

Joseph Conrad's Under Western Eyes: In Sight of Moral Discovery

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I

Valuable commentaries have been written about the socio-political and historical facets of Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911), and of its prophetic and tragic truths regarding pre-1917 Russia. However, the moral internals of this novel have yet to be adequately explored. Merely to mention the "moral isolation" or the "moral anarchism" which *Under Western Eyes* registers in relation to human life and destiny hardly goes far enough. Conrad invites his readers to go to the heart of the novel's happenings; that they grapple strenuously with its moral problems and experience its moral vision in both its descending and its ascending movements.

Conrad confessed in the "Author's Note," added in 1926, that *Under Western Eyes* was a failure with the reading public. Such failure is not unusual when one considers the moral demands that this novel makes on a reader. Indeed, even when one considers the scenes of the novel's story, which occur in the late nineteenth century, covering a period of

two years, and which are located in Russia and in Switzerland, specifically St. Petersburg and Geneva, there is really no vivid atmosphere or dramatic terrain as found in *The Secret Agent* (1907). Place has a secondary role here; and evoking spectacle is not Conrad's main preoccupation. The two cities where the actions unfold are not memorably defined and are even somewhat blurred in their distinctions. Clearly Conrad has another, metaphysical intention foremost in mind: to use ideas that the novel poses as a journey of moral discovery.

Under Western Eyes expands Conrad's view of autocracy and revolution and, more specifically, his examination of the theme of betrayal encountered in *The Secret Agent*. The moral contexts of this novel are even more heightened; and the moral probity is even more subtle, as Conrad burrows into the state of isolation, and the depth of suffering and pain of conscience that his protagonist experiences. *Under Western Eyes* was to emerge from a short story, "Razumov," Conrad was originally writing, and about which he was to remark to his friend John Galsworthy, in a letter dated January 6, 1908:

I think that I am trying to capture the very soul of things Russian—*Cosas de Russia*. It is not an easy work but it may be rather good when it's done....

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Listen to the theme. The Student Razumov (a natural son of Prince K.) gives up secretly to the police his fellow student, Haldin, who seeks refuge in his rooms after committing a political crime (supposed to be the murder of dePleve). First movement in St. Petersburg. (Haldin is hanged, of course.)

2nd [movement] in Genève. The Student Razumov meeting abroad the mother and sister of Haldin falls in love with that last, marries her, and, after a time, confesses to her the part he played in the arrest of her brother.

The psychological developments leading to Razumov's betrayal of Haldin, to the confession of the fact to his wife and to the death of these people (brought about mainly by the resemblance of their child to the late Haldin), form the real subject of the story.

The preceding synopsis describes what essentially transpires in *Under Western Eyes*, though neither marriage nor the conception of a child takes place. The final paragraph of the letter quoted reveals Conrad's twin purpose in this novel: to examine the psychology of betrayal in relation to the inner lives of those affected by Razumov's actions and to gauge the effects of these actions in relation to the condition of Razumov's soul. It is the internalizing process of betrayal and breakdown that we view in the novel.

Betrayal ignites a cruel process of inner turmoil, moral confusion, and death. Once the conscious decision to betray takes place, all action in the novel is subordinated to the main condition that is presented: the punishing power of conscience and its effects on its victim. Conrad's explorations, moving from outer to inner levels of experience, are ultimately metaphysical in character. Always in command of the vision he is rendering, and of the moral constituents of that vision, he uses the dramatic energies of the novel to venture into the

deeper psychic essences seething and surging behind and beneath and within the political tableaux of what Conrad himself calls an historical novel. Though *Under Western Eyes* recreates historical events, in space and in time, it is a novel that includes and transcends place and history in moral implications and meaning. The historical events constitute a horizontal line of action with specific reference points of place and time and race. In his "Author's Note" Conrad provides some hint of the vertical significance of his novel, of what later in the text itself he speaks of as the task of the novelist to eventuate "the moral discovery which should be the object of every tale."

The political events of the novel, chiefly the assassination in St. Petersburg of a prominent and powerful Russian statesman, gives the novel political specificity, that is, pre-1917 Russian autocracy. This assassination is depicted in the light of a social-political milieu of tyranny, terror, oppression, corruption. The Tsarist government is relentless in its efforts to maintain absolute rule in the face of sporadic outbreaks of revolt and disorder. We encounter a totalitarian state that brooks no challenge to "the principle of autocracy"; and no one who comes under the slightest suspicion of disloyalty, even of dissent, escapes watching. The murdered government official, the Minister-President Mr. de P_, epitomizes the totalitarian mentality in its obsessive fear of sedition, as well as its fanaticism in keeping the status quo—"he was bent on extirpating from the land every vestige of anything that resembled freedom in public institutions; and in his ruthless prosecution of the rising generation he seemed to aim at the destruction of the very hope of liberty itself."

His assassin, Victor Victorovitch Haldin, a student at the University, takes refuge in Razumov's lodgings following the murder, remaining there for several

hours before the latter's arrival. The two young students were never on intimate terms, nor were they "in exactly the same camp," though Haldin knew of and admired Razumov for his solidity of character "which cannot exist without courage." Almost immediately he tells Razumov that it was he, Haldin, who had "removed" Mr. deP_, "a dangerous man—a convinced man." He goes on to relate the details of the murder plans and of the murder itself. He also notes that, after the assassination, he walked quickly to one of the poorer sections of the town in order to find Ziemianitch, a town-peasant and owner of a small number of sledges and horses for hire, who had once indicated his willingness to lead the assassin to safety. Haldin, failing to find Ziemianitch at his usual haunt, a low-class eating house on the outskirts of town, at first hid in a nearby woodyard, but from which he was ejected by the watchman. He then repaired to Razumov's rooms, keeping in mind not only Razumov's reputation, but also the fact that the latter was "the last person that could be suspected" by the authorities. From Razumov he seeks help "to vanish," and asks Razumov to find Ziemianitch and to make a final arrangement for his getaway.

Razumov's response to this dangerous situation, with all of its perils, is one of "anger," "hate," "indignation," "dismay." Basically, too, Razumov is detached and apolitical in his views. A student of philosophy at the University, he sought for academic recognition, and, hence, he was concerned chiefly with his own work, his studies, and his future. This sudden contact with an assassin and traitor now endangered Razumov's modest and normative goals. He saw himself implicated in a political crime with which he had no connection and no special sympathy, and he intuited the dire consequences: "Razumov saw himself shut up in a fortress, worried, badgered, perhaps ill-

used. He saw himself deported by an administrative order, his life broken, ruined, and robbed of order." For him Haldin represents the enemy who has now violated his *raison d'être* and who embodies the threat of breakdown. In a sense Haldin is the destroyer of Razumov's ordered, if not innocent, world. Extremism, in a word, now invades Razumov's private world; and he feels overpowered by its antagonist spirit; indeed, this can even be termed the spectre of ideology casting a dark shadow over human existence.

Haldin himself manifests the kind of threat, and even evil, that frequents Conrad's fictional world as a whole—"I am the world itself, come to pay you a visit.... I am a sort of fate—the retribution that waits its time," to recall the words of that "envoy of the outer world," Jones, in *Victory* (1914). And Razumov is still another "unarmed man" encountering yet another "envoy of the outer world" who fills him with fear, about which Conrad writes in "An Outpost of Progress" (1898): "A man may destroy everything within himself...but...he cannot destroy fear." Indeed, from the moment of his encounter with Haldin it is fear that possesses and drives Razumov in all of his actions—his moods, feelings, and decisions that would permanently, even fatally, affect him and also the lives of those who come into any contact with him.

Increasingly the external world presses against Razumov's world of solitude and the sense of order that it seems to provide him. His isolation defines and strengthens his control over his life. In recognizing the limits of his rarefied situation, he achieves the virtue of measure enabling him to deal with his situation. Thus, in his contacts with his contemporaries he maintains detachment, even as he is always a good listener who scrupulously keeps a certain dispassionateness along with intelligent understanding and even friendliness. But he is also one who

has formed no binding ties or commitments that would distract him from his defined goals. Within his limit-situation he steers with care, as Conrad would put it. His is a life of regularity, of openness, of steadiness, which the authorities, no less than his peers, esteem for its future possibilities.

In his "Author's Note," Conrad speaks of Razumov with sympathy: "He is an ordinary young man, with a healthy capacity for work and sane ambitions." But, as Conrad also goes on to declare, Razumov is, like many Russians, both the oppressors and the oppressed, a victim "of the normality of their place, and time, and race." "The sanguinary futility of the crimes and the sacrifices seething in that amorphous mass envelops and crushes him." As Conrad also emphasizes, this process of destruction is fueled by that most curious of alliances, autocracy and revolutionism, and the terrors which that alliance unleashes. The chord of sympathy which one hears in this novel, and which gives it its quality of feeling, is one which emerges from what Conrad decried as the social-political nullity that he probes in these revealing sentences of his "Author's Note," which crystallize Conrad's prophetic estimation of the pitfalls of a warped ideology that demean the human spirit:

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.

From the beginning to the end of the novel, Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov mirrors the state of isolation and its inescapable affliction. His parentage was not clearly known, and it was said that he

was the illegitimate son of a distinguished nobleman, Prince K—, who was also his protector. His deep sense of being alone in the world, fated to fend for himself, to endure and, if possible, to succeed in the world, at all costs, makes him all the more apprehensive. He realized that to be implicated in any revolutionary activity "meant simply sinking into the lowest social depths amongst the hopeless and the destitute—the night birds of the city." These thoughts attack the very center of Razumov's being, reinforcing his sense of isolation and defenselessness.

The presence of Haldin locked up in his rooms drives him into fury, and he is obsessed with "the desperate desire to get rid of his presence which drove him forward." When he finds that Ziemianitch is not at the low eating-house, he is dumbfounded. The owner of the den volunteers to take Razumov to a nearby building,— "through a small doorway into a long cavernous place like a neglected subterranean byre." And here he discovers the prone body of Ziemianitch, in a drunken stupor, unable to be awakened even when kicked by the eating-house keeper. The sight of "the man of horses," who alone could save Haldin and in turn Razumov himself, is alarming: "A terrible fury—the blind rage of self-preservation—possessed Razumov." He is so infuriated that he seizes the handle of a stablefork and strikes the prostrate body before him: "Razumov belaboured Ziemianitch with insatiable fury, in great volleys of sounding thwacks."

For Razumov, both Ziemianitch and Haldin signify entrapment: "Between the two he was done for. Between the drunkenness of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things, and the true character of men." His thoughts return incessantly to Haldin, "the guest he had in his rooms," and whom he likens to "a pestilential disease that would not perhaps take your life, but

would take from you all that made life worth living....” He even considers killing Haldin when he gets home, but he knows that such action would solve nothing. Infinitely shaken, he sees himself as a condemned man with “no exit”: “He had not even a moral refuge—the refuge of confidence.”

Clearly Razumov is an honorable man now face-to-face with a dishonorable world. A man of reason, as his name signifies, he comes more and more to reject everything Haldin represents. “Haldin means disruption,” he tells himself, as he walks slowly on “the soft carpet of snow” of “his native soil,” and as he envisions “a passive land with its lives of countless people like Ziemianitch and its handful of agitators like this Haldin—murdering foolishly.” “If I must suffer,” he tells himself, “let me at least suffer for my convictions, not for a crime my reason—my cool superior reason—rejects.” Conrad renders this scene in which Razumov holds a discourse with himself, step by step, and with dramatic intensity. Razumov is obsessed with Haldin, what he is, what he has done, what he portends. And though he does not want his death, he sees Haldin as one who cannot possibly be saved. It is too late. Here his rational faculty speaks to Razumov directly, unsentimentally, and without illusions: “If I must perish through him, let me at least not perish with him, and associated against my will with his sombre folly that understands nothing either of men or things.”

During this entire episode Razumov appears as a man in deep moral concentration, fully aware of the severe consequences of his decision: “*I shall give him up.*” That this decision denotes an act of betrayal does not trouble Razumov since he also believes “that there must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience.” And now, following agonizing personal discourse, he gets into a sledge and orders the driver to take him

to Prince K., who receives him in his study; after the passage of a half hour, they are both on their way to the house of General T., to whom Razumov, with loathing, utters the name: “Victor Victorovitch Haldin.” Razumov then returns to his rooms. The scene here is dark and eerie as Razumov lights a match to find Haldin still lying flat on his back in the bed. “Razumov thought suddenly, ‘I have walked over his chest.’” And to Haldin he says, in a muffled voice, “It’s done.” That is to say, he has made arrangements with the authorities for Haldin’s escape. The betrayal scene is bathed in somber colors, with intermittent ironies of silence, echoing doom, when, at three minutes to the midnight hour, one condemned man chooses to condemn another man to death. Haldin departs, quietly and portentously: “There was a faint rustling in the outer room, the feeble click of a bolt drawn back lightly. He was gone—almost as noiseless as a vision.”

The act of betrayal has a rending inner effect as feelings of agitation besiege Razumov and heighten the torments of his isolation: “Several times that night he woke up shivering from a dream of walking through drifts of snow in Russia where he was completely alone....” On the day following his act of betrayal Razumov learns from another student of Haldin’s arrest. And an official letter he receives commands him to present himself promptly at the General Secretariat, where he is to meet with Gregory Matvieitch Mikulin,—chief of a department who happens to have a more humane aspect, as indicated when he first receives Razumov: “The mild gaze rested on him...almost without passion. In its passionless persistence there was something resembling sympathy.” Razumov learns directly from Councillor Mikulin that Haldin was hanged at four o’clock that same afternoon.

The meeting of the two men is painted in a calm, almost detached manner, the

entire scene evoked with a sense of fatality: "The silence and immobility of Councillor Mikulin impressed him [Razumov]. The bearded bureaucrat sat at his post, mysteriously self-possessed like an idol with dim, unreadable eyes." Mikulin and, no doubt, the authorities rightly perceive the magnitude of Razumov's plight: they know that he has nowhere to go, that, in fact, his fate, too, is sealed. They know that they have him in their pocket, so to speak. Mikulin is simply allowing Razumov to speak his thoughts without restraint or any threat of punishment, knowing that Razumov's betrayal of Haldin makes him a marked man for the rest of his life. When Razumov cries out that he has "the right to be done with that man, Haldin," that he can resolve everything by choosing "To retire—simply to retire," the "seated bureaucrat" calmly and softly asks, "Where to?" Part First ends with these ominous words.

By now, too, we are made aware of Razumov's moral predicament, no less than his moral isolation, condemned as he is by both "the lawlessness of autocracy" and "the lawlessness of revolution." What is made unmistakably clear by the end of this first movement of the novel is that Razumov's private world is now in shambles. Haldin, as Razumov declares to Mikulin, exemplifies "Visionaries [who] 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."

And the beneficent world, too, that Razumov envisioned, we are reminded, is unattainable. This beneficent world he was to summarize in a piece of paper on which he wrote five lines, one under the other: "History not Theory./ Patriotism not Internationalism./ Evolution not Revolution./ Direction not Destruction./ Unity not Disruption." Razumov wrote these words ("a sort of political confession of faith") following Haldin's departure from

his lodgings; and he was to stab the paper with a penknife to the wall at the head of the bed. The police found this paper when they searched Razumov's rooms.

II

Haldin's mother and sister, Nathalie, lived in Geneva, where they eventually expected Haldin to join them, and then go to Italy together. It is here that the Haldin women, as Russian émigrés, learn of his capture, judgment, and execution. Conrad's portrayal of their grief is unalleviating. The fate of Haldin has powerful consequences, as Nathalie indicates: "What have we to look for in the future? For what hope and what consolation?" In this novel, as in his others, Conrad once again underlines an existential concern with the future—"an idea without a future," "waiting without faith," "waiting without hope," as he has variously written elsewhere. And in this novel, too, he counts up for the reader what Robert Penn Warren speaks of as "the cost of awareness." And the costs, for the mother and her daughter, as for Razumov, are severe. Mrs. Haldin slowly wastes away, unable to cope with the death of her son. "Death," Conrad writes, "is a remorseless spoliator." The aged mother is simply unable to accept the report of Victor's death—"to abandon him quietly to the dumb unknown."

The novel's narrator, an Englishman and a teacher of foreign languages who lives in Geneva, expresses Conrad's own feelings about revolution and about political upheaval in general. Far from being a "reactionary," Conrad's assessment of the makers and results of revolution is a caustic one of political reality and adroitness. In a "real revolution," he emphasizes, which is "not a simple dynastic change or a mere reform of institutions," the best people do not always come to the front. To be sure, the more noble human natures may begin a revolution-

ary movement, which then too often passes away from them and falls into the hands of fanatics and shams. Noble natures are not, Conrad declares, "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 revolution."

Geneva is now the scene of Razumov's activities as a secret agent for the Russian government. Betrayal is Razumov's albatross, it is what attacks and possesses his conscience, and what shapes and seals his fate. In contact with Razumov, the reader, no less than the Haldins, the omniscient narrator, and the Russian revolutionaries themselves, is in contact with the metaphysical dimension of betrayal, which brings to mind Gabriel Marcel's observation that "we live in a world where betrayal is possible at every moment, and in every form: betrayal of all by all and of each by himself." For Razumov the act of betrayal is also his tragedy. The novel recreates the stringent moral ramifications of Razumov's tragedy, which actually goes beyond the political and ideological elements. It is the moral life that is on trial here. Razumov's thoughts and activities are detailed through the narrator's use of Razumov's journal, or diary, containing dated entries in a narrative form, covering months of time and extending over dozens of pages. The reader in effect takes part in Razumov's intense experience with empathy and even with growing, if also fitful, moral discernment, which is Conrad's overarching concern in this novel. The political and historical specificities, including Conrad's own detestation of things Russian, are in the end absorbed and transfigured by Conrad's commitment to establishing the "moral complexion," the "moral character" of the novel.

It is Conrad's principal aim in this

novel to register suffering and guilt in relation to moral crime, as well as to present, in profoundly dramatic terms, the moral aspect of the confusion that conduces disorder, in both the outer world and the individual soul. The uneven structure of the novel that perturbs some readers and critics actually augments the moral confusion the novel seeks to dramatize. To be able to fathom the insidious forms of moral confusion, and all their consequences, constitutes still another major task of the novelist here. The difficulties of attaining this discernment, the obstacles and the impediments thrown in the way of discernment, are important, if not intrinsic, parts of the novel's structure. As Conrad himself was to note: "...even the most artful of writers will give himself (and his morality) away in about every third sentence."

In Geneva we meet Russian revolutionists whom Conrad portrays with astute insight and with unusual objectivity. Their illusions, romanticisms, sentimentalities, treacheries, shallowness, paradoxes are all on display here. Through them, in fact, we concentrate, sometimes exclusively, on Razumov, and penetrate his inner world. They act almost as a prism. If in *The Secret Agent* topography is employed to buttress character and to dramatize emotions and attitudes of mind, in *Under Western Eyes* a variety of men and women contribute to the delineation of Razumov's personality and problem. Place here is not pivotal in the total economy of the novel; it does not, for the most part, vivify or individuate human behavior and interrelationships. The Canton of Geneva hardly attains the tensive power of the London of *The Secret Agent*. Its bourgeois drabness excites neither Conrad nor his readers, and his reproduction of this Swiss city is routine and even somber in its details. The narration and dialogue, including internal dialogue, as well as encounters,

are what ultimately develop and specify the novel's story-line, and it is these elements that illuminate what happens to Razumov.

Both Razumov's moral crime and his moral isolation are amplified in his feeling "of immense moral and mental remoteness." His "bitterness of solitude" is so deep, so absorbing, that there is very little else in the outer world that can make an impression on him or cast some light on his suffering. He hears voices, sounds, but he does not really see things in their clarity. Sleeplessness and silences occupy his nights and days. He seems totally oblivious of the colors and vividness of existence, as he sinks deeper and deeper into the prison of his conscience, his anguish.

At the end of Part Second of the novel, in the course of Razumov's chance encounter with the narrator, in the public promenade of the Bastions, they are nearing a bridge in Geneva. The Englishman appeals to Razumov to find time to visit Mrs. Haldin and Nathalie. But Razumov remains silent and removed. "He turned away...and leaned over the parapet of the bridge...He hung well over the parapet, as if captivated by the smooth rush of the blue water under the arch." The destructive force of the current of the water under the bridge fascinates Razumov: "Its slightly undulating rush seemed capable of scouring out a channel for itself through solid granite... But had it flowed through Razumov's breast, it could not have washed away the accumulated bitterness the wreckage of his life had deposited there."

In Geneva, Razumov is secretly spying on the exiled Russian revolutionists for the Tsarist régime. The revolutionists themselves view him with admiration as an accomplice, or at least as a supporter, of Victor Haldin. Conrad portrays these revolutionists with critical disinterestedness, viewing some of them

as sincere or, at any rate, naïve, and others as fakes. The often-stated charge that *Under Western Eyes* is merely "a Russian story for Western ears," into which Conrad poured all his Polish "hatred" of Russia and the so-called "Russian soul," steadily diminishes in the reading of the novel. To charge, with one critic, that "evil is given a local habitation and a name in Russia," grossly oversimplifies *Under Western Eyes* by regionalizing its meaning, spatially and temporally. Conrad himself was aware of the charges against this novel and defended himself on a number of occasions by insisting that he was "concerned with nothing but ideas," and that his artistic purpose was "the development of a single mood."

In this novel, he maintained, "I have approached things human in a spirit of piety," and "by establishing a standard of judgment, [I have] set their [humankind's] idealism free to look for plainer ways, for higher feelings, for deeper purposes." In the end, *Under Western Eyes* supersedes the limitations imposed on it by restrictive political interpretations. St. Petersburg, epitomizing the Russian world, and Geneva, epitomizing the West, are both equally deficient in Conrad's eyes. He was profoundly attuned to ideological deformations whether in the East or in the West. Hence, one must approach this novel in more universal ways: betrayal, political autocracy, corruption, depravity are inclusive characteristics of human existence, and go beyond geography. The human paradox, no less than the political paradox, suffuses this novel, and Conrad illuminates this double paradox in moral contexts.

The final two parts of the novel disclose this inner process of self-understanding and self-cleansing. This process is also seen in terms of Razumov's contacts with the Haldin women and the revolutionaries who gather in and around the Château Borel, "this centre of revolu-

tionary plots, of this house of folly, of blindness, of villainy and crime." In discerning the character and the condition of these men and women Razumov reaches the point of self-discernment. That is to say, he finally confronts the nature and the consequences of his act of betrayal. These various figures are—become—embodiments of his *persona*, whether it is the hypocrisy and despotism of Peter Ivanovitch (the "burly feminist," "Russian Mazzini," and "arch-priest of Revolution"), or the sincerity and dedication of Tekla ("the *dame de compagnie*"), or the honest fanaticism of Sophia Antonovna. The process of his self-revelation emerges through his encounters with the revolutionists. He voluntarily confesses his crime, in the end, not only to Nathalie Haldin but also to the revolutionists, knowing as he does that "I am a match for them all." That is to say, he knows that the revolutionists trust him, value him for "uncommon strength of character." Razumov, thus, serves as an illusion for the revolutionists; in him they see the virtues of fortitude and determination that revolutionism requires if its work is to be done. If we learn here something of Razumov's mind and thought, we also learn something of the revolutionist mind in search of redeeming paradigms. The interactions between Razumov and the revolutionists help a reader to detect the human element that creates a certain solidarity.

For Razumov, Sophia Antonovna, the veteran "woman revolutionist," poses a challenge to his sense of self, and, indeed, his own self-preservation. Their chance encounter, as related in the third section of the third part of the novel, takes place at the Château Borel, by the gate. (The two had previously met in Zürich.) In her presence Razumov experiences feelings of vexation, even self-recrimination, as he responds, instinctively, to the intentness and gravity of her commitments to revolutionism.

Depth of discernment clearly marks this dedicated woman, who seems to understand so much, to see sympathetically into the human psyche, and to convey such a piercing integrity, that "he judged her...as being a distinct danger in his path." She has power to arrest his thought, to pierce his secret self, to challenge his will-power. In short, she is able to "read" him in ways that others could not: "What's the matter with you," she tells him, "is that you don't like us." A kind of verbal duel goes on between them as they strive to assess each other, each also recognizing in the other certain powers of character, pertinacity, insight that make them strong, friendly antagonists.

Sophia Antonovna's intuitive insights into his condition—"What are you flinging your very heart against? Or, perhaps, you are only playing a part."—unsettle him. Her specific inquiries, too, regarding some of his actions on the day of the Haldin affair further jar him. (It should be mentioned here that she is in possession of a "famous letter" from an informant containing "various minute details" regarding the fate of Haldin.) At one point, speaking of Haldin's death—"And what is death? At any rate, it is not a shameful thing like some kinds of life," she declares—her riveting words seem to stab into Razumov, who, understandably, "felt something stir in his breast, a sort of feeble and unpleasant tremor." Her words infiltrate his conscience, as he also strives to maintain his equilibrium as he fences with "the old revolutionary hand, the respected, trusted, and influential Sophia Antonovna.... Stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories, she was the true spirit of destructive revolution. Clearly she was the personal adversary he had to meet," who even gains Razumov's admiration and respect, raising "himself above the dangerous weaknesses of contempt or compassion," as he looks

at her white hair: and this mark of so many

uneasy years seemed nothing but a testimony to the invincible vigour of revolt. It threw out into astonishing relief the unwrinkled face, the brilliant blackglance, the upright compact figure, the simple, brisk self-possession of the mature personality—as though in her revolutionary pilgrimage she had discovered the secret, not of everlasting endurance.

In time, Razumov has the opportunity to meet other celebrated revolutionists passing through or living in Geneva: e.g., the corpulent Nikita, nicknamed Necatov, who was “supposed to have killed more gendarmes and police agents than any revolutionist living,” “the executioner of revolutionary verdicts”; the diminutive Julius Laspara, “this violent pamphleteer clamouring for revolutionary justice...confidant of conspirators, inditer of sanguinary menaces and manifestoes.” His meetings with the revolutionists prompt him to be cautious, not “to shrink...[which] would be worse than moral suicide.” Out of these meetings, too, emerges Razumov’s decision to write down his thoughts in a notebook, which he actually begins to do in an “unfrequented tiny crumb of earth,” an islet containing a couple of tall poplars and a few other trees which stood “grouped on the clean, dark gravel, and under them a few garden benches and a bronze effigy of Jean Jacques Rousseau.” The narrator, it should be recalled, was eventually to get possession of the notebook and to use it in relating Razumov’s life and fate.

Razumov’s meetings, thoughts, writings, and conduct are invariably connected to the moral consequences of his act of betrayal. He cannot escape or hide from “the Haldin mystery”—“everywhere Haldin: a moral spectre infinitely more effective than any visible apparition of the dead.” From Razumov’s diary, too, we learn of the relentless rhythm of his ordeal, from the point of his betrayal of Haldin to the point of his betrayal of

the revolutionists. This latter task, or mission, is entrusted to him by Councilor Mikulin: “It was to be a dangerous mission to Geneva for obtaining, at a critical moment, absolutely reliable information from a very accessible quarter of the inner revolutionary circle.” Razumov’s solitude of soul is also his schism of soul; both states of soul are tied to the moral anguish afflicting his whole being from the beginning of the Haldin affair. The novel tells the story of this moral anguish in all its gradations and ramifications. And from his own notebook, which he begins writing, “all alone with the bronze statue of Rousseau,” we learn important details of his “mission.” Self-knowledge is, of course, an important facet of his diary, as the reader enters the inner chambers of Razumov’s soul—and as the drama of Razumov’s life and fate—his moral complexity—unravels irrevocably.

III

Part Four of *Under Western Eyes* allows the reader both to see and to experience the full force and tension of Razumov’s moral condition. Commentators who concentrate merely on the Russian side of Conrad’s novel, and who respond merely to the foreignness, the grotesque incongruities and paradoxes of the Russian character and soul, as these go against Western rationality and sensibility, fail as a result to consider Conrad’s transcendent concern with the moral issues, if not the moral dilemma, that this novel engages. Moral warfare, as such, attains a universal character in Conrad’s work, and, in Razumov’s case, this warfare has ultimate consequences. The Westerner in Conrad’s narrator here, commanding as he does clarity and a rational sense, is representative of “terrible simplifiers” who define and mold “enlightened” Western society. Razumov in fact is a direct threat to a modern West that dares not grapple with perplexing

moral issues or truths, as these emerge from a process of moral struggle and suffering. The cruel depth of this suffering on Razumov's part is dramatically heightened in juxtaposition to the narrator's simplistic attitudes and words, accentuating his "European remoteness."

In the last part of the novel we observe Razumov's pain of conscience, which returns him (and the reader) to Haldin's impact on Razumov's life and fate. Even at the point when the latter visits and talks to Mrs. Haldin,—“There was in the immobility of that bloodless face the dreadful aloofness of suffering without remedy,”—with the purpose of explaining her son's actions and demise (as “the moral victim of autocracy”), the memory of Haldin does not diminish one jot in Razumov's thoughts: “It's myself whom I have given up to destruction.... He has induced me to do it. I can't shake him off.” On this same significant occasion, as he is about to leave the Haldin residence—“It was frankly a flight”—he comes upon Miss Haldin: “Her presence in the ante-room was as unforeseen as the apparition of her brother had been.” Razumov's love for her, however understated and even mysterious, cannot be averted: “He had such a strong sense of Nathalie Haldin's presence that to look at her he felt would be a relief. It was she who had been haunting him now.” The ante-room itself now becomes the “strange stage for an obscure drama”—the scene of Razumov's confession to Miss Haldin.

Nathalie haunts him no less than does Haldin himself. The moral pressure on him at this concluding point in the novel and in his life is unalleviating. What distinguishes him not only from the revolutionists but also from the authorities who have wedged themselves into his life is precisely his moral sense of what he is and what he has done, and where, above all, he is going. He is now confronting his moral future, and his moral *telos*, which is his unconsoling burden. That he can-

not help either mother or daughter in terms of giving them some final comfort in their grievous loss of a son and a brother, that in fact his role in Haldin's life and death brings into question the very “question of fitness,” are realities that he perceives as insuperable. It is clearly “too late” for Razumov to fulfill Nathalie's high expectations of him. “I have had the misfortune to be born clear-eyed,” he tells her. “And if you only knew what strange things I have seen! What amazing and unexpected apparitions!”

In Nathalie's presence, Razumov has discovered that he needed her—and she was “moved by the same feeling.” Here, clearly, appearance and reality collide, with irreversible consequences. The dramatic elements of this scene are heightened by words spoken by both of them: tense and intent, punctured by lonely silences and cruel ambiguities that mark the way to confession. “You speak obscurely,” she says to him. “It seems as if you were keeping back something from me.” Her words no doubt pierce Razumov and point the way, inevitably, to his confession to her as the real betrayer of her brother. If, too, he has discovered his love for Nathalie, he has simultaneously discovered his conscience, which speaks to him with an honesty equivalent to that of his love. To be sure, she is unable, perhaps even unwilling, “to see the truth struggling on his lips.”

Ultimately, Nathalie is the force that wrenches from Razumov the truth of his fateful involvement in Haldin's life. She insists on hearing the full “story” of his involvement, even as Razumov has been agonizing to relate it to her, fitfully, fatefully. His final words to her have far-reaching consequences:

“There is no more to tell!” He made a movement forward, and she actually put her hand on his shoulder to push him away; but her strength failed her, and he kept his ground, though trembling in every limb. “It ends here—on this very spot.”

He pressed a denunciatory finger to his breast with force, and became perfectly still.

Comprehending now the full import of what has been said, Nathalie staggers and is helped to a chair by the old professor of languages, who has been an incredulous witness to the entire episode, which is rendered with intense dramatic power.

The actions and gestures that Conrad renders at this point buttress the power of the words uttered by both Nathalie and Razumov during this momentous encounter. She suddenly springs up from the chair, and then totters, to be assisted by the old professor-friend into the drawing-room. A tragic pathos permeates, as the reader is witness to the consequences of Razumov's "atrocious confession":

Away from the lamp, in the deeper dusk of the distant end [of the drawing-room], the profile of Mrs. Haldin, her hands, her whole fingers had the stillness of a sombre painting. Miss Haldin stopped, and pointed mournfully at the tragic immobility of her mother, who seemed to watch a beloved head lying in her lap.

The Conrad we find in these two sentences is not just an artist of genius but also an iconographer of wondrous power and insight, the added visual details of which seem to accumulate in the memorable depiction of Razumov, still present in this scene, looking on, making no sound, "standing before the empty chair." His mysterious presence is captured by Conrad's narrator in these prescient words:

I stared at the broad line of his shoulders, his dark head, the amazing immobility of his limbs. At his feet the veil dropped by Miss Haldin looked intensely black in the white crudity of the light. He was gazing at it spell-bound. Next moment, stooping with an incredible, savage swiftness, he snatched it up and pressed it to his face

with both hands.

At this point, too, Razumov departs, slamming the outer door, as Nathalie, now sitting on the sofa, presents a sad witness to the cruel events that have transpired. The old professor, in silent horror, now looks down at her: "Her hands were lying lifelessly, palms upwards, on her lap." In a languid whisper, she voices sorrow too deep for tears: "It is impossible to be more unhappy.... It is impossible.... I feel my heart becoming like ice."

What follows in the last two sections (IV and V) of Part Four is an abeyant but desperate delineation of the fates of Razumov and the Haldin women. Here Geneva remains, for the most part, the locale which Conrad describes as "the serious-minded town of dreary hotels, tendering the same indifferent hospitality to tourists of all nations and to international conspirators of every shade." "Washed clean" by a heavy shower, Razumov has returned to his hotel room on the third floor, and here he commences immediately to write confessional passages in his notebook. In a "page and a half of incoherent writing" he addresses directly the reader regarding Nathalie's power over his imagination. It is through Nathalie, he writes, that Victor Haldin now haunts him; and it is she who was "appointed to undo the evil by making me betray myself back into truth and peace." And it is Nathalie to whom he first confesses his act of betrayal: "I felt that I must tell you that I had ended by loving you. And to tell you that I must first confess. Confess, go out—and perish." With the words, "No! I am independent—and therefore perdition is my lot," Razumov stopped writing.

He departs swiftly from his room and from the hotel to the street, "swept then by a fitful gust of wind," the darkness torn by a flash of lightning. He makes his way at midnight to the house of Julius

Laspara where, he has heard earlier, the revolutionists are gathering, and he is invited by one of Laspara's daughters to enter, she having recognized him at once. Here still another confession takes place, to the amazement of his audience, as he commences to exonerate Ziemianitch of the arrest of Victor Haldin, and then continues with the actual details of his betrayal of Haldin to the authorities. At this point the revolutionist Nikita, "famous slayer of gendarmes," confronts Razumov in a scene awash with anger, disbelief, hostility. For Razumov this confession has freed him from falsehood and remorse, as he retreats from the room and walks to the stairs, where Nikita and three other revolutionists pin him against the wall. Nikita, with "his enormous arm," thereupon gives him a tremendous blow on the side of his head over the ear; Razumov is now completely overpowered and made helpless. Nikita delivers another blow to Razumov's other ear, after which the other assailants fling him out into the street. Nikita had purposely burst the drums of Razumov's ears, silencing him forever.

The scene is one of stark horror as we view a deafened and helpless Razumov staggering down a long and empty street. Conrad's graphic description of this scene conveys its eerie violence: "The lightning waded and darted round him its silent flames, the water of the deluge fell, ran, leaped, drove—noiseless like the drift of mist." Razumov, bedraggled, soaked, wanders off unsteadily, we are told, in the morning, after stepping right in front of a tram-car and goes under. The pitiless details of Razumov's condition mount up, as if to accentuate the costs of the pain of conscience and his confession. Physical destruction and moral forlornness seem to combine, mercilessly; his features "seemed composed in meditation." "Silent men, moving unheard, lifted him up, laid him on the sidewalk, gesticulating and grimacing round him

their alarm, horror, and compassion." This tragic event, bathed in a spreading darkness of grief and suffering, returns us to Nathalie's eloquent, prayerful words spoken earlier to Razumov (in the third section)—words that, in fact, underscore Conrad's vision of the human predicament and of the human fate at the nethermost edge of grace: "Revolutionist and reactionary, victim and executioner, betrayer and betrayed, they shall all be pitied together when the light breaks on our black sky at last."

In the fifth and concluding section we learn of the fates not only of Razumov but also of the Haldin women. A muffled, pensive feeling pervades these pages of *Under Western Eyes*. Bleakness exists here, but so does compassion—and even hope. We learn of Mrs. Haldin's death, who "seemed to die from the shock of an ultimate disappointment borne in silence." Clearly Razumov, who had visited and spoken to Mrs. Haldin, had not gained her confidence: "She had not believed him"—though we are never told what exactly was said during their meeting. As for Nathalie, she now discloses a certain resignation and tranquillity and appears to the narrator, who sees her for the last time, to have transcended her hitherto "defenceless" situation. She looks forward, as she informs the old teacher of languages, to a new day when all discord is silenced; she is, according to her friend, "wedded to an invincible belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a heavenly flower from the soil of men's earth, soaked in blood, torn by struggles, watered with tears." Finally, too, we learn of Razumov, nursed by the "good Tekla," formerly the lady companion to the Egira of Peter Ivanovitch who "had found work to do after her own heart," after she had seen a fleeing and deafened Razumov in the grounds of the Château Borel, where he had rushed for some unexplained reason, just before his crippling accident. After a slow recov-

ery, he was discharged from the hospital, but would be a "hopeless cripple all his life," to be looked after by "Tekla the Samaritan." The information concerning both Nathalie and Razumov was completed two years after the cruel happenings, when the narrator was accidentally to meet Sophia Antonovna in Geneva; she had just returned from a secret excursion into Russia, where she had chanced to see both Miss Haldin and Razumov.

Nathalie now worked tirelessly in the center of Russia in a town, compassionately sharing her labors between overcrowded jails and bereaved homes. Razumov, Sophia Antonovna reports, lived in the south of Russia in a little wooden house of two rooms, tended faithfully by Tekla. His condition, we are told, was deteriorating, as we also learn that other revolutionists go to visit him when passing through: "He is intelligent. He has ideas....He talks well, too," according to Sophia. To her, too, Razumov relates in minute details what transpired in the Laspara house. Sophia Antonovna's judgment of Razumov, as she expresses it to the teacher of languages, is not only forgiving, but also humane and wise. Her judgment undoubtedly reflects Conrad's moral sensitivity and insight; it also underlines his moral measure, which, as Conrad himself reminds us, is closely tied to the "earnest meditation" that is the ground of his imaginative vision. Sophia Antonovna's words illumine Razumov's character and fate:

"There are evil moments in every life. A false suggestion enters one's brain, and then fear is born—fear of oneself, fear for oneself....but tell me, how many of them would deliver themselves up deliberately to perdition...rather than go on living, secretly debased in their own eyes? How many?...And please mark this—he was safe when he did it. It was just when he believed himself safe and more—ininitely more—when the possibility of being loved

by that admirable girl first dawned upon him, that he discovered that his bitterest railings, the worst wickedness, the devil work of his hate and pride, could never cover up the ignominy of the existence before him. There's character in such a discovery."

Under Western Eyes portrays the process of moral discovery in the face of confusion, scoundrelism, anarchism. Razumov himself is finally able to distinguish the law of measure as it governs, or should govern, both human existence and individual character and fate. His confessions give us the measure of his character; they reveal a growing inner perception in sight or moral discovery. This, no doubt, is what Sophia Antonovna has in mind in her judgment of Razumov: "There's character in such a discovery," to recall here again her remark. Razumov, of course, has to pay the price for such a discovery at the hands of the vicious Nikita, who turns out to be a traitor himself, a spy—"the perfect flower of the terroristic wilderness," as Conrad writes in his "Author's Note." The people in this novel are all caught in the intricate web of the disorder of history: tyranny, intrigue, murder, revolution. "The most terrifying reflection (I am speaking now for myself)," Conrad further writes in his note, "is that all these people are not the product of the exceptional but of the general—of the normality of their place, and time, and race." Razumov is the victim of an historical process that ensnares him: "The sanguinary futility of the crimes and the sacrifices seething in that amorphous mass envelops and crushes him."

During his journey of moral discovery Razumov also finds his soul, which talks to him, prods him, heals and redeems him. If Razumov does not triumph over history, he does transcend its mundaneness after his mighty ordeal and effort. His experience, hence, is not exclusively one of salvation or of reconciliation, but instead one of self-purgation and self-

discernment. For Razumov this is a penitential struggle that mobilizes an inherent capacity for moral growth and cleansing.

The Secret Agent portrays the death of the soul; it is a novel in which a rhythm of disintegration affects all levels of human meaning and action. In *Under Western Eyes* ratification of the soul is achieved by a rhythm of ascent. Conrad approached this novel with the same "scru-

pulous impartiality" that shaped his major fiction. His task thus entailed the added burden of vision that he explicitly identifies in this statement in his "Author's Note": "I had never been called before to a greater effort of detachment: detachment from all passions, prejudices and even from personal memories." A careful study of *Under Western Eyes* will confirm that, in this effort, Conrad obtained triumph.

First Frost

Ceres, the dark mother, returns to her underground abode.

There is owlhoot in the pines now, blackbirds'
Complaint; cicadas and katydids
By night: "a stridulation of crickets."
Crows announce the dawn; the cardinal's whistle
Now is gone or call of mourning dove.
The green caravans are moving out of town.

The river here is boisterous and broad,
A young horse that's given his own head
As it races by beneath the wooden bridge.
The dirt road is a patchwork quilt of leaves,
A counterpane in amber, gold and red,
As it winds along beside the foxy wood,

To open on a field of goldenrod.
Headhigh canes here sleepwalk in the wind,
The veterans left too long on campaign.
Milkweed pods depend on rigid stems,
Like semaphores to long departed trains
On a spur of track that weeds have overcome.

The pensioners are idling in the sun,
Awaiting one last fling of revelry
When stingy pods unclench a hoard of seed
And fling them forth in little chutes of down
Wherever wind or earth will have them now.
Who's to say if spring comes back again
And young birds sing? Forget the past,
We've had our say. Broadcast! Broadcast!

Jack Flavin