



Illustration 3: (1.4 p. 50)

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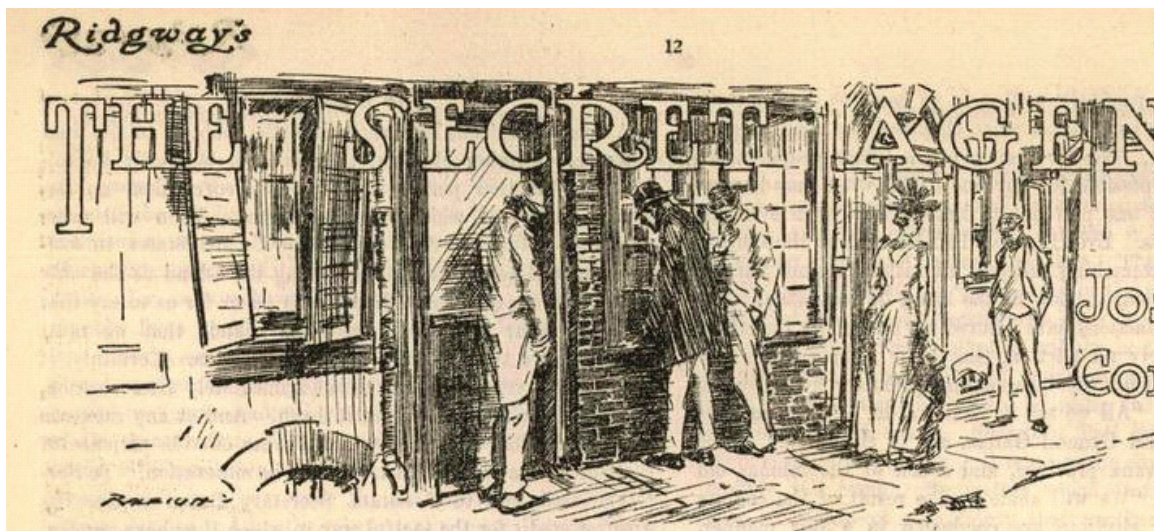


Illustration 1 (1.1 p. 12)

Visual Narrative: The Use of Illustration in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

A picture paints a thousand words – more appropriately, a picture elicits a thousand or more ideas without the use of words. With words, a picture becomes an interpretation; an illustration is capable of bearing heavily on the reader's experience of the text – for better or for worse. The early serial publication of *The Secret Agent* by

Joseph Conrad in *Ridgway's*, a weekly American periodical first published in 1906, included illustrations interspersed throughout the story. Since these illustrations were not included in the final novel format, some may argue that the illustrations serve only as filler; they take up space on the page and may even distract from the text. Further, it may be said that the artist limits the reader's experience of the text by inserting his own interpretation through art. However, the illustrations in *The Secret Agent* serve a crucial commercial role in *Ridgway's* and complement the story without interpreting it excessively. By their placement and their composition, the illustrations picque the interest of the reader, fill in descriptive gaps, and set a visual foundation upon which the reader's imagination can build, making the Conrad's story engaging and present to the reader and giving it a valuable head-start towards becoming an even fuller length novel.

The illustrations were created by American illustrator Henry Patrick Raleigh (1880-1944), who rose from poverty, illustrated for several publications including *Vanity Fair* and *Saturday Evening Post*, and was for years one of the most affluent illustrators in the United States. At the time, Raleigh's style was very popular, and he was sought after by several famous writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald and H.G. Wells (Apatoff). Significantly, Raleigh appears to have never corresponded with Conrad during his life, let alone during the creation of *The Secret Agent*. Conrad arranged the publication of the story through his agent, J.B. Pinker, who in turn made the arrangements with *Ridgway's* (Watts 10). Most likely, *Ridgway's* would have commissioned Raleigh for the illustrations after receiving the text from Pinker, removing Conrad from the editing and illustration process. Cedric Watts points out that this is in fact the case, and reports, "In October 1906 Conrad remarked to Pinker: 'Ridgways are sending me their rag. It's awful

– and it don't matter in the least. I see they are "editing" the stuff pretty severely.'" (Watts 11). Interestingly, Watts insists that the illustrations in *Ridgway's* add to the problem:

In addition to making many cuts, the editors at *Ridgway's* interpolated some linkage-material and made some stylistic alterations which were intended to clarify the narrative. The numerous illustrations by Henry Raleigh (line-drawings in a style verging on caricature) solicited the magazine-reader by isolating dramatic incidents, such as the revelation of the mangled remains of the bomb-victim or the stabbing of Verloc by his wife. In *Ridgway's*, in contrast to the book version, Conrad's novel resembles a graphic thriller for rapid reading, a work markedly less resonant and subtle. (Watts 12)

While it is true that the *Ridgway's* version is significantly less "resonant and subtle" than the novel, the illustrations actually repair some of the damage and end up serving Conrad favorably, though he did not commission them.

On one hand, Watts is absolutely correct to say that Raleigh's illustrations "solicited the magazine-reader" (Watts 12). *Ridgway's* employed illustrators like Raleigh to attract attention to featured stories such as *The Secret Agent*. In serial format, Conrad's novel competes with several other articles and narratives for the attention of the reader. *Ridgway's*, as a periodical, seeks to reach a large, widely varied audience; not every reader will be opening its pages in search of Conrad's latest work. As a potential reader browses the periodical, his eyes will naturally be drawn to large text and pictures that stand out from the normal text. The Title Illustration above, spanning the top of page

twelve of the first issue, marks the beginning of Conrad's narrative and makes it stand out from the surrounding articles and advertisements (Illustration 1). In the final, non-serial format, this method of advertisement is no longer necessary, as the work is complete and detached from other works.

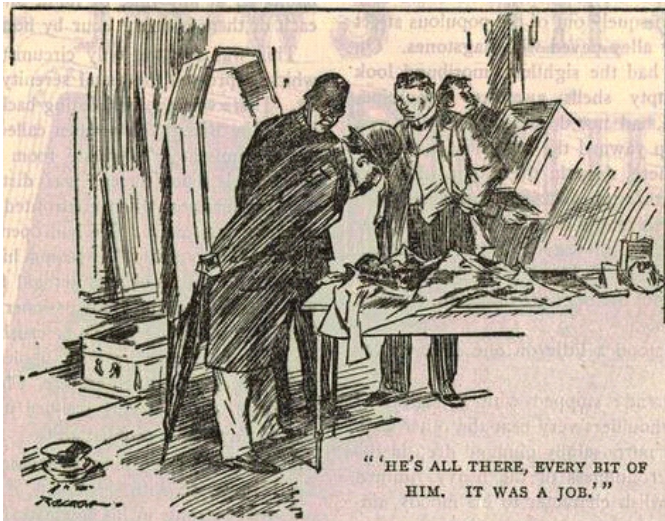


Illustration 2: (1.5 p. 23)

Having caught the reader's attention, the illustrations in the serial then hint at the

subject matter of the narrative, peaking the reader's interest. Each of the pictures includes a caption, usually an important snippet of a longer passage. For instance, one illustration depicts Verloc in Mr. Vladimir's office and is captioned: "A dynamite outrage must be provoked – I give you a month" (1.3 p. 15). It depicts the characters in a moment of conflict, which encourages the reader to explore the context by reading the whole interview between Verloc and Mr. Vladimir. Several of the illustrations are strategically placed to encourage the audience to read more, as well; often, they are placed several paragraphs or pages before the corresponding passages. The preceding image (Illustration 2) is positioned within the passage relating the discussion between Ossipon and the Professor on page 23; the passage in which the inspector views the bomb-victim's body does not occur until the next chapter, page 61. Having seen the picture, the reader is led to continue reading until he reaches the related passage and understands the context. Ultimately, the reader sees more of the text, becomes interested, and often ends up reading the whole story. Thus, it is commercially strategic for periodicals such as *Ridgway's* to incorporate illustrations into the featured stories, whether they are included in the submitted text or not. In the serial, then, the "isolated dramatic images" to which Watts refers become free advertising for Conrad's book (Watts 12).

Advertising aside, illustration also makes up for much of the narrative quality lost in the necessary chopping and editing of the text to fit the periodical publication. According to Norman Page, Conrad had initially intended for *The Secret Agent* to be a short story, but as he wrote it became evident that the subtlety and depth of the story would require a full-length length novel. Page states that "[b]y 5 March, indeed, less than two weeks after his first mention of 'Verloc,' [Conrad] refers to it as 'a longish story:

180 000 words or so' – in anticipation, that is, for in the final version it was to turn out to be about 105 000 words, or not much more than half that figure” (Page 100). A novel of that magnitude would not have fit into a publication like *Ridgway's*, so it was necessarily cut down. The majority of content absent from the serial consists of description, both of the scene and of the internal natures of the characters, which Raleigh's illustrations can in part provide through visual setting and the emotions depicted in the characters' faces and aspects.

For instance, in one particular scene, Verloc enters his bedroom to inform Winnie that Stevie is still downstairs. In the novel, Conrad describes this in detail:

Mrs. Verloc had fallen asleep with the lamp (no gas was laid upstairs) turned up full on the table by the side of the bed. The light thrown down by the shade fell dazzlingly on the white pillow sunk by the weight of her head reposing with closed eyes and dark hair done up in several plaits for the night. She woke up with the sound of her name in her ears, and saw her husband standing over her.

“Winnie! Winnie!”

At first she did not stir, lying very quiet and looking at the cash-box in Mr. Verloc's hand. But when she understood that her brother was “capering all over the place downstairs” she swung out in one sudden movement onto the edge of the bed. Her bare feet, as if poked through the bottom of an unadorned, sleeved calico sack buttoned tightly at the neck and wrists, felt over the rug for the slippers while she looked upward into her husband's face. “I don't know how to manage him,” Mr. Verloc explained peevishly. “Won't do to leave him downstairs alone with

the lights.”

She said nothing, glided across the room swiftly, and the door closed upon her white form. (44-45)

The passage vividly describes Winnie's picturesque form and the serene aspect of the room as she sleeps, as well as her sudden, earnest movement as she rises to fetch Stevie.

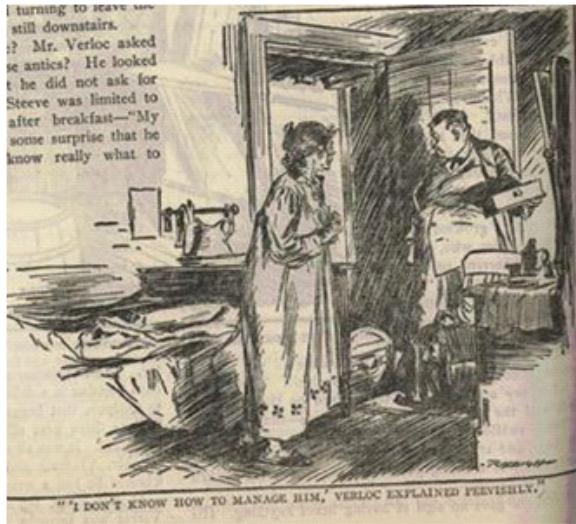
In the serial, however, the whole scene is much more concise:

Mrs. Verloc had fallen asleep. But when she understood that her brother was still downstairs, she swung out in one sudden movement and glided from the room.

“I don't know how to manage him,” Mr. Verloc explained peevishly. “Won't do to leave him downstairs alone with the lights.”

(1.4 p. 50)

Of these passages, the one from the novel is clearly the more interesting and imaginative of the two. It gives the reader not only the action, but also the tone, setting, and emotion it exudes. Conrad's shorter passage lacks much of the visual effect found in the novel, such as the manner in which Winnie moves and her appearance. Standing alone, the passage from the serialization does not make much of an impression on the reader. This lack is countered, however, by the illustration of Mr. and Mrs. Verloc standing in the bedroom



(Illustration 3).

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In addition to giving the basic elements of the scene (e.g. the two characters, the cash-box, etc.), the image reveals the aspect of the couple and assigns the desired mood or feeling to the scene. Mrs. Verloc fidgets with her nightgown buttons as she looks at her husband, who in turn looks downstairs toward the unmanageable Stevie. Verloc's gaze and his position by the door demonstrate his desire to leave the corrective action (i.e. the management of Stevie) up to his wife. Her aspect conveys an earnest desire to accomplish his request and to keep Stevie from being a nuisance to her husband. Thus, the illustration provides the visual effect and emotional tension which the serialized narrative leaves out

and which the later narrative would fill in. The illustrations in the serial, therefore, allow the narrative to remain a manageable length and restore some of its intended literary quality.

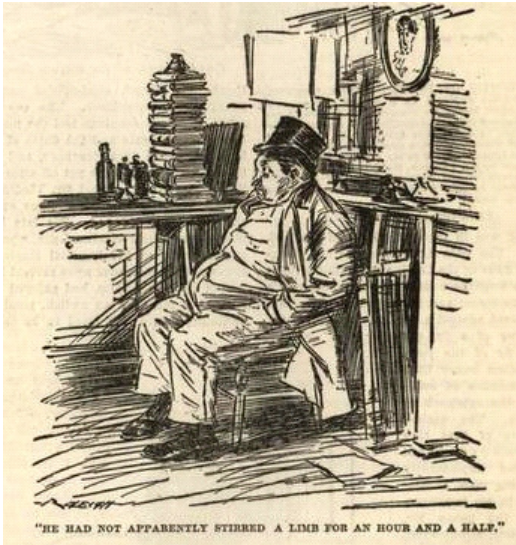


Illustration 4: (1.3 p. 16)

One thing of importance to be noted is that since Conrad did not commission the illustrations, they essentially represent Raleigh's interpretation of the text. At this point, many would say that the illustrations do limit the reader's experience of the story or would agree with Watts that they turn the narrative into a "graphic thriller for rapid reading"

(Watts 12). In fact, some readers may feel that they are being forced into a particular visual interpretation of the text. Raleigh himself had a very different idea of his art's purpose. In a 1923 interview, he reveals that “the most beautiful picture is one which the observer is left free to complete for himself. The illustrator should be able to select the essential elements in any subject which will convey to the layman the entire scene in the simplest and most direct way, avoiding mere details which tend to cause either monotony or confusion” (Apatoff). The tangible evidence of this objective is manifested through Raleigh's style; he focuses on the emotional interaction of the central figures and insinuates the background in light, fluttery sketches, as can be seen in his drawings for *The Secret Agent*. Art critic David Apatoff writes that “the focal point of Raleigh's illustration often consists of a few sensitive, well placed lines to define the 'essential elements' (proving he can indeed draw), encircled by increasingly loose and broad marks that create a general tone but offer few competing details” (Apatoff). The result is a central concrete image – a moment, so to speak, in which the essential elements of the conflict are manifested in stillness, but open to interpretation by the viewer. This moment forms a stage on which the events of the narrative play out in the imagination of the reader. The images do predesignate the appearance of the characters, which limits, to a certain degree, the imaginative license of the reader, but they also make the scene more present and more tangible than verbal description, allowing the reader to take his own interpretation further. For example, the novel calls Verloc a man whose “eyes were naturally heavy” and who “had an air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed” (4). These descriptions, as vivid and affecting as they are, do not give a complete image of Verloc. An image (Illustration 4) solidifies the description of Verloc

from the narrative into a complete person, and from there, the reader can imagine this complete character as engaging in the conflict as a real person. The illustrations in the serialization of *The Secret Agent* provide a visual guide around which the reader can imaginatively construct the world of the narrative. They are not intended to limit the reader but to encourage his imagination.

As Norman Page points out, Conrad did not take *Ridgway's* version very seriously and soon set out to “make a decent book of *The Secret Agent*” (Page 100). His criticism of the serialization is well founded. Is the novel better written than the periodical? Absolutely; the levels of depth and quality between the two are incomparable. Should Raleigh's illustrations have been included in the final version? Probably not. As it transitioned from serial form to a full-length novel, the illustrations lost much of their purpose and necessity. Published as a complete book, the novel no longer needed the illustrations to attract the reader's eye amidst an onslaught of competing articles. As an extended narrative, the novel no longer needed visual aids to fill in the missing description and emotion. Nevertheless, Raleigh's illustrations added much to the quality of *The Secret Agent* in its earliest version, as incomplete and as edited as the text was at the time. Without the additional description, emotion, and imaginative response they evoke from the reader, the story may well have turned out to be a “graphic thriller for rapid reading” (Watts 12).

Works Cited

Conrad, Joseph. *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*. New York: Penguin, 2007. Print.

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Apatoff, David. "ILLUSTRATION ART." *Illustrationart.blogspot.com*. N.p., 21 Dec. 2009. Web. In his article, Apatoff explains that Henry Raleigh's seemingly incomplete style of illustrating contributed to his rise to fame, for the style captures perfectly the sentiment of the period. He points out that "the focal point of Raleigh's illustration often consists of a few sensitive, well placed lines to define the 'essential elements' (proving he can indeed draw), encircled by increasingly loose and broad marks that create a general tone but offer few competing details." Apatoff gives a short history of the height of Raleigh's career and analyzes the fashionable style of the period, Raleigh's art itself, and the reviews Raleigh received at the time. Apatoff's analysis of Raleigh's style shows how such a style is effective in illustration, including in Conrad's work.

Watts, Cedric. *Joseph Conrad: 'The Secret Agent'*. Literature Insights. Tirril: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007. Web. Watts chronicles the life of Joseph Conrad and the composition, publication, and initial impact of *The Secret Agent*. He compares and contrasts the various publications of the book, pointing out that "In *Ridgway's*, in contrast to the book version, Conrad's novel resembles a graphic thriller for rapid reading, a work markedly less resonant and subtle." Watts describes the editing process for the Ridgway version and claims that Raleigh's illustrations are part of the problem, which counters Raleigh's own view of his art.

Page, Norman. "The Novels: *The Secret Agent*". *A Conrad Companion*. London: Macmillan, 1986. 100-105. Print. Page relates the varied reception of *The Secret Agent* back to Conrad's initial indecision and impulsive composition of the novel. He observes that "the notion of a short story was quickly abandoned as Conrad found his original conception growing beneath his hand." Page traces the early criticism of the book both during Conrad's life and after his death. He points out that Conrad did not think very highly of the serialization of his book.