

ENG 4362: Twentieth Century Literature
Fall 2012
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Assignment #1

Option #1:

This course is a period course—that is, one which considers literary works as part of a historical period or context. Nevertheless, most of our discussions consider the works on their *own* terms, exploring the words on the page and the worlds of their fiction.

This assignment, however, asks you to step back and to consider the historical context of *The Secret Agent* as preserved on ConradFirst.com, an open-access archive which contains scans of the complete issues of the periodicals in which Conrad's works were serialized (it can be found at www.conradfirst.net). *The Secret Agent* first appeared in 1906, in the first eleven issues of a new American magazine, *Ridgway's*. Your task is to peruse some or all of those issues and respond to the following question:

How does the context of its original serialization change how we read *The Secret Agent*?

Please note that the phrase, “context of its original serialization,” can mean either the context *in which* the novel was serialized (so you might consider, for example, how some aspect of the surrounding issue of *Ridgway's* magazine might have affected how readers read his narrative)—or the serialization itself *as* a context of the novel (so you might contrast, for example, the ending of the serialization with that of the later, expanded version). There are, then, many ways of addressing this question—and your essay should not attempt to cover all of them. Rather, you should choose **one** angle, the one that you consider to be the most interesting or fruitful. Develop it into a coherent, well-substantiated, reader-friendly essay of 4-6 pages (1200-1800 words).

By the way, do not assume that Conrad endorsed any particular elements of the context in which his work was published—the surrounding articles, advertisements, or even the summaries preceding the various installments.