the Professor, that the novel ends:

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49 The Secret Agent, p. 77.
50 Wiley, p. 112.
...the incorruptible Professor walked, too, averted his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thought caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable—and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men.51

The characterizations of the anarchists in this novel have been criticized as were those of the revolutionaries in Under Western Eyes; it is contended that Conrad has descended to such burlesque that he violates his intention of portraying them as potential menaces. "He removes any reasonable ground for the fear in which he obviously holds them . . . . doesn't his association of anarchist and sham deprive him of access to the complexities of the radical mind?"52

This may not be a valid objection in view of the fact that Conrad disclaimed any intention of analyzing the world of the anarchists. It must be noted, however, that in his preface written in 1920, he expressed satisfaction that his portrayal had been considered true to life, and asserted that, "there had been moments during the writing of the book when I was an extreme revolutionist."53 It cannot be denied that Conrad's anarchists are politically ridiculous, but

51The Secret Agent, p. 253.
52Howe, "III. The Political Novels," pp. 3-4.
53The Secret Agent, p. 12.
they stand as effective examples of the immorality and irrationality of the modern spirit which he wished to excoriate.

Conrad's policemen and government officials also demonstrate an aptitude for devious and expedient actions motivated by personal considerations. When Conrad says, "The terrorist and the policeman both come from the same basket," he is referring to the social system which has produced them, but that system has produced the same lack of morality in both.

Inspector Heat is the advocate of the tried and true methods of criminal pursuit, and the exponent of a career in which success has been based upon routine. His success in dealing with criminals has come from the similarity between their minds and his:

...he could understand the mind of a burglar, because...the mind and the instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and the instincts of a police officer. Both recognize the same conventions, and have a working knowledge of each other's methods and of the routine of their respective trades. They understand each other, which is advantageous to both, and establishes a sort of amenity in their relations. Products of the same machine, one classed as useful and the other as noxious, they take the machine for granted in different ways, but with a seriousness essentially the same.

Heat's attempts at dealing with the anarchists are obstructed by their refusal to follow the rules of the game.

54 Ibid., p. 68.
55 Ibid., p. 85.
and by the refusal of his new superior officer to countenance the use of spies and double agents which has proved so useful to the police in the past.

The new Assistant Commissioner of Police feels hampered and harassed in his bureaucratic surroundings in London, after having served for years in the colonies where he had room for individual maneuvering. He is inhibited by the presence of too many subordinates, too many masters, and the irrational nature of public opinion. His "suspicion of police methods (unless the police happened to be a semi-military body organized by himself) was not difficult to arouse...his appreciation of Chief Inspector Heat's zeal and ability, moderate in itself, excluded all notion of moral confidence."\(^{56}\) He suspects that much of Heat's official reputation has been gained by the use of information extracted from agents such as Verloc, and demands the arrest of the latter. Heat is reluctant to give up his secret source of information and advocates instead the arrest of the known anarchist, Michaelis, as a measure to quiet the public outcry following the bombing; for him it is neither ethics nor justice, but success, which matters.

The Commissioner has his own personal reasons for resisting the arrest of Michaelis, since the latter is the pampered protege of a wealthy, influential woman who is his wife's sponsor in society. Both Heat and the Commissioner have

\(^{56}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 102-103.}\)
good and valid professional reasons for the stands they
take, but their conduct also coincides with their personal
interests.

Sir Ethelred, the Secretary of State, exhibits that
desire for clear-cut issues and definite rules so charac-
teristic of Heat. He complains that he is kept in the dark
by the police, yet he approves of Heat because the latter
tells him exactly what he wants to hear, and although he
demands information, he constantly admonishes, "Spare me
the details," and, "Be lucid, please." \(^{57}\) Obsessed with his
conception of himself as a revolutionary crusader, Sir
Ethelred is far more interested in his campaign for Nation-
alization of Fisheries than in the affairs of the people,
more engrossed in forestalling the machinations of the
Opposition than in attending to the welfare of the nation.

Conrad has painted a far from edifying picture of the
"lawful" elements of the nation; it is yet another view of
the spiritual impoverishment of a world which is preoccu-
pied solely with personal advancement. "There is no sense
of waste, no suggestion that the characters were made for
better things....The final effect is of negation and squa-
lor." \(^{58}\) The very public issues, by their smallness and
unimportance, tend to strengthen this effect. "This is

\(^{57}\) Ibid., pp. 119, 121.

\(^{58}\) Baines, p. 338.
not a tragic world of noble defeats and vast forces overthrown. The Secret Agent's vision is of a 'mediocre mankind' in an 'imperfect society': flabby, debased, emotionally gullible."

It is an extension of the picture rendered by The Inheritors, of a modern society ripened for chaos and disaster by its own corruption. Its theme of moral anarchy and political futility was to be employed again by Conrad in Under Western Eyes. The Secret Agent, however, bears the signs of an earlier work in its tendency toward generalized characterizations. This aroused criticism which Conrad bore in mind when writing his later novel, in which his personages are more individualized and more nearly rounded; some of them, such as Tekla and Sophia Antonovna, are allowed to display a few ameliorating qualities of character.

59 Guerard, p. 225.
CHAPTER IV

DOMESTIC POLITICS: REGENERATION AND REFORM

Not all of the Edwardian novelists held such a gloomy view of human prospects as did Conrad, nor were they all content with such a dispassionate presentation as that of Galsworthy. There were those who felt as strongly as Belloc the inefficacy of contemporary political institutions, and deprecated their corruption by those who held political power, but who believed that the diseases of modern life were curable. They held out hope for the regeneration of the inner man—and even the possibility that such a regeneration might effect a beneficial change in his political behavior and institutions.

The Man Who Was Thursday

One of these authors was G. K. Chesterton, whose conception of Law and Anarchy as symbols of the powers of Good and Evil was markedly different from that of Conrad. This conception was presented in The Man Who Was Thursday, which was published in 1907, the same year as The Secret Agent. Chesterton, who has been described as "a man who is fond of looking at the world upside down so that he can
see it the right way up,"¹ evolved a fantastic situation in which the anarchists, unknown to each other, are really police detectives in disguise, and Sunday, the Chief of the Anarchists, is also the chief of detectives who sends them out to war on anarchy.

In an interview years later, Chesterton said that he had intended the novel as the reverse of the ordinary detective tale, in which the most harmless-seeming individual turns out to be the murderer; he thought it would be fun to make the tearing away of menacing masks reveal benevolence.² He states in his Autobiography that, "So far as the story had any sense in it, it was meant to begin with the picture of the world at its worst and to work toward the suggestion that the picture was not so black as it was already painted."³ The idea that there is good to be found in the most unlikely places is borne out in the course of the story, as Syme confronts each anarchist only to learn that he too has been working for good instead of evil.

Chesterton also suggests that those who are fighting each other may all be fighting on the same side. In one memorable scene, Syme and his fellow-detectives imagine that the whole of civilization, represented by the most

respectable elements of a French town, have gone over to the side of Anarchy. They are proved to be wrong; the others have merely suspected the same of them.

Chesterton also contends that one can understand the real meaning of neither Law nor Anarchy, Good nor Evil, because of our limited visions. Syme says of Sunday,

When I see the horrible back, I am sure that the noble face is but a mask. When I see the face but for an instant, I know that the back is only a jest....Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind and it looks brutal.... If we could only get round in front--

It is also possible that he means that all take anarchy too seriously, that laughter might be more effective than anger in smashing it. In the mammoth pursuit of Sunday across London and the English countryside, that enigmatical figure enjoys himself by flinging nonsensical notes back at the detectives, treating as a huge joke the matter they take in dead earnest.

As each of the detectives tells the others his conception of Sunday, the only comparison he can find is some aspect of the universe: the earth in spring, the sun at noonday, shapeless protoplasm, virgin forests, or a changing landscape. Sunday seems to be symbolic of the lawlessness and amorality of Nature, heedless of man and his desires; but when his mask is torn off, he is revealed as the Peace

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of God. This is a new and whole vision for the detectives, who learn that they have only gained it through their struggle; Sunday tells them:

I sent you out to war. I sat in the darkness, where there is not any created thing, and to you I was only a voice commanding valour and an unnatural virtue. You heard the voice in the dark and you never heard it again. The sun in heaven denied it, the earth and sky denied it, all human wisdom denied it. And when I met you in the daylight I denied it myself....But you were men. You did not forget your secret honor, though the whole cosmos turned an engine of torture to tear it out of you.  

It is Syme who interprets this message for the others; he is the voice of Chesterton throughout the book. Syme, "a poet who had become a detective," had begun as a rabid hater of anarchism. He rebelled against rebellion simply because of his family, all of whom were cranks of one kind or another; the only thing left for Syme to revolt into was sanity. In this he is truly Chesterton; "There is a conventionality in rebellion against which Chesterton always rebelled." 6 Through his experiences with Sunday, Syme has evolved the concept of individual liberty which Chesterton expressed in his Autobiography: "I have felt that the world is conceiving liberty as something that merely works outwards. And I have always conceived it as something that works inwards." 7

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5Ibid., p. 273.
7Autobiography, p. 103.
Syre answers those of the detectives who are ready to accept the Peace of God but who object to the sufferings they have endured in the struggle; he also confutes the arguments of Gregory the poet, the one true anarchist and pessimist in the book, who hates Government and rulers because they govern and because they are safe and have never suffered. Syre asks,

Why does each thing on earth war against each other thing; why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? ....So that each thing that obeys the law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter....No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, "We also have suffered."

Syre believes that by constant experiment and struggle a man may find himself, that by tasting both good and evil he comes to a reconciliation with himself, an individual reconciliation not imposed from without, either by the forces of good or evil; in the process he also becomes reconciled to the Good and Evil embodied in God, who created both.

The novel ends on a note of peace and well-being. Syre, after awakening from his nightmare (or vision, as the case may be), felt "an unnatural buoyancy in his body and a crystal simplicity in his mind. He felt he was in possession of some impossible good news, which made every other thing a triviality, but an adorable triviality."
This expression of hope and eventual reconciliation between warring forces places Chesterton at the opposite pole from such Edwardian Cassandras as Conrad, and in the ranks of the crusading but optimistic reformers, of which he undoubtedly made one in his early years.

**The New Machiavelli**

The Edwardian atmosphere was not merely one of criticism, self-examination, and doubt; there was a sense of impending change in the air, and an age which was subjected to the propaganda of such visionary new theories of government as Marxism and Fabian Socialism inevitably produced some writers who proclaimed hope for the future.

H. G. Wells was one Edwardian novelist who did not stop with depicting the shortcomings of his world, and who went beyond abstract discussions of good and evil. He was an active reformer, offering specific ideas in the belief that man is capable of perfecting himself and the society in which he lives. As a man of the people with a scientific background, Wells was particularly well constituted to understand a time in which the common man was exerting his influence as never before, and in which there was a widespread belief that application of the principles and discipline of science would inevitably lead to progress and perfection.
The New Machiavelli (1911), which is "almost a hand- 
book of English political life on the eve of the First 
World War,"\(^{10}\) is less a novel than a propaganda medium for 
ideas which Wells had expressed in his earlier sociological 
essays. Within the framework of his story, which concerns 
the clash between public ambition and private passion in a 
young politician, Wells finds opportunity to indict contem-
porary political, social, and moral practices, and to 
present concrete proposals for a planned and orderly socie-
ty. The protagonist, Remington, is Wells' spokesman through-
out the novel, asserting his belief that politics should be 
a great constructive process, and advocating an ideal socie-
ty which would be ruled by an aristocracy of statesmen 
produced by revolutionary practices in eugenics and edu-
cation--statesmen who would be motivated only by ideas of 
sound service to humanity and the State.

Looking about him, Wells saw social and economic dis-
order: a society confused, wasteful, and planless, which 
muddled about in politics and education, trying to patch up 
a social fabric which actually called for a complete re-
making. In his novel he indicts the muddle-headedness and 
the tendencies toward pettiness, expediency, compromise, 
and drift which are displayed in the government, political

\(^{10}\)Wagenknecht, p. 470.
parties, and politicians. He does not exempt from blame the electorate itself, which "did not think politics was a great constructive process; they thought it was a kind of dog-fight." 11

Remington, a young idealist, is appalled when he learns during his first political campaign that elections revolve about personalities rather than ideals, and he is further disillusioned by his Parliamentary experience which teaches him that self-interest is the motivating factor for both individuals and parties.

The Conservative Party not only stands for the established property interests, but considers that the existing arrangement is the only possible one.

...it was possible to question whether they had any imaginative conception of constructive statecraft at all; whether they didn't opaquely accept the world for what it was, and set themselves single-mindedly to make a place for themselves and cut a figure in it. 12

It is the party of Imperialists, militarists, and big businessmen, all of whom Remington condemns for their short-sightedness, their bullying, their "patriotism at the Kipling level," and their mere habitual persistence in the pursuit of gain, adding the trenchant comment that, "a race that bears a sceptre must carry gifts to justify it." 13


12 Ibid., p. 342.

13 Ibid., p. 332.
Even the Conservative leader, Evesham, who is Wells' portrait of Lord Balfour, though sympathetically pictured as one who "brought political art to the last triumph of naturalness...the typical aristocrat, so typical and above the mere form of aristocracy, that he remained a commoner to the end of his days,"\(^{14}\) displays "a quite unscrupulous wickedness in the use of his subtle mind" in "playing for points in the game of party advantage."\(^{15}\) He shares Remington's ideal about the common constructive purpose all parties should pursue in politics:

When Evesham talked of this ideal of the organized state...so clearly stated as to have the compelling conviction of physical science, he spoke quite after my own heart. Had he really embodied the attempt to realize that, I could have done no more than follow him blindly. But neither he nor I embodied that, and there lies the gist of my story.\(^{16}\)

The Liberals are nothing but a diversified crowd, the party of criticism, the "Anti" party. "It was tremendously clear what they were against. The trouble was to find out what on earth they were for!"\(^{17}\) They are capable only of fine-sounding phrases about democracy and liberty; they have no well-defined collective aim, being merely a collection of smaller men banded together against the established few.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 339.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 341.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., pp. 341-342.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 228.
Their futility and pettiness are embodied in Oscar and Altiora Bailey, who are the powers behind the scene. In these two characters, Wells descends to malicious caricature; they are Sidney and Beatrice Webb, transposed from the Socialist to the Liberal Party in the novel, in which Wells seeks partial revenge for his unsuccessful attempt to capture the leadership of the Fabian Society from them and George Bernard Shaw. Altiora, with her "bony soul" and her "gaunt and greedy vanity," had seized and married the startled little intellectual with the objective of forming the nucleus for a reform movement of Young Liberals. In effect, the reform is all on paper; they classify everything, reducing it to little compartments with hard outlines, making every person a "type," and transforming statistics into immutable principles. When viewed in the light of the outer world, they are curiously unreal and ineffective, completely futile as a political force.

The Labour Party is, except for its obvious antagonism to employers and property owners, appallingly narrow. "Its leaders are no doubt constructively minded, but the mass of the following is naturally suspicious of education and discipline, hostile to the higher education, and... almost destitute of ideas."18

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18 Ibid., p. 302.
As for the Socialists, who "at least had an air of coherent intentions," Remington finds them yet another heterogeneous collection of individuals, each one of whom "behaved exactly like a man in possession of valuable patent rights, who wants to be dealt with. He had an air of having a corner in ideas...the whole Socialist movement was an attempted corner in ideas." Personal malice appears again in Wells' comments on the oddities of manners and dress of the Socialists, but his real quarrel with them lay in their formal policy which claimed exclusive rights for one class or party; Wells' brand of Socialism "was much more a 'realization of a common and universal loyalty in mankind, the awakening of a collective consciousness of duty in humanity'."

Remington comes to realize that none of the political parties as presently constituted are capable of carrying out his ideal of organizing and disciplining, of building up a constructive State out of the world's confusions. He sees his opportunity in the defeat of the Conservatives, and leaves the Liberal Party in the hope of raising up a band of Young Conservatives who will follow his lead.

He has developed a mystical conception of the race mind as something which has impelled the progress of

19 Ibid., p. 292.
20 Ibid., pp. 296-297.
humanity down through the ages, even though hidden as a real self hides behind the exterior which an individual displays to the people around him:

...something struggling out of the undiscriminated abyss, struggling to exist and prevail over and comprehend individual lives...something greater than ourselves which does not so much exist as seek existence....It has worn the form and visage of ten thousand different gods, sought a shape for itself in stone and ivory and music and wonderful words, spoken more and more clearly of a mystery of love, a mystery of unity, dabbling meanwhile in blood and cruelty beyond the common impulses of men. It is something that comes and goes, like a light that shines and is withdrawn, withdrawn so completely that one doubts if it has ever been.

Since this "hinterland" lies beyond the immediate present, Remington believes that the growth of statesmanship can only come from the development of an intellectual modesty which will forego the error which all priests, schools of thought, and political schemers have made—the assumption that they can completely think out the whole of man's future, clearly and finally. Once the importance of the hinterland in both the individual and the race mind is grasped, the statesman will be emancipated from immediacy, and will no longer try to "fix up" human affairs but will devote himself to the development of the necessary intellectual life; he will cease to build on the sands and set himself to gather foundations.

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22 The New Machiavelli, p. 290.
23 Ibid., pp. 307-308.
These foundations will be provided by a program which Remington calls The Public Endowment of Motherhood. It is aimed at producing the finest children from the finest parents, and to give them the type of education needed to produce an aristocracy of intellect which will provide the statesmen of the future—the "Samurai" which Wells had projected in *A Modern Utopia* (1905). This scheme is the central political idea of the novel; the idea of a collective mind here plays the part which a United Italy played in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and the ideal state which will evolve will be emblematic of a new renascence for humanity.

A trained aristocracy and universal education are of paramount importance to Remington (and Wells), for it is obvious that modern society is failing to produce children good enough and well-trained enough for the demands of the developing civilized state. The urgency of the need evidently is apparent to the public too, for Remington achieves a success which is astonishing in view of contemporary mores on the subjects of the family, marriage, and sex.

Remington's program is intended also as a solution of the problem of women, a recognition of their need to become less subordinate to individual men. Wells is unique among the writers of his period in giving consideration in his novel to the growing influence of women in politics. It is not merely that women are to be given freedom and

\[24\] Ibid., p. 386.
citizenship and a place of supreme importance in producing the statesmen of the future, nor that Altiora Bailey's political machinations receive much more extensive treatment than those of Sophia Antonovna in Under Western Eyes or Churchill's aunt in The Inheritors; Wells sees in the suffrage movement one of the most serious subjects determining legislation, and a portent of political life in the future:

...it was the first crude expression of a great mass and mingling of convergent feelings, of a widespread, confused persuasion among modern educated women that the conditions of their relations with men were oppressive, ugly, dishonouring, and had to be altered. They had not merely adopted the Vote as a symbol of equality; it was fairly manifest to me that, given it, they meant to use it, and to use it perhaps even vindictively and blindly, as a weapon against many things they had every reason to hate.25

Remington's personal tragedy arises from complications caused by Woman and faulty education. When he forsakes his wife for his mistress, he is forced to bow to the prevailing moral code and sacrifice his career. His action serves to point up the fact that, "Statecraft sits weaving splendid garments, no doubt, but with a puny, ugly, insufficient baby in the cradle."26 Remington represents an imperfect product of modern education and upbringing, one who is unable to subordinate private passion to the high ideals he has envisioned. He himself can only term his act a "self-betrayal."

25Ibid., p. 373.
26Ibid., p. 379.
His choice is the direct opposite of that made by Galsworthy's Miltoun. In both cases, it is determined by the individual's background and education, but the authors differ decidedly in their attitudes toward the situation and characters. Galsworthy presents his situation dispassionately, but Wells is indignant at the sacrifice of human talent to stupid convention; Galsworthy makes Miltoun, even though politically victorious, seem a doomed figure as he fights to hold on to an outworn tradition, while Remington, even in defeat, holds out hope for a future in which men who have been endowed with superior spiritual equipment by their superior inheritance and education will provide a better world for mankind.

Wells is so engrossed with the political and sociological ideas in this novel that he subordinates his story to them, interrupting the action with lengthy passages of discussion. His re-creation of contemporary life is somewhat marred by his preoccupation with his theme; with the exception of Remington, his characters are merely types whose actions and points of view are described without an attempt at analysis of cross-purposes or complicated motivations. "Conrad would have used those men to give us an understanding of life as it is, where Wells has used them simply to throw into relief his idea of what life ought to be." 27

Wells stands almost alone among the Edwardian novelists in his belief that the bettering of humanity can be achieved by legislative means, and his optimistic view of the role of the individual in politics. The prevailing tendency among writers of his era was to fear and decry the subordination of the individual to the mass in modern society, but Wells saw in the situation a glorious opportunity for self-fulfillment; he looked forward to a future embodying "the beauty of the Greek ideal that the individual can only rise to the full stature of personality as a member of the community." 28

The Napoleon of Notting Hill

That the serious matter of reform need not take the guise of a politico-sociological treatise was proved early in the Edwardian period, when G. K. Chesterton effectively employed a different type of treatment for some of the political maladies of modern life. The Napoleon of Notting Hill (1904) is a "serious joke," a farce which pretends to deal with a future time in which Englishmen attempt to revert to the Middle Ages. In the short space of its two hundred pages, Chesterton brings under fire a surprising number of contemporary phenomena: representative government; the monarchy; imperialism; militarism; the drabness created in modern life by materialism and specialization; and the belief in Wellsian Utopias.

28 Wingfield-Stratford, p. 150.
Chesterton's London in that year of destiny, 1894, is one in which the people have cheated the foolhardy prophets of the early twentieth century, those clever men who

... took something or other that was certainly going on in their time, and then said that it would go on more and more until something extraordinary happened—H. G. Wells and others who thought that science would take care of the future.... the people went and did what they liked. Let me no longer conceal the painful truth. The people had cheated the prophets of the twentieth century. When the curtain goes up on this story, eighty years after the present date, London is almost exactly like what it is now.29

The people have absolutely lost faith in revolutions. Democracy is dead, for no one minds the governing class governing. England has become a despotism in which the King is chosen like a juryman upon an official rotation list, a despotism which is not a decay of democracy but rather its fulfillment; by the simple means of choosing one despot with the same intellect or lack of intellect as the whole electorate, the "eternal insolence of the aristocracy of talents" formerly embodied in the House of Commons has been done away with.30

When the choice for king falls on Auberon Quin, it sets in motion a chain of events which has momentous consequences for the complacent, placid Londoners, who have come to assume that things will happen just as they have always

30Ibid., p. 31.
happened, and that there is no reason for any man doing anything but the things he had done the day before. For Quin is a dangerous man, one who cares for nothing but a joke: "Every man is dangerous who cares for only one thing." It is his whim to revive all the medieval trappings, the traditional ceremonies, costumes, and charters of liberties of the various boroughs of London. Protests are inevitable for, "Londoners had no particular objection to the King making a fool of himself, but they became indignant when it became evident that he wished to make fools of them." Only two men approve the idea; the first is Chesterton himself, who tended to view the Middle Ages with nostalgia, feeling that they represented a spirit of romance sadly lacking in modern life; the other is Adam Wayne, who is as dangerous as the king, for he too cares for only one thing—the sacred separateness of Notting Hill, of which he is provost.

In Wayne, Chesterton embodies his own patriotic position, that of the "Little Englander," to which he was led by his opposition to the Boer War. He feared that the nationhood of England would be lost in the Imperial idea, and felt that the real roots of the patriot should be in his own country and preferably in his immediate neighborhood; "...the more fervently Mr. Kipling sang and preached of Empire, the

\[31\text{Ibid.}, p. 33.\]
\[32\text{Ibid.}, p. 60.\]
more decisively did Mr. Chesterton embrace the parish pump, honouring it as a symbol if not as a source.

Wayne embraces Quin's idea with all the fervor of a frustrated poet—which he is—one to whom Nature has given the urge for creation without the power of artistic expression. He devotes all his energies to making Notting Hill a great nation, even to the extent of declaring war on the rest of London in order to protect his sovereign territory against a crass materialistic scheme to run a road through it. He strives hard to bring the spirit of romance and chivalry back to the souls of the shopmen in his street, but finds it difficult to enlist them in his cause; they are interested only in the money he spends with them. Finally he finds a true romantic in the proprietor of a curiosity shop, who turns out to be an excellent military strategist, and from that moment Notting Hill is invincible.

Chesterton has suggested that it takes a humorist to initiate a revolution, a fanatic to determine on carrying it out, and a romantic to prosecute it successfully. The attributes of the businessman and the politician, represented in the provosts of two other London boroughs, are not adequate to the situation: Buck, the prosaic businessman, places too much reliance on sheer numerical advantage and lacks the imagination to envision the enemy's employing

\[33\] E. T. Raymond, Portraits of the New Century (The First Ten Years) (New York, 1928), p. 34.
such unorthodox tactics as turning off the street lights, or threatening to lose a flood from the Waterworks Tower; Barker, the hidebound politician, is inhibited by tradition and a respect for rules, and is literally thrown off his feet by the actual sight of "things happening." The carnage is tremendous; considering that it is a conflict fought within a few city blocks over a trivial issue, but Chesterton's exaggeration serves to emphasize horrors which are but magnified in the large-scale warfare in which modern man indulges.

The real point which Chesterton makes is that human nature does not change with a revolution in the outward trappings of its society. Notting Hill gains ascendancy over the rest of London, and immediately enforces its own tyranny, imposing Wayne's romantic vision on the whole of the city.

Quin is disillusioned when the only outcome of his joke is that Wayne conquers and by his conquest becomes commonplace: "Lord! what a strange world in which a man cannot remain unique even by taking the trouble to go mad."34

Wayne protests against the imperialistic tendencies of Notting Hill in a typically Chestertonian phrase, "Notting Hill is a nation. Why should it condescend to be a mere empire?"35 But he cannot prevail against human nature, and

34Ibid., p. 176.
35Ibid., p. 182.
although he fights to defend Notting Hill when the inevitable uprising comes against its tyranny, he can only feel that its defeat is proper and right. Quin, whose unpredictable sense of humor has been delighted by Wayne's "unique" declaration, abdicates and enlists on his side and they go down to defeat together.

After the battle these two men, whose differences in outlook have created the whole wild story, effect a reconciliation between the humorist and the fanatic:

...we are not two men but one man. We are mad, because we are two lobes of the same brain...we have been opposite like man and woman, aiming at the same moment at the same practical thing....

I know of something that will alter that antagonism, something that is outside of us, something that you and I have all our lives perhaps taken too little account of. The equal and eternal human being will alter that antagonism, for the human being sees no antagonism between laughter and respect....When dark and dreary days come, you and I are necessary, the pure fanatic, the pure satirist. We have between us remedied a great wrong....But in healthy people there is no war between us. We are but the two lobes of the brain....let us start our wanderings over the world. For we are its two essentials.36

Chesterton places his hopes of reform in human regeneration. In this novel, as in The Man Who Was Thursday, he emphasizes the need of accepting life in all its aspects, neither embracing nor fighting against isolated sides of human nature. Just as his detectives had to fight evil, learning to respect it as a worthy foe in order to realize

36 Ibid., pp. 199-200.
their true individuality, so his Londoners are jolted out of their materialism and complacency by war which brings romance back into their lives. They recognize the worth of individuality, a concept which has been forgotten; they learn anew the necessity of fighting for something they believe in, and that only in active participation can they live life fully.

The Napoleon of Notting Hill is an answer to defeatism and pessimism, and an answer to those who would forget the human equation in placing their entire hope for the future in a cold, scientific, formalized organization of society.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The Edwardian novelists were representative of the transitional age in which they lived, for with the exception of Kipling, who actually belongs among the late Victorians, they portrayed a society in flux, a time of shifting values in which older ideals were felt to have been outworn while there was uncertainty as to what was needed in the new world of the twentieth century. The realization that the national state tended to occupy an ever more prominent place in the direction of the lives of individual men resulted in an investigation into politics, but of all the Edwardian novelists, Wells alone was chiefly a political writer; the others tended to deal with politics in a larger, more general way, as only one of the forces which influence modern life.

The political themes which these writers introduced into their novels mirrored their individual outlooks on life, and offered no collective view of modern society or forecast for the future. The one feature common to all was the abandoning of the Victorian demand for reforms of specific abuses. This may have been due to a realization of the need for more general reform, and the necessity of a more sweeping examination of political practices and ideals;
it is equally possible that it was occasioned by a loss of faith in the power of political institutions to effect a better world. With the exception of Kipling, the Edwardian novelists were unanimous in proclaiming the need for reform, but they placed their emphasis on individual man as he faced the complexities of modern life—or, more often, was faced down by them. Their hopes for the future, if any, lay in the regeneration of the individual.

Conrad flatly believed that man's political arrangements were incapable of affecting the course of history; he saw in them reflections of the selfishness, the lack of morality, and the futility revealed in the actions of individual men.

Galsworthy deprecated the extremes of political behavior, believing them to be inimical to the development of a well-adjusted, politically effective man. His was a temperate approach, advocating the middle way in politics as well as in all of life, but he offered no suggestions for reform.

Belloc stated only that it was impossible for political institutions, as they were constituted in his day, to effect a better world; he reserved his proposals for reform to his sociological and political works of nonfiction.

Chesterton specifically denied the possibility of reform through a mere change in the outward trappings of society. Serious under his foolishness to the point of
approaching the mystical, he placed his reliance on the ultimate reconciliation and synthesis of warring elements in one man and in all men, and advocated the joyous acceptance of life in its entirety.

Kipling and Wells were the two optimists of the group, but at opposite ends of the scale. Kipling, at least during the period in which he wrote *Kim*, blindly accepted Imperialism as the divinely ordained way of life, believing that political ideals and practices which had proved effective in the past would continue to furnish the best possible life both for Englishmen and the people they ruled. Wells advocated both individual regeneration and collective reform, trusting that if scientific principles could be applied to the education and intellectual development of the individual, he would be mentally and morally equipped to produce the constructive legislation which would lead to Utopia.

The years of war and tension, revolution and governmental experiment, which have followed the Edwardian period have borne witness to the fact that political panaceas alone can bring neither peace to the world nor conditions within the national state which will be conducive to the happiness of all individuals. Whether these goals can be achieved through regeneration of the individual remains to be seen; certain it is that neither Chesterton's "Whole man" nor Wells' science-minded man seem near to universal embodiment, but they do represent a belief in active participation
in life which would offset Conrad's pessimistic conception of individuals and societies whose political actions are equally meaningless and ineffective.
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