Chapter VI

SALVO-TARTAR BYZANTINE BARBARISM
Having finished The Secret Agent in 1907, Conrad began to work on Chance, but left it unfinished to work on a short story. Entitled 'Razumov', this story was to be "a contribution to and reading of the Russian character ... the very essence of things Russian, not the mere outward manners and customs but the Russian feeling and thought...."¹ In the same letter to Eric Pinker, his publisher, written on Jan. 7, 1908, he maintains that the subject had long haunted him and that nothing of this sort had so far been attempted in English. In his letter to Galsworthy the previous day, he lays out the theme more elaborately. He gives the whole scheme of the plot and says: "I think that I am trying to capture the very soul of things Russian --

¹G. Jean Aubry, Life and Letters II, p.64.
cosas de Russia. It is not an easy work but it may be rather good when it is done..." Of course, the original plot was drastically altered in the last part of the novel, and quite reasonably. It was too melodramatic to be considered as a serious work of art.

In some sense, Under Western Eyes may be regarded as a watershed in Conrad's literary career. It is the culmination of Conrad's mature thinking on a number of issues—cultural, political and metaphysical—that occupied him deeply through his life. The very phrase 'cosas de Russia' reminds us of Costaguana. Nostromo and Under Western Eyes are related to each other inasmuch as in both the novels Conrad explores the complexities of national characters and how they determine the fate of a nation. Both Costaguana and Russia are unusually large canvases, peopled with an extraordinary range of characters who play out the drama of fidelity and betrayal, allegiance and non-conformism. In both the cases, Conrad's diagnosis of the political and cultural ailments proved prophetic. The relation between The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes is much deeper. The latter is a continuation and an improvement upon the theme of the former. Under Western Eyes further explores the theme of anarchism and nihilism and their terrible and futile consequences. These were first taken up in

\[^2\text{G. Jean Aubry, Life and Letters II, p.63.}\]
The Secret Agent and given greater depth and complexity in Under Western Eyes. There are also thematic and structural similarities between Under Western Eyes and Lord Jim. Both the narratives are chronicles of guilt and atonement, of moral isolation and integration. In both the stories, an average man commits a fundamental act of betrayal and spends the rest of his life to redeem it. "The Secret Sharer," though outwardly a typical Conradian story about the sea, is also linked with Under Western Eyes, not only in its preoccupation with fidelity and betrayal but in its essence.

For an appropriate assessment of the cultural and political dimensions, Under Western Eyes must be read in conjunction with some of Conrad's non-fictional and autobiographical writings. Particularly important are the essays -- "Autocracy and War" and "Crime of Partition" contained in the book, Notes on Life and Letters. Written in 1905, "Autocracy and War" contains Conrad's comprehensive denunciation of the 'moral corruption' that had overwhelmed Russia, an oppressed society where "the noblest aspirations of humanity, the desire of freedom, an ardent patriotism, the love of justice, the sense of pity, and even the fidelity of simple minds are prostituted to the lusts of hate and fear, the inseparable companion

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of an uneasy despotism."\textsuperscript{4} Ostensibly a reflection on the progress of the Russo-Japanese war, in the essay Conrad makes a dispassionate survey of revolutions in different parts of the globe. He is extremely wary of mass movements that lead to mass hysteria; nevertheless, he acquiesces that revolutions are sometimes permissible in certain forms. He also believes that there are essential differences between the circumstances elsewhere in Europe and those in Russia:

The revolutions of European states have never been in the nature of absolute protests en masse against the monarchical principle; they were the uprisings of the people against the oppressive degeneration of legality. But there never has been any legality in Russia, she is a negation of that as of everything else that has its roots in reason or conscience.\textsuperscript{5}

He goes on to say that for any revolution to become really successful, it must be preceded by adequate intellectual groundwork. Unless the people are sufficiently prepared, no real benefit can accrue from revolution. For Conrad, the autocratic regime of Russia under the Tsars is not amenable to healthy change or evolution: "For the autocracy of holy Russia, the only possible self-reform is suicide."\textsuperscript{6}

Inspite of his strong denunciations of the autocracy

\textsuperscript{5}Notes on Life and Letters, p.101.
\textsuperscript{6}Ibid.
in Russia, Conrad did not think of a people's revolt with any enthusiasm. He knew that the only alternative left to the people of Russia is revolution; nevertheless, for him it was 'a word of dread as much as of hope'. This ambivalence is maintained throughout the four parts of the novel. By the very nature of his genius, Conrad was incapable of seeing things in terms of crude generalisations. Hallowed by no tradition of popular governments and corrupt in its values, Russia is seen as having a past incapable of evolving new relevances:

The same relentless fate holds in its grip the all-powerful ruler and his helpless people... the princes of Russia who in their heart of hearts had come in time to regard themselves as superior to every monarch of Europe, have never risen to be chiefs of a nation. Their authority has never been sanctioned by popular tradition, by ideas of intelligent loyalty, of devotion, of political necessity, of simple expediency, or even by the power of the sword. In whatever form of upheaval Autocratic Russia is to find her end, it can never be a revolution fruitful of moral consequence to mankind. It cannot be anything else but a rising of slaves.  

In the light of the above views held by Conrad, it was a very difficult task for him to write a novel on Russia. The very name of the land evoked memories that were acutely painful. "The obligation of absolute fairness was imposed on me hereditarily, by the peculiar

7Notes on Life and Letters, p.102.
experience of race and family....", says Conrad in the 'Author's Note' and the readers acquainted with Conrad's childhood may well realise how bitter those experiences were. From the account of the way he grappled with the narrative, it is evident that it was an ordeal for him to depict the characters and the scenes of the novel objectively, without giving way to his deep-seated rancour. Whatever objectivity he could achieve, was, at the cost of great mental tension which is evidenced by his total collapse when he finished the novel. Through every means — rewriting of the manuscripts and deletion in them, he tried to divest the book of all imputable personal prejudices and maintain a sense of impartiality and generosity of opinion. The 'Author's Note' makes it clear: "My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality." That Conrad deleted the name of Poland and even all references to it from the original manuscript testifies to his desire to make the story not a personal diatribe against Russia but a universal parable of the political and cultural emasculation of a people fated to live under the curse of an autocratic rule. He was concerned to recreate "not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia" and that lifts

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8 'Author's Note', Under Western Eyes, p.50.  
9 Ibid.  
10 Ibid.
the narrative from the strait-jacket of topicality and makes it a universal statement on the human situation.

Razumov is the symbol of isolation and suffering that was typical in the Tsarist atmosphere of pre-revolutionary Russia. He leads a lonely and withdrawn life. A man born without any political or family ties, Razumov is, as the author says, as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea. He wants to end his alienation and integrate himself to society by carving out a respectable career for himself. He is an ordinary young man with a healthy capacity for work and sane ambition and conceives for himself a linear kind of development. By dint of sheer hard work, he wants to make a 'solid beginning' that would end his anonymity and pave the way for him to become 'a celebrated old Professor, decorated, possibly a privy councillor':

... a celebrated Professor was a somebody. Distinction would convert the label Razumov into an honoured name... A man's real life is that accorded to him in the thoughts of other men by reason of respect or natural love. ¹¹

But Razumov's solitary existence is intruded upon by the uninvited confidence shown in him by Haldin, a fellow student and the assassin of the Minister-President. Razumov's orderly, routined existence is

¹¹ _Under Western Eyes_, p.63.
thwarted by this intrusion of the unexpected. He is intelligent enough to realise that his private world of non-commitment and ambition has crumbled down the moment Haldin entered his room. Haldin was like the inexorable fate: "Fatality enters your rooms while your landlady's back is turned; you come home and find it bearing a man's name... you cannot shake it off anymore. It will cling to you forever." Razumov's isolation from the discontent raging around him comes to an end. His conscious avoidance of involvement in the political struggle between reaction and revolution does not really save him. Rather, his cultivated neutrality and lack of ties mark him out, make him the obvious confidant for Haldin:

> It occurred to me that you -- you have no one belonging to you -- no ties, no one to suffer for it if this came out by some means. There have been enough Russian ruined homes as it is.\(^{12}\)

Both in the body of the text and the 'Author's Note', Conrad repeatedly emphasises Razumov's loneliness and isolation from any organic community: "The word Razumov was the mere label of a solitary individuality."\(^{14}\) He has guarded his solitariness so far by alienating himself from the political unrest and emotional tension

\(^{12}\) *Under Western Eyes*, p.63.
\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*., p.67.
\(^{14}\) *Ibid.*., p.61.
of the time and keeping "an instinctive hold on normal, practical, everyday life." He is guided primarily by the instincts of self-improvement and self-preservation. But into the fortress of his private world erupts absurdity in the form of Haldin. This absurdity is the claim of politics that impinges on the private life of each individual, however non-commital, in modern times. Henceforth any choice, in response to Haldin's confidence, is bound to be a political choice. And the choice is inescapable. In his conversation with Councillor Mikulin later in the narrative Razumov explicates the dilemma:

What is a sober man can do, I should like to know? To cut oneself entirely from one's kind is impossible.... But if a drunken man runs out of the grog shop, falls on your neck and kisses you on both cheeks because something about your appearance has taken his fancy, what then -- kindly tell me? You may break, perhaps, a cudgel on his back and yet not succeed in beating him off.

There are two mutually exclusive alternatives open to Razumov -- either to give Haldin up to the police or to help him escape and thus be implicated with him. Of course, he was fully aware of the consequences: "He was a Russian and for him to be implicated meant simply sinking into the lowest social depths among the hopeless.

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15 Under Western Eyes, p.60.
16 Ibid., p.128.
and the destitute, the nightbirds of the city.  

Razumov frantically debates the question in his mind and the whole debate is skilfully dramatised by Conrad in his trance-like journey to the 'vile den' of Ziemianitch. Though the ambiguity of his intention has been maintained so far, it is fairly clear that he wants to help Haldin out to escape. Otherwise he should have gone to the police first rather than to Ziemianitch. Nevertheless, his feelings at this stage are very tentative.

The 'gentleman' Razumov is revolted by the putrid atmosphere prevailing in the lowly eating house. He finds the people there stripped of their humanity. The company includes "a horrible, non-descript, shaggy being with a black face like the muzzle of a bear" and "a wet and bed-ragged creature, a sort of sexless and shivering scarecrow" washing glasses over a wooden tub. The place is like some underground asylum for rats: "The house was an enormous slum, a hive of human vermin, a monumental abode of misery towering on the verge of starvation and despair." This was Razumov's first contact with the 'people'. He is filled with disgust and nausea. For him, they are all 'brutes'. Razumov was told that Ziemianitch, 'the bright soul' of Haldin had

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17. Under Western Eyes, p.72.  
18. Ibid., p.74.  
19. Ibid., p.75.
got his skinful early in the afternoon and had gone away "with a bottle under each arm to keep it up amongst the horses." When Razumov finds him out, he is dead-drunk and cannot make him get up. The host sympathises with him and says, "who could bear life in our land without the bottle?" When his kicks to wake Ziemianitch do not produce any desirable result, Razumov is suddenly filled with frenzied fury and belabours the 'brute' mercilessly. Ziemianitch, after showing signs of life, fell snoring again. Razumov feels utterly hopeless. The narrator's comment is revealing:

Ziemianitch's passionate surrender to sorrow and consolation had baffled him. That was the people. A true Russian man. Razumov was glad he had beaten that brute, 'the bright soul' of the other. Here they were: the people and the enthusiast. 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.

Razumov is torn between the desires to do right by Haldin and to preserve himself. The encounter with Ziemianitch was psychologically unsettling. For a split moment he thinks that he would kill Haldin and settle the matter once for all. But the vision of the corpse hanging about his neck dissuades him immediately. The

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20 Under Western Eyes, p.74.
21 Ibid., p.75.
22 Ibid., p.77.
hallucinatory quality of the journey has been evoked by Conrad with deep psychological realism. Faced with the crisis, the 'naked terror' of his utter loneliness comes home to him. He even thinks of rushing back to Haldin, embracing him and his cause and thus creating "an incredible fellowship of the souls." Razumov's mental crisis is further aggravated by the absence of any 'moral refuge'. There is none who could share his feeling and understand his plight. He gets more and more desperate: "Razumov stamped his foot and received almost a physical impression of endless space and countless millions." Next he has an epiphany in which he experiences a mystical identification with the historical fact of Russian autocracy: "like other Russian before him, Razumov, in conflict with himself, felt the touch of grace upon his forehead."

Razumov thus moves slowly to the point of conversion. His mind passes judgement against Haldin. "Haldin means disruption", and his action inevitably point up towards chaos and instability. Razumov prefers the status quo to an era of chaos, uncertainty and helplessness: "Better that thousands should suffer than that a people should become a disintegrated mass, helpless like dust in the wind. Obscurantism is better than the

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23 Under Western Eyes, p.77.
24 Ibid., p.78.
25 Ibid., p.79.
light of incendiary torches." In this state of mind Razumov meets Haldin's ghost. He is horrified and as soon as the hallucination is over, he decides to give Haldin up as if to get rid of the real man as much as his ghost. From the moment he decides to give Haldin up, his mind becomes alert and active. He goes to the house of Prince K, the only person he is attached to, however remotely. In going to prince K, he aligns himself with the ruling conservative and reactionary forces. But the irony lies in the fact that his alignment with these forces does not restore his former independence. Rather he gets more implicated. Right from the moment Prince K brings him to General T, he is treated as a suspect and interrogated accordingly. Though his role in the arrest of Haldin is kept a closely guarded secret because of his proximity with Prince K, the police do not leave him alone. General T has discovered that Razumov has the quality of inspiring confidence in people. This quality, combined with the belief of Haldin's comrades that he is one of them, lends itself to substantial political exploitation and must be used to reap maximum political benefit.

It is evident that Conrad does not invest Razumov with any explicit political ideology. His betrayal of Haldin is the result of a chain of circumstances and

26Under Western Eyes, p.79.
psychological imperatives. However, it seems that through his readings, Razumov has made himself conver- sant with the liberal, historical tradition and democratic ideologies of the West and evolved for himself a system of belief that can be found in the following abbre-viated statements:

History not Theory
Patriotism not Internationalism
Evolution not Revolution
Direction not Destruction
Unity not Disruption

Razumov's allegiance to the values posited in the left hand column above places him squarely on the side of General T and the status quo of which the assassinated Minister-President and Prince K are external symbols. Yet one feels that the conservative ideals mentioned above are a later rationalisation after the act of betrayal when Razumov is stung by a gnawing conscience. In an illuminating essay on *Under Western Eyes*, Tony Tanner argues that the real cause of Razumov's betrayal springs from a deep emotional need of human attachment and social integration:

The father he had never really had repre-sents the harmony of the established order, that great place of status and security into which he aspires to be admitted. Haldin, on the other hand, stands for 'horrible discord' not only in Russia but in Razumov's precari-ously maintained routine existence. In suc-cumbing to the unspoken claim of his father

27 *Under Western Eyes*, p.104.
Razumov is following a profound emotional need. His subsequent conservative ideals are rationalisation.\textsuperscript{28}

This emotional need is also voiced by Razumov himself when he tells Haldin: "You are a son, a brother, a nephew to no end of people. I am just a man."\textsuperscript{29} All the same, his emotional needs are not satisfied. On the contrary, he is not only harassed by repeated official inquiries into his supposed complicity with Haldin, but is also deprived of peace of mind because of his own internal conflicts: "... everything abandoned him -- hope, courage, belief in himself, trust in men. His heart had, as it were, emptied itself. It was no use struggling on."

If he had a precarious existence before, he virtually reaches on 'rack' now.

Razumov's meeting with Councillor Mikulin are notable because of the frank discussion that took place between the two. Though Razumov constantly labours under the idea that he is being regarded as a police suspect, he puts forward his views with unusual vehemence. Now that he is embroiled into the schizophrenia of Russian political life, he shows the same tendencies. Proudly displaying himself before Mikulin as a 'thinker', Razumov swears by the name of sanity: "I did not hate him

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\textsuperscript{28}"Nightmare and Complacency: Razumov and the Western Eye", Critical Quarterly, IV, 3 (1962), p.200. \\
\textsuperscript{29}Under Western Eyes, p.100. \\
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., p.182.
\end{flushright}
because he had committed the crime of murder. I hated him simply because I am sane." But Mikulin does not have much faith in Razumov's sanity. He tells Razumov that though now he is fully independent, he will inevitably come back to them -- "Some of our greatest mind had to do that in the end." At the end of the 'comedy of persecution', Razumov expresses the earnest desire "to retire", to be left alone in peace. Mikulin finds no possibility of this. "An occurrence of that sort marks a man", he says. His inescapable question "where to?" rings with ominous forebodings. The inexorable quality of the political forces in Russia is epitomised in that tiny question. Razumov realises that he is permanently trapped.

The critical discussions on Under Western Eyes tend to bypass Haldin. No serious attempt has so far been made for a proper assessment of his character. Our impression of him is largely derived from Razumov's denunciations of him and the interest in him seems to consist chiefly in in the fact that he implicates Razumov. It should be pointed out that besides this unflattering portrait presented by Razumov, there is enough textual evidence to make the character stand on its own feet. Haldin's long conversation with Razumov before his arrest and the words put in the mouth of his mother and

\[^{31}\text{Under Western Eyes, p.127.}\]
\[^{32}\text{Ibid., p.283.}\]
\[^{33}\text{Ibid., p.128.}\]
sister in their conversation with the English Professor and Razumov go to build up a portrait which is comprehensive enough to deserve critical attention.

Haldin is drawn by Conrad as a man of 'lofty daring' and idealism. He endangers his own security and that of his family by plunging himself into revolutionary activities against the oppressors. He is not a theoretical or fancy revolutionary. He mixes closely with the poorest of the poor and the oppressed to empathise with them. To the destitutes of the 'vile den' he carries words of hope. Haldin's mother tells the narrator that he has a brilliant intellect, the most noble and unselfish nature and that he is the 'oracle' of his comrades. Before embarking on his mission of removing Mr. de P, he gives up his room and stops mixing with his comrades so that he does not implicate anyone. All this speaks of a mind capable of cool thinking and sound judgement. He makes it clear that he had no personal grudge against the Minister-President. He had to be removed because of his inhuman cruelty and ruthless extermination of all forces of revolution: "Three more years of his work would have put us fifty years back into bondage", he tells Razumov, "and look at all the lives wasted and all the souls lost in that time."

34Under Western Eyes, p.65.
Moved by the suffering of the people, he is compelled to do the 'weary Work' and feels totally drained out. He is horrified by his act; nevertheless, he thinks that he owed it to "the Russian soul that lives in all of us". Otherwise why, he asks Razumov, should he have done this, "reckless like a butcher -- in the middle of these innocent people -- scattering death -- I ... I wouldn't hurt a fly!" And sitting down, he wept for a long time.

Though Conrad had little sympathy with romantic idealists or revolutionary enthusiasts, he invests Haldin with human warmth, dignity and respect. He is drawn to seek the aid of Razumov because he had great regard for the latter's sober thinking and cool judgement and trustfulness. He appeals to Razumov in the name of a 'brother', an epithet designed to cut across Razumov's isolation and establish a bond of fellowship. Haldin's absolute sincerity of purpose and trust in Razumov is revealed unequivocally in the following lines:

> You suppose that I am a terrorist now -- a destructor of what is. But consider that the true destroyers are they who destroy the spirit of progress and truth, not the avengers who merely kill the bodies of the persecutors of human dignity. Men like me are necessary to make room for self-contained, thinking men like you.

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35 *Under Western Eyes*, p.70.
Further, Haldin is not moved by any partisan or selfish motive. If he wants to save his life, it is not for himself: "It is not my life I want to save but my power to do. I wouldn't live idle." Ironically, while Haldin is holding forth about his self-less dedication to the cause of the oppressed people, Razumov is preoccupied with the thought of saving his own skin.

When Razumov comes back supposedly after arranging for Ziemianitch's carriage, but really giving Haldin up to the police, he tries to nettle Haldin psychologically by openly denouncing his act of assassination:
"And what can you people do by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow? On this Immensity. On this Unhappy Immensity", cries Razumov, and for the first time Haldin realises that Razumov does not approve of his action. But his trust in Razumov does not erode: "You are a magnanimous soul, but my action is abhorrent to you", he tells Razumov and feels a pang of conscience for implicating him by taking refuge in his room. But as readers, we know that Haldin's trust in Razumov is not culpable but Razumov's betrayal is. Razumov does not turn Haldin away, nor does he undeceive him till the act of betrayal has become an accomplished fact.

The final compliment to Haldin comes from the narrator.

37 Under Western Eyes, p.68.
38 Ibid., p.100.
Inspite of his conservative distaste for revolution and revolutionaries in Russia, he is finally compelled to recognise that Haldin cannot be called a sinister conspirator; he was a 'pure enthusiast'.

Part One of *Under Western Eyes* concludes with Mikulin's unanswerable question. Part Two takes us back six months from the happenings of the first part. At the beginning of this part, Haldin's mother and sister are introduced to the readers by the English Professor of languages. Doubts have too often been expressed about the role of the English Professor as narrator, his so-called Western eyes through which events are seen and their significance interpreted. Several critics, notable among them C.B.Cox, find the Professor obtuse and unsatisfactory as a narrative intelligence:

Conrad's use of the English teacher as a narrator is a most unsatisfactory device.... His insistence on his lack of imagination appears ridiculous because he recounts the tale with compelling force. The pretence that he is simply recording his memories wears thin, and we may wonder where this supposedly smug and impotent onlooker found his grasp of language and astute powers of artistic selection.40

On the other hand, a host of others have found the narrator quite useful. The fact is that Conrad in

writing Under Western Eyes, was dealing with a subject very close to his heart and which evoked acutely painful and unpleasant memories. He had to take utmost precaution not to allow personal prejudices colour his judgement. It is in this light that the significance of the narrator is to be assessed. The English Professor as narrator was a convenient device to mute the strident personal resonances. It helped Conrad to put the narrative in a certain perspective. Conrad himself admits as much in the 'Author's Note'.

The novelist's intention becomes clear when we compare his controversial use of the narrator in Under Western Eyes with that of Marlow in Heart of Darkness or Lord Jim. Whereas Marlow is deeply interested in the fate of the protagonist and the world around him and has unshakable faith in work ethics, the language teacher is comparatively uninvolved and lacks dynamism. Fortified by an independent income and a conventional outlook, he leads an easy and uneventful life in Geneva. Marlow associates himself enthusiastically with the life and career of Jim and Kurtz and tries to help and understand them and is, to some extent, transformed by his unusual experiences; the language teacher is nonchalant and continually pretends incomprehension. Eventhough he is a sympathetic friend to Natalia and offers her some kind of emotional
support at the time of crisis, he takes a dislike to Razumov at the first sight (the aversion was mutual) and makes no effort to understand his plight. It is obvious that the function of the English narrator is not to interpret the significance of events but to present a particular point of view.

The narrator is baffled by the endemic cynicism displayed by most of the Russian characters and locates it in the political environment of Russia: "For that is the mark of Russian autocracy and Russian revolt. In its pride of numbers, in its strange pretensions of sanctity, and in the secret readiness to abase itself in suffering, the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism." The Russian official's disregard for truth and Natalia's lack of concern for intelligibility baffles him equally. The Russians' extraordinary love of words puzzles him. In the cases of both Haldin and Razumov, moments of crucial action are always accompanied by cynical gestures or mystical effusions. At one moment Razumov equates Russianness with cynicism: "We are Russians, that is children, that is sincere; that is -- cynical."

Conrad makes it clear that the cynicism discussed

41 Under Western Eyes, p. 123.
42 Ibid., p. 214.
above is a by-product of centuries of oppression that obliterated all hope for a better future. The oppressors and the oppressed alike are the victims of this inexorable historical fact. Both in this novel and the essays, Conrad has shown that civilised values of democracy and human rights have always been tainted in Russia. Individual Russians were not allowed to imbibe the democratic values that should be their birthright as a social being. Jacques Berthoud has explored this particular aspect and points out:

The interdependence of the individual and the community on which rationality depends presupposes one essential condition: that the individual should be free to commit himself to his community in the expectation that the community will respect the freedom without which obligation cannot exist.... Under Tsarist autocracy, however, obligation is replaced by coercion and the integrity of the community is destroyed.  

When the organic link between the individual and the community on the one hand and the people and the government on the other, is destroyed, the state and the people draw violently apart. The only possible weapon that remains in the hands of the state is coercion and for the individual the only recourse is either abject submission or violent revolt. Conrad's views were unequivocal on this: "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 ...." Haldin as much as Razumov on the one hand, and General T on the other, are the natural product of the same autocratic regime.

The members of the 'la petite Russie' in Geneva are also the product of this regime. They may be regarded as testcases indicating what peculiar transformation human beings are capable of when they are compelled to live under the yoke of ruthless autocracy. In Peter Ivanovitch, the Russian autocracy threw up a revolutionary of grotesque proportions. A megalomaniac fraud, he is conceived on a grand scale and treated with barely concealed irony and contempt. The life-story of this 'Russian Mazzini' is the stuff that modern day bestseller thrillers are made of. The account of his transformation from convict to revolutionary makes for a stirring tale of adventures that is extremely fascinating and that made him famous throughout Europe. Conrad invests him with savage physical features, a love for the bombast, and a vulgarly exhibitionist style of life that sharply undercut his image of

44'Author's Note', Under Western Eyes, p.51.
a sincere revolutionist. He has got his worthy com-
nion in Madame de S, an aristocratic lady of question-
able antecedents. "Once upon a time the intriguing
wife of a now dead and forgotten diplomat", she is the
ostentatious symbol of Ivanovitch's 'cult of the woman'.
His 'burly black-coated figure' with his shapeless ha-
iry face, his dark glasses and his bull neck can be
seen esconced in a big landau opposite 'that heavily
made-up, long-waisted, glassy-eyed' lady in a pose of
stunning ostentation. Their life-style is totally at
variance with their proclaimed commitment. Peter Iva-
rovitch's cult of feminism does not conceal his perver-
sion (There are suggestions of an obscene liaison bet-
ween him and Madame de S) and his will to power. His
inhuman exploitation of Tekla makes nonsense of his
professed principles. Chateau Borel, the citadel of
the revolutionists, is ruled over by Madame de S and
Peter Ivanovitch. The villa smacks of shady goings-on
and squalid plots and counterplots. A little uneasy
in the world of ideas, Peter Ivanovitch's motto is to
'spiritualise' them and make people fanatics because,
according to him, "Faith alone won't do." Like Luci-
fer, he tempts Natalia to his cult because he needs so-
meone to preach, instruct and guide. When Natalia,

45 Under Western Eyes, p.150.
46 Ibid., p.219.
in her conversation with Peter Ivanovitch expresses doubt as to the credentials of Madame de S, he quickly disarms her by his eloquent remark -- "She is the perpetual manifestation of a noble and peerless spirit." Eventually this 'noble spirit' turns out to be a vulgar occultist whom Peter Ivanovitch cultivates solely for the money she supplies.

However, unlike the hollow band of anarchists drawn under the wing of Verloc in The Secret Agent, the members of 'la petite Russie' in Geneva are invested with a certain complexity and depth. Peter Ivanovitch and Nikita ('The killer of the largest number of gendarmes') are extreme cases. Between these two extremes of the revolutionary spectrum, there are those like Tekla and Sophia Antonovna who do credit to the otherwise sinister set of nihilists. Along with Natalia, Tekla brings with her the qualities of compassion and service to the suffering humanity which give Under Western Eyes a unique dimension among the major novels of Conrad. As R.A. Gekoski points out: "Tekla and Natalia Haldin refuse to be defined by allegiance to any political creed. It is through his association with these two women that Razumov finally achieves redemption and escapes from his 'rack'." Tekla is a

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47 Under Western Eyes, p.154.
48 Ibid., p.198.
non-conformist to the core. She rejected the life of indignity and petty intrigue led by her father and employed herself like the Mother Teresa of our time, in bringing solace to the downtrodden and the destitute. Her life with the journeyman lithographer further opened her eyes to the inhuman oppression of the Tsarist regime. It is her intimate contact with suffering rather than any pretentious ideology that impels her to join hands with the forces that were supposedly trying to abolish tyranny and oppression. But after having worked for Peter Ivanovitch for several years, she has begun to abhor him. It must have been a cruel disappointment to her to discover what depths of cruelty and deceit this 'heroic fugitive' is capable of. In her talk with Natalia, Tekla makes a clean breast of everything, presumably to save the girl from the spell of Peter Ivanovitch. "Oh these geniuses!", she bursts out in scorn, and when Natalia asks if she is no longer a republican, she says meaningfully,- "After taking down Peter Ivanovitch from dictation for two years, it is difficult for me to be anything."

The best in Tekla comes out when she meets Razumov. With instinctive sympathy she is drawn to Razumov when his heart was being spilled over with bitterness, remorse and anguish. Peter Ivanovitch and

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50 *Under Western Eyes*, p.168.
Madame de S have brought her to such a pitiable state that she hungers for common human decency. She is moved when Razumov shows courtesy to her. Moreover, she is drawn to him because of his supposed strength to deal with monsters of oppression: "You kill the monsters! You have done a great deed." She has suffered and suppressed her feelings for such a long time that she can hardly restrain the violence of her speech: "Great men are horrible!" Her passionate plea that all these people with names must be done away with speaks of the bitterness accumulated in her mind.

Tekla asks Razumov to allow her to be with him whenever he is sick, in misery or distress. Razumov was surprised at the spectacle of her unquestioning devotion and dedication. He is drawn to her by her unabashed devotion to him and we find them slowly moving towards that 'domestic tradition' the absence of which Razumov deplored in his talk with Haldin. And when Razumov is truly rendered a cripple physically by the grotesque brutality of Nikita, Tekla immediately comes to his side and tends him unwearyingly "with the pure joy of unselfish devotion." True to her original instincts, she finds her salvation not in the world of revolutionary intrigue, but in the ideal of service to the suffering humanity.

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51 *Under Western Eyes*, p.237.
The other significant revolutionary in Geneva is Sophia Antonovna. Admirably drawn by Conrad, she is the finest portrait of a revolutionary in the whole gamut of Conrad's political portraits. In fact the monstrosity of the political set in Geneva is offset, to a certain extent, by the presence of this revolutionary woman. Her initiation into the world of revolution, like that if Tekla, is a result of her intimate contact with suffering. From the day she had opened her eyes to the world, she saw her father slog and toil at the service of his superior masters without any protection or a word of encouragement. Even the simple joys of life, 'the birthright of the humblest' were robbed from him by the injustice of a society that totally dehumanised him. Sophia Antonovna gives an account of the climactic moment in the following touching lines:

It was like a lurid light in which I stood, still almost a child, cursed not the misery that had been his lot, but the great social iniquity of the system resting on unrequited toil and unpitied suffering. From that moment I was a revolutionist.  

With astonishing perspicacity she analyses the quality of life in Russia. "You have either to rot or burn", she tells Razumov; she would burn rather than rot.

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54 Under Western Eyes, p.257.
55 Ibid., p.248.
Sophia Antonovna is a totally dedicated soul. She can think of no other life but one which is hallowed by an enduring sacrifice. "One is ashamed of being left", she refers to Haldin's death and then says heroically, - "And what is death? At any rate, it is not a shameful thing like some kinds of life!" She has a far deeper understanding of the revolutionary political process and the complexity of the situation in which they are enmeshed, than anyone else in the novel. She has moved beyond the stage of convenient generalisations and glittering platitudes. When Razumov seeks to characterise her as a 'materialist' and quotes Caba-nis at her, she dismisses him instantly by saying -- "My dear soul, I have outlived all that nonsense." Embittered against the general run of revolutionists, Razumov is humbled by the manifestation of her invincible spirit of revolt:

Razumov looked at her white hair; and this mark of so many uneasy years seemed nothing but a testimony to the invincible vigour of revolt... in her revolutionary pilgrimage she had discovered the secret, not of everlasting youth, but of everlasting endurance.

If Tekla and Natalia bring compassion to Razumov, Sophia Antonovna brings clear-eyed knowledge. She

56 Under Western Eyes, p.256.
57 Ibid., p.249.
58 Ibid., p.258.
sees revolutionists as human beings endowed with human failings. Her analysis of Razumov's temptation and 'fall' and her immediate recognition that, "There is character in such a discovery" betokens her readiness to understand and forgive and appreciate whatever is good in man. When the narrator meets her last in the novel, she is just back from another of her innumerable journeys through Russia, her revolutionary vigour, still intact. She has visited Razumov, as she often does, on her way. In her view, he has redeemed himself fully and now legitimately deserves the respect of all true revolutionists.

The discussion between Natalia and the English Professor invite scrutiny because they contain some of Conrad's mature cogitations on different aspect of revolution and revolutionists. Standing in the midst of widespread repression and unrest, and inspite of great personal loss, Natalia does not lose faith in the possibility of a hopeful future. She thinks that all conflicts will finally be resolved though the necessary price will have to be paid. The Professor warns her against the way revolutions are taken over by extremists, opportunists and charlatans. The enlightened may start a revolution but can never possibly guard against the prostitution of the noble cause by the intrusion of unwanted elements:

59 Under Wes. in Ives, 349.
The last thing I want to tell you is this: in a real revolution -- not a simple dynastic change or a mere reform of institutions ... 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 the leaders...⁶⁰

It seems that for once Conrad has decided to come out of his facade of the western eyes and speak in the unequivocal Conradian voice. The narrator's summation of the revolutionary processes is as relevant today as it was in the pre-revolutionary Russia.

Natalia's vision of the future is an all-inclusive one. She is more than aware that the contemporary history of Russia bristles with pain, suffering, anger and unrest. But she, with her 'clear-eyed simplicity' looks beyond that: "I must own that I shall never give up looking forward to the day when all discord shall be silenced." On the face of it, such idealism may sound naive and even sentimental, but such vigorous optimism was, perhaps, necessary to offset the bleak despair evoked by different characters and situations in the novel. Moreover, as Natalia elaborates on her dream of future concord and justice, we realise that she is

⁶⁰ Under Western Eyes, p.293.
⁶¹ Ibid., p.346.
not blind to the enormous losses in terms of human lives and intellectual potential that the revolution will exact. As for herself, she is ready to dedicate her present life "sharing her compassionate labours between the horrors of over-crowded jails, and the heart-rending misery of bereaved homes." Her faith rests ultimately on the great power of love, on the ideal of fidelity to certain values in which Conrad, for all his scepticism never stopped believing. Conrad seems to have outgrown some of his pervasive scepticism as he conjures up, through Natalia, a vision of the future essentially optimistic: "... an invincible belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a heavenly flower from the soil of men's earth, soaked in the blood, torn by struggles, watered with tears."  

However, the most significant function of Natalia in *Under Western Eyes* is to help Razumov towards his redemption. When we meet Razumov in Part Two, we see a strange, haunted figure overwhelmed by his sense of guilt. He is temperamentally unsuited for his assumed role of a double agent. He seems to be parched, suffocating and suffering terribly in his mind. His sense of guilt becomes more acute when he meets Natalia.

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\(^{62}\) *Under Western Eyes*, p.346.  
With absolute trustfulness and child-like dependence, she looks up to him for guidance. Ironically, she attributes Razumov's lack of warmth and communication to his depth of feeling. "I have told you my opinion that he is a man of deep feeling", she tells the narrator. She thinks that the death of Haldin must have affected Razumov deeply: "Their friendship must have been the brotherhood of souls." Her absolute faith in him intensifies his sense of guilt to an unprecedented level. She is like a mirror in which Razumov sees his ugly face. Hungering for trust and affection, Razumov comes across Natalia's "noble trustfulness... foreign to every meanness" and cannot but fall in love with her. But being what he is, to allow himself to deceive her will amount to 'stealing' her soul, committing a greater outrage than his betrayal of Haldin. Unable to fulfil any of his assumed roles, his life becomes a torment to him. Eventually he decides to throw away all disguises and confess. His love for her makes him give her up and betray himself. This is his first step towards redemption and reintegration.

*Under Western Eyes* continually dramatises the tension between the Slav and the Western cultures. The Western eyes behold with amazing incomprehension the

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64 *Under Western Eyes*, p.197.
65 Ibid.
drama that is being played out on the Russian soil and abroad in Geneva. The narrator frequently reiterates his belief that no Westerner can fathom the perverse mystery of Russian character:

This is a Russian story for Western ears, which as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty, of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe.66

Europe and Russia are conceived as two counterpoints in the novel. The enlightenment of the one puts in sharp focus the darkness of the other. Though Conrad's claim that Europe has totally silenced the irrational tendencies of cynicism and cruelty sounds gratuitous, particularly in the light of the pervasive nihilism in The Secret Agent, the point here is the absence of any affinity between the two cultures. Over the years, Europe has evolved a culture based on the democratic principles of liberty, human dignity and freedom. Russia is presented to us as a country that lacks any such tradition. It has nothing in the past to build on, nor its present holds out any hope for the future:

... Under the shadow of autocracy, nothing could grow. Russian autocracy succeeded to nothing; it had no historical past and it cannot hope for a historical future. It

66 Under Western Eyes, p. 75.
In his 1905 essay, "Autocracy and War" Conrad had already distinguished between the social and political processes in Europe and those in Russia. Russia had studiously shut herself against the 'ideological contamination' of Europe, and conducted herself in a way that refused to recognise that the world had come a long way from its medieval mores. This ideological difference between Europe and Russia increased so much that it became virtually unbridgeable: "A yawning chasm opens between East and West," says Conrad in the same essay. The Russians even in the first decades of the twentieth century were compelled to live under a kind of political tyranny that was unthought of in Europe. Conrad calls this remorseless political conditioning a 'bottomless abyss'-- an abyss that has "swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge, towards every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience." The words 'chasm' and 'abyss' signify the intensity of Conrad's aversion to Russia, for in Conrad's mind, these are the epithets-

67 Under Western Eyes, p.97.
68 Notes on Life and Letters, p.100.
69 Ibid.
reserved for ultimate tragic apprehension. The English narrator's seemingly trivial statement that "it is unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov's position" becomes resonant with meaning and highlights the enormity of the 'cultural divide' between Russia and Europe.

Here it will be appropriate to recall that Conrad thought himself to be a European in a broader sense and his culture that of Europe. He regarded Poland as a part of Western Europe, both ideologically and culturally. According to him, the Poles have no affinity with the Russians and are immune from the 'Slavo-Tatar-Byzantine barbarism' of the Russians. He reacted strongly on several occasions when his friend Edward Garnett and other reviewers and critics of his books used the epithet 'Slav' to identify him and complimented his penetration of the Slav mind. Any identification with Russia infuriated him and vehemently denied having anything to do with that land and its culture. It is in this context that the "Western eyes" seem to be much more Conrad's own than those of the English Professor of languages. He identified himself with the conservative tolerance and liberal cultural tradition of Europe so much so that Russia seemed to him

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70 Under Western Eyes, p.118.
a pre-historic land of ghosts and goblins, genii and tyrants. One may remember his hatred of Dostoevsky, and the reason for his hatred is illuminating:

"... I don't know what D(ostoevsky) stands for or reveals, but I do know that he is too Russian for me. It sounds to me like some fierce mouthings from pre-historic ages." In the novel Under Western Eyes, the narrator symbolises the puzzlement of the West at the primitiveness of Russian natures. The analytical mind of the narrator cannot fathom the half mystical utterances of either Haldin or Razumov. When faced with crisis, the Russians display an extra-ordinary love of words. Natalia Haldin, though generally very lucid, also displays her illogicality and lack of concern for intelligibility. Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S want to get away from facts by 'spiritualising' them. Indeed, one can find little logic or rational analysis in the whole of the Russian world in Under Western Eyes.

Under Western Eyes, the last of Conrad's major political novels is distinguished by a maturity and mellowness in Conrad's thinking on revolutionary politics, the cultural conditioning of Russia and other related issues, rarely to be found elsewhere. It has become a metaphor of the predicament of the modern man in oppressive political environments.