

PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY OLMOUC
FACULTY OF ARTS
Department of English and American Studies



Nikola Valášková

**Under Conrad's Eyes: Perception of Russia in the Works of Joseph
Conrad**

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným
dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne

Podpis

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Introduction

This thesis will examine how Russians and Russia itself are portrayed and depicted in the works of Joseph Conrad. For the thesis, I will focus on the following works: *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Under Western Eyes* (1911) and *The Secret Agent* (1907).

I intend to provide historical and social background. Conrad's Polish heritage and the understandable dislike of all things Russian culminated after his father's arrest and accusation of anti-Russian conspiracies. At that time, Conrad experienced the power of the Russian Empire for the first time. He never forgave. He was deeply impacted by his negative experience with the Russian Empire and by his understandable Polish dislike of Russian culture.

Furthermore, I am going to examine the Russian characters of the three books and I will try to explain what Conrad's perspective on them truly looked like. Although Conrad deals with Russian themes throughout all the three works, the most extensive example of Russia itself is provided in *Under Western Eyes*. Here, Conrad does not focus only on a single individual but provides a perspective on Russian society as a whole. He claims to express general truths as an answer to that time Russian political affairs related to imperialism. Thus, intended for Western readers, Conrad seems to rely on rather stereotypical images. In the preface to *Under Western Eyes*, Joseph Conrad shares his opinion on Russian nature: "the Russian temperament to the pressure of tyrannical lawlessness, which, in general human terms, could be reduced to the formula of senseless desperation provoked by senseless tyranny."¹ For him, the Russians are uncivilized brutes with a tyrannical temperament.

There can be no doubt that the negative experiences of his life influenced his works. However, it could be argued whether he interprets Russian relations accurately or whether he successfully creates a stereotype (or promotes an already existing one) which is later presented to Westerners in order to challenge their own perceptions of Russia. Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, in which he claims that stereotypes result from emotional attachment,² suggests that Conrad's feelings towards Russia were influenced by his father's beliefs and their unfortunate encounters with Russian power. Lippmann's further argument that: "We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most

¹ Joseph Conrad, preface to *Under Western Eyes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), xxxi.

² Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, 1922), 49. PDF e-book.

things before we experience them,”³ proves that Conrad might have intended to provide his very own image and perhaps persuade the unenlightened reader.

The work is divided into three chapters followed by a conclusion. Each of the chapters analyses Russian characters. The main focus is put on Conrad’s personal perception and his approach to the creation of Russian identities. Overall, the aim is to analyse the books and uncover his genuine relationship towards Russian people.

³ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 49.

I. Historical background

In this chapter, I draw heavily on *A Brief History of Russia*, by Michael Kort.⁴

At the time of the greatest glory of the Russian Empire, their territory expanded from the Pacific Ocean to Scandinavia and in total, covered eleven time zones. The Russian Federation, as is known today, is the largest country located on two continents. The Empire had been extending itself from 1721 to 1917. It is a part of Russian history, unique in various ways. History witnesses the establishment of a self-confident Russia.

Since the thirteenth century, Russia lagged behind. The changes that occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, were a result of the Russian attempt to surpass the development of Western Europe. The most significant distinction between the Grand Duchy of Moscow and the Soviet Empire was the progression of Russian identity towards the emperor (a tsar). Russian society formed itself into society, emphasizing the power, greatness, and glory of their country.

The Grand Duchy of Moscow was a principality from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century with its origin in Byzantium. Over the centuries, this region remained both historically and culturally isolated from Europe, even though several cultural parallels could be found. The Baltic states, eastern Ukraine and eastern Poland, that later became part of the Russian Empire, are the exceptions. It is generally known that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, also known as the Time of Troubles, the Grand Duchy of Moscow in terms of industrialization lagged behind well-developed Europe.

The seventeenth century was a period of the ascension of the first Romanov tsar, Tsar Michael. Earlier, the reign of altering monarchs was accompanied by disagreements amongst the monarch and Boyars. The Polish-Lithuanian Union (including Conrad's birthplace) took advantage of it. Poland and Russia were rivals. One of the biggest issues at that time represented the territory of present-day Belarus and Ukraine, where many religious confrontations took place.

The eighteenth century was a period of revolutions and sudden changes that concerned the claiming of the Russian throne. As Kort points out, it was a time during which five rulers shared the throne.⁵ Peter the Great, who acceded to the throne at the end of the seventeenth century, is considered as a monarch during whose reign, Russia expanded its borders towards the outside world. The consequence was that Russia has

⁴ Michael Kort, *A Brief History of Russia* (New York: Facts on File, 2008).

⁵ Kort, 60.

become a fundamental part of Europe's power structure. Traditional values tried to be preserved, but the economy and society were changing. The goal of Russian politics in the eighteenth century was the annexation of all Russian territories to the empire. Belarus and Ukraine were, however, still part of the Polish-Lithuanian Union and thus turned into an enemy. Over the years 1793 to 1795, Russia joined with Austria and Prussia for the partition of the Union's remaining territory. Therefore, one of Russia's competitors has been wiped from the map. Poland—that we know today—disappeared from the map for more than a century.

“The history of Poland in the nineteenth century was a series of disastrous attempts to regain national independence,”⁶ claims Jeffrey Meyers in *Joseph Conrad: A Biography*. After the Napoleonic wars in 1815, the Congress of Vienna created a sovereign Polish state—the Polish Kingdom. The population of the Kingdom was ethnically mainly Polish, and the majority were of the Roman Catholic denomination. Thus, the Kingdom began developing solid anti-Russian sentiments and later became the cradle of Polish nationalism. The emerging interest in nationalism was according to Harry Hearder's *Europe in the Nineteenth Century, 1830-1880* supported by literature: “The romantic movement in literature encouraged nationalism in Poland,... Adam Mickiewicz had become immensely popular with the young, through his patriotic poetry,...”⁷ The loss of freedom and subsequent nationalism ideologies resulted in two insurrections (1830-1831, 1863-1864) against Russia. The intention was to overthrow the tsarist supremacy and restore an independent Polish state. Both of the insurrections were crushed by Russians. As stated by Kort, after the defeat of the two uprisings: “Poland was officially incorporated into the Russian Empire and subject to systematic repression and policy of Russification.”⁸

During the reign of Nicholas I., the Polish Kingdom became an inseparable part of the Russian Empire and its sovereignty was limited. The participants of the uprisings were punished either by execution, imprisonment, exile to Siberia, confiscation of their properties or voluntarily emigrated. Polish people were exploited. Men were recruited into the Imperial Russian Army, most often sent to Siberia, the Caucasus or other remote parts of Asia, to serve for 25 years. The situation of landowners also deteriorated and their living conditions have approached the hostile conditions prevailing in the Russian

⁶ Jeffrey Meyers, *Joseph Conrad: A Biography* (London: Murray, 1991), 2.

⁷ Harry Hearder, *Europe in the Nineteenth Century, 1830-1880* (London: Longman, 1988), 326.

⁸ Kort, *A Brief History of Russia*, 92.

countryside. According to Andreas Kappeler's *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History*, what followed were cultural changes, which were known as the policy of the previously mentioned russification: "Russian policy towards Poland in the ensuing decades pursued the goal of solving the Polish question once and for all through repression and forced integration."⁹ As a result of Russian domination, the Russian language was established as the language of administration and education and the Polish złoty was replaced by the Russian ruble.

⁹ Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-Ethnic History* (Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 253.

II. Conrad's life

Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, who later changed his name to Joseph Conrad, was born on the 3 December 1857 at Berdyczów in modern Ukraine (sometimes regarded by the Poles as the "Stolen Lands") that was at that time part of the Russian Empire. He came from a relatively wealthy family that played a crucial role in the history of shaping the Polish nationalist movement.

His father, Apollo, was a rebellious poet who engaged himself in dangerous political activities. To pursue his nationalist interests, the family moved to Warsaw. There, their house became a place for illegal meetings for the purpose of supporting the Polish nationalism. In *Josef Conrad: A Life*, Zdzisław Najder highlights that: "Korzeniowski was before 1862 'the leading' Red activist."¹⁰ However, he did not take into consideration the safety of his family and soon, this illegal activity has been uncovered, the house invaded by Russian police and Apollo arrested. Later on, Apollo with his sick wife and a little son were exiled to Vologda, northern Russia; later to Chernikhov, northeast of Kyiv. Conrad's mother died from tuberculosis, so Conrad and Apollo moved to Cracow. To cope with his grief and loss, Apollo overwhelmed himself with an adequate amount of work, suffered from depressions and later on, died as well.

After the death of both of his parents, Conrad's conservative uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski raised him in Poland. It is possible that his uncle, who did not support Apollo's political involvement, influenced Conrad's future political views.

According to J. I. M. Stewart's *Eight Modern Writers*: "His education was inconsistent and at 16 years old his thoughts had turned to the one profession which would take him out of Poland."¹¹ Thus, he left for France to become a sailor. Owen Knowles in his attribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad* mentions that his fellow crew members nicknamed him 'Polish Joe'.¹² His stay in Marseilles was rather intense. He was involved in smuggling weapons and even tried to commit suicide. It was his uncle, who helped him to recover from the French misadventures. The fact that Tadeusz's influence on Conrad was beneficial is supported by James Walton's claim in his article *Conrad and The Secret Agent: The Genealogy of Mr. Vladimir* for *The Polish Review*: "Conrad after joining the British Merchant Service embraced the Bobrowskian values of

¹⁰ Zdzisław Najder and Halina Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Life* (New York: Camden House, 2007), 17.

¹¹ J. I. M. Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 184.

¹² Owen Knowles, "Conrad's Life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, ed. J.H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

restraint, duty, and fidelity as if they were his only protection against the powers of darkness.”¹³ Fully recovered from the suicide attempt, Conrad was ready to leave his reckless years behind. As a result, he ended up joining the British merchant marine, became a British citizen and sailed around the world.

Furthermore, Knowles works with the possible influences upon Conrad’s life and suggests that: “Polish, English and French influences upon him made up a genuinely tri-lingual and tri-cultural identity.”¹⁴ Bernard C. Meyer in *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography* suggests even two more identities of this complex figure of Conrad:

For in this single life it is possible to trace at least five separate and distinct lives, five lives which might well have belonged to five separate individuals: a Polish gentleman-student; a seafaring adventurer on French ships out of Marseilles; a British sailor who, by dint of his labours, attained the rank of Captain in the Merchant Navy; a Congo River boatman caught in the sordid history of Belgian cupidity; and a lyrical master of English prose.¹⁵

Having left Poland could be perceived by some as a gesture of weakness or a sign of betrayal of his legacy and manhood. However, he had to leave to avoid enlisting in the Russian army. Another factor for this departure could be the disgust he felt towards the memories connected to that country. Meyers, in fact, supports this possibility and claims that Conrad “decided to reject Apollo’s sacrificial legacy and to cut himself off the tragic past of his landlocked country.”¹⁶

According to Stewart, Conrad would declare to become a great writer.¹⁷ Thus, several decades later, he is regarded as one of the most outstanding English novelists. His prose was rich and his technical competence very well detailed. It was his father Apollo, who introduced him to the world of literature. Meyers declares Apollo’s influence upon Conrad and states that: “... the condemnation of the corrupting and cynical influence of Russia, ..., recurs powerfully in *Under Western Eyes*. Conrad certainly adopted his father’s scepticism and pessimism, ...”¹⁸ Undoubtedly, there has always been a tendency

¹³ James Walton, “Conrad and *The Secret Agent*: The Genealogy of Mr. Vladimir,” *The Polish Review* vol. 12, no. 3 (1967): 30, accessed January 30, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25776722>.

¹⁴ Knowles, “Conrad’s Life,” 3.

¹⁵ Bernard C. Meyer, *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 3.

¹⁶ Meyers, *Joseph Conrad: A Biography*, 29.

¹⁷ Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers*, 184.

¹⁸ Meyers, 8.

in a parent's life to educate and moralise their descendants. Apollo's influence on Conrad's literary output was somewhat pessimistic and Conrad, as a boy, produced politically focused pieces. According to Najder, Conrad began writing at an early age: "It appears Konrad, at eleven, also produced literary pieces charged with patriotic ideas. A friend of him from those days recalled that Konrad used to write "plays," usually on the subject of the insurgents fighting against the Muscovites..."¹⁹ This statement reinforces the belief that his character, that later imprinted into his works, was deeply impacted by the troubling events that happened during his childhood. As a result, his background and personal beliefs prevented him from the ability to possess a neutral attitude. He compared the tsarist state to the heart of darkness.

The significant information about Joseph Conrad is that he has not heard English until his 20s, and yet was capable of acquiring the language quite successfully. Conrad's long-time friend Ford Madox Ford describes his language competence in *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* as follows:

His voice was then unusually low, rather intimate and caressing... His accent was precisely, rather dusky, the accent of dark rather than fair races... he spoke English with great fluency and distinction, with correctitude in his syntax, his words absolutely exact as to meaning, but his accentuation so faulty that he was at time difficult to understand...²⁰

At his death in 1924 he was already recognized as an exceptional artist. Since his life was very rich, he benefited from it and based most of his works on his own experience. Some of his characters are even based on Conrad himself. He mastered to express the colourful adventures whether at the sea or in various exotic places. However, according to *Encyclopædia Britannica*, his skills and striking insight "masked his fascination with the individual when faced with nature's invariable unconcern, man's frequent malevolence, and his inner battles with good and evil."²¹ Like many other great authors, Conrad had difficulties with writing and sometimes was not capable of producing any lines for days. As already mentioned, almost all Conrad's works are based upon personal experience and his doubtful relation towards his past. He deals with Polonism–Polish

¹⁹ Najder and Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Life*, 33.

²⁰ Ford M. Ford, *Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), 35.

²¹ The Editors of *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "Joseph Conrad," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, accessed January 12, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joseph-Conrad>.

characteristics and sense of identity; sophisticated Englishness appears in his works and exile is a prominent theme. Joseph Conrad represents a great example of a European writer in the early phase of the development of the modern European novel.

If the background of his life was taken into consideration, there would not be any surprise about his hateful relationship towards Russia. The early origins of Conrad's negative perception arose from his father. Lippmann observes that the perception of stereotypes is common in the generations' transmissions.²² It seems that by being exposed to his father's attitudes, he became blinded by stereotyped thinking. This possibility is furthermore supported by Lippmann, who claims that: "... we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see... we pick out what our culture has already defined for us..."²³ According to Meyers, these ideas of Apollo imprinted into the writing of *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent*.²⁴

Russia has always been a powerful country evoking fear and aware of no boundaries. In Conrad's 1905 essay *Autocracy and War*, he provides his opinion on Russia and warns the West that Russia's autocratic politics will not change or suddenly develop into a peaceful one. Even though Russia was the source of misery for him, it influenced his imagination and created engaging stories. Nevertheless, he has a clear vision of Russia being the heart of darkness:

The truth is that Russia of our fathers, of our childhood, of our middle age—the testamentary Russia of Peter the Great, who imagined that all the nations were delivered into the hand of Tsardom—can do nothing. It can do nothing, because it does not exist. It has vanished forever at last, and as yet there is no new Russia to take place of that ill-omened creation, which, being a fantasy of a madman's brain, could be nothing but a figure out of a nightmare seated upon a monument of fear and oppression.²⁵

²² Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 51.

²³ Lippmann, 45.

²⁴ Meyers, *Joseph Conrad: A Biography*, 21.

²⁵ Joseph Conrad, "Autocracy and War," *The North American Review* vol. 181, no. 584 (1905): 39, accessed February 12, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/25105426.

What is peculiar is his relationship towards Russian people. It appears that he was familiar with Russian temperament and morality, which was shaped by the despotic anarchy to which people were exposed. In *Under Western Eyes*, his alter ego in the form of the teacher of languages, provides the reader with his personal view upon Russian society and the impossibility to understand it:

I suppose one must be a Russian to understand Russian simplicity, a terrible corroding simplicity in which mystic phrases clothe a naïve and hopeless cynicism. I think sometimes that the psychological secret of the profound difference of that people consist in this, that they detest life, the irremediable life of the earth as it is, whereas we westerners cherish it with perhaps an equal exaggeration of its sentimental value.²⁶

For example, according to Conrad: “The oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together...”²⁷ With this claim, he suggests that not only the authorities create an abused society. The fact that the “oppressor” is the state and the “oppressed” are the people is being refuted. This statement might be perceived as he declares himself to be an anti-Russian and thus, possess great anti-sympathies for them. Furthermore, he claims that: “... these people are not the product of the exceptional but of the general—of the normality of their place, and time, and race.”²⁸ This statement, on the contrary, shows Conrad’s sympathies for Russian people. He is aware of the conditions of their lives and how society treats them. The conditions are indicated in *Under Western Eyes*, where Russians are pictured as people who would envy simple lives of dogs in other countries: “No four-footed beast could stand the filth and wretchedness so many human beings were condemned to suffer from in Russia.”²⁹ Fundamentally, Conrad suggests that since these people were born to a country capable of such cruelty, they had to adapt. They became cynical and their cynicism became their innate trait.

To sum up, I believe that Conrad, influenced or not, provided his truthful and uncensored perspective on all things Russian. In addition, he claimed to be familiar with Russianness. He sees the dominance of the authorities as degenerated as the behaviour of ordinary people. According to him, everybody in Russia takes place of the oppressor and the oppressed at once. In this way, he expresses his anti-sympathies. On the contrary, he

²⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 104.

²⁷ Conrad, introduction to *Under Western Eyes*, xxxii.

²⁸ Conrad, xxxii.

²⁹ Conrad, 273.

suggested that the conditions of anarchic Russia have shaped its people. The inhuman conditions of their lives are explored in *Under Western Eyes*. Eventually, he concludes, that the people had to adapt.

III. Heart of Darkness

Conrad's masterpiece, novella *Heart of Darkness*, was completed in 1899 and first published in the same year as one of the three-part series in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. Reflecting Conrad's personal experience in the Congo, where he has undergone both mental and physical trauma that affected his health condition during his later life, it is said to be his most famous story. Stewart points out that: "The autobiographical basis of this in mature experience, a voyage up the Congo, undertaken in 1890, which appears to have had a profound effect upon his imagination and indeed his personality."³⁰ The story represents the progress of the post-trading in the African jungle and its negative effect on primitive societies, as well as on the mindset of civilized men. Despite the fact that the story deals with the effect of imperialism and the madness as its result, the goal of my analysis was to resolve the process of creating the Russian character.

Although the Russian sailor is not the main protagonist of the story, Conrad demonstrates his Russian prejudices through the character of Harlequin. Conrad's description of him in *Heart of Darkness*: "a beardless, boyish, very fair, no feature to speak of,"³¹ creates an image of someone who can be easily manipulated and has no voice. Overall, he is described rather positively and evokes the youthfulness he represents.

The character of Harlequin can be traced back to the Middle Ages. References can be found in German demonology, French folklore and Italian art. If we focus on Italian art, the character of Harlequin is often associated with Picasso. He not only used it as his alter ego, but more importantly created countless paintings. Picasso works with the character of tragic Harlequin and portrays him as an ancient chthonic god—as C. G. Jung in *Spirit in Man, Art and Literature* points out.³² The following Jung's statement: "Harlequin gives me the creeps—he is too reminiscent of that "motley fellow, like a buffoon",³³ suggests that Conrad may have drawn on similar historical data while creating the figure. Another influence upon this character could arise from Dante's *Inferno* that also deals with demons. Without any doubt, Harlequin is merely a symbol of death in Conrad's eyes.

³⁰ Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers*, 193.

³¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1989), 90.

³² C. G. Jung, "Spirit in Man, Art and Literature," in *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 15, eds. Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hull (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), 133. PDF e-book.

³³ Jung, 135.

Harlequin is conveniently introduced as a jester. When Marlow—the protagonist and possibly Conrad himself, encounters Harlequin for the first time, he describes him as someone wearing so-called “motley coat,” which is often associated with this character: “His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown Holland probably, but it was covered with patches all over, with bright patches, blue, red, and yellow, - patches on the back, patches on the front, patches on elbows, on knees.”³⁴ The colourful cloth could suggest Harlequin’s disoriented nature. His mental state is associated with the costume also in the contribution of Nidesh Lawtoo’s to *Conradiana*, who claims that Harlequin is “a character of the *commedia dell’arte* [the Italian comedy] whose patched costume matches the fragmentation of his psychic life.”³⁵ Additional description of his traits: “His face was like the autumn sky, overcast one moment and bright the next,”³⁶ supports the image of his emotionally unstable personality and the rapid shifts in his mood.

On the other hand, according to Mario L. D’Avanzo’s article *Conrad’s Motley as an Organizing Metaphor in the Heart of Darkness* in the *CLA Journal*, the description of his clothes serves as a projection of the European colonization in Africa and intensifies its indefensibility and absurdity.³⁷ D’Avanzo’s claim is dramatized with the revelation of Harlequin being a son of an arch-priest. This knowledge emphasizes the Russian capitalist sense of missionaries and the alienation of the African mind.

The Russian sailor had run away from school to go to sea in a Russian ship, just to run away again. Despite his background, he is given some kind of a naïve innocence. He became a free man, experienced hardships of life and still seems to sense a need for devotion to someone. Thus, for the sake of his existence, he devoted himself to Mr Kurtz. According to the protagonist, Harlequin devoted himself in an overly extreme way: “I did not envy him his devotion to Kurtz, though. It came to him, and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism.”³⁸ Moreover, Jan Verleun in his article *Marlow and the Harlequin* agrees, but suggests that the devotion might be unconscious, and observes that: “The Harlequin makes himself believe that Kurtz has opened up to him splendid vistas of moral

³⁴ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 90.

³⁵ Nidesh Lawtoo, “The Horror of Mimesis: “Enthusiastic Outbreak[s]” in *Heart of Darkness*,” *Conradiana* vol. 42, no. 1/2 (2010): 62, accessed February 20, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24635218.

³⁶ Conrad, 90.

³⁷ Mario L. D’Avanzo, “Conrad’s Motley as an Organizing Metaphor in the *Heart of Darkness*,” *CLA Journal* vol. 9 (1966): 289, accessed January 21, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/44328105.

³⁸ Conrad, 93-94.

inspiration...”³⁹ Nevertheless, the reader will notice that he is tough. He had wandered through the jungle alone for 2 years, cut off from the civilization and still managed to survive. Possibly, the journey itself could be blamed for forming such a character and bewildering his mind.

Not until the end is his pure personality questioned. When Kurtz is at the point of death and all he achieved in the Congo slowly falls apart, Harlequin quickly disappears. However, before he does so, he is not embarrassed to ask for cartridges and a pair of shoes. At this point, he reveals his true nature: “He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness.”⁴⁰ He always praised Kurtz, who was able to enlarge his mind and occupy his thoughts, but in the end, he leaves him to his destiny.

What, therefore, should we make of this Harlequin? It can be agreed that Conrad created a mysterious character that leaves the reader wondering. Even the protagonist cannot believe he had encountered such a character: “Sometimes I ask myself whether I had ever really seen him – whether it was possible to meet such a phenomenon!”⁴¹ An opinion that he should be interpreted only as a symbol prevails. The reader can notice the contraries that the author tried to highlight. Verleun mentions the different energies Harlequin evokes in the reader: “..., one must find the young Russian an extreme of youthful instability and ignorance, but at the same time an extreme epitome of the generous passions of the young.”⁴² Besides, Conrad uses the character of Kurtz as an example of civilized man, that is eventually consumed by the darkness. However, the Harlequin that represents the evil forces, survives and vanishes into the darkness as if he belonged there.

To conclude, it appears that Conrad created this character to emphasize the darkness that Russian naivety represents. With the means of his mysteriousness, he challenges the reader to doubt the existence of such an individual. Overall, the young Russian should remind the reader of a typical jester. Conrad cleverly uses Harlequin’s clothing to intensify the reader’s perception and association with mental instability. This is also supported by his moody personality. All in all, Harlequin represents a young

³⁹ Jan Verleun, “Marlow and the Harlequin,” *Conradiana* vol. 13, no. 3 (1981): 200, accessed February 22, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24634120.

⁴⁰ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 104.

⁴¹ Conrad, 104.

⁴² Verleun, “Marlow and the Harlequin,” 206.

Russian trying to look innocent, yet capable of betrayal. He escaped from one dark place just to end up in another. He, himself, is the symbol of the heart full of darkness.

IV. Under Western Eyes

Conrad's historical fiction novel *Under Western Eyes* was first published in 1911 and belongs to the most political novels of all his works. Once more, he draws on a historical event—the assassination of the Minister of the Interior Plehve, committed in 1904. For the first time, the reader is directly given the Russian characters and the setting of St. Petersburg, Russia. In this novel, Conrad criticizes the Russian absolutism and demonstrates its Tsarist autocracy. Simultaneously, he deals with the impossibility of an individual to possess enough power to make any difference. Jeremy Hawthorn in the introduction to *Under Western Eyes* also observes that: "... it is impossible for the individual to separate him or herself from society, ..." ⁴³ Moreover, as the cleverly used title suggests, it is a description of Russia from the western democratic point of view. Conrad created various characters, each representing a different trait. The characters in this story are typical Western stereotypes of Russians. In my analysis, I tried to focus on the most prominent characters.

i. Razumov

Conrad creates a character of Kyrilo Sidorovich Razumov—a young, lonely and isolated Russian student of the Saint Petersburg University. He is described as a person with bad luck whose peaceful life suddenly changes. His betrayal causes his devotion to the political police, who take advantage of him and send him to Geneva as a spy. The mental pressure he undergoes eventually leads to his confession and terrible brutality caused by the hands of his own people. There may be a personal link between Razumov and Conrad since they both underwent an existential crisis.

Razumov is an intellectual man without anything secret about his life. He is a man of good manners who believes in establishing a successful future through diligent work. In Marcus Wheeler's *Russia and Russians in the Works of Conrad* the meaning of Razumov's name is pointed out and the possibility of its derivation from a Russian word *разум*: "... derived from *razum*, "reason," it indicates that he is the embodiment of reason..." ⁴⁴ The meaning serves to Conrad as a source in illustrating Razumov's reasonable nature. Conrad tries to stress his mediocrity when presenting him as an

⁴³ Hawthorn, introduction to *Under Western Eyes*, viii.

⁴⁴ Marcus Wheeler, "Russia and Russians in the Works of Conrad," *Conradiana* vol. 12, no. 1 (1980): 29, accessed February 9, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24634046.

exemplary Russian, whose fate is determined by forces over which he has no control. He is a symbol of his country.

The reader discovers that he is nobody's child. Thus, without being able to associate himself with any legacy, he attributes his existence to Russia itself: "he is a Russian—or he is nothing."⁴⁵ The most crucial occurrence of Razumov's consciousness of his Russian heritage appears in his claim to Peter Ivanovitch: "But Russia can't disown me... I am it!"⁴⁶ This claim is also supported by Eloise K. Hay, who in *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study* agrees that: "... Razumov makes fully explicit an identification between himself and his nation..."⁴⁷ His orphanhood, emphasizes the fact that his success nor his life matter to no one. Moreover, the absence of family highlights Razumov's lack of purpose, direction and identity. Contrarily, as a trustworthy student of philosophy, he is looked upon to by his fellow students. According to Hay, Conrad provides him with such characteristics, that makes him trusted by both the revolutionaries and the police.⁴⁸

Furthermore, his existence is set in a chaotic period full of revolutions, corruptions and desires. Hay explores Conrad's setting:

Conrad figures the central dilemma and tragedy of Russian life, the life of people who for generations, and particularly in the present century, have naively worshipped the state (in the person of Tsar or "soviet") and to further this end, have methodically sought to destroy whatever threatened that holy authority.⁴⁹

It was a time of great, but radical and violent changes that affected many people. Millions lived in poverty, but whoever decided to speak against the system was arrested, tortured and in most cases died in prison. Conrad describes this period of Russian history as a one when "it was not always safe, for a student especially, to appear too much interested in certain kinds of whispers,"⁵⁰ and Razumov, as an educated man was conscious of the hardships of this time. Hence, he did not involve himself in any political matters.

⁴⁵ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, xxxi.

⁴⁶ Conrad, 209.

⁴⁷ Eloise K. Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 271.

⁴⁸ Hay, 293

⁴⁹ Hay, 290.

⁵⁰ Conrad, 10.

One evening, when Razumov returns to his room, his fellow student Victor Haldin waits for him. His sudden appearance represents the unstable life within the Russian autocracy. Victor, who has just committed an attack in which he assassinated the minister and, at the same time, a significant number of innocent human beings, seeks for a place to hide. He asks Razumov for assistance with escaping Russia. By these acts, he makes Razumov his accomplice. However, Razumov was the best choice and Haldin justifies it by the means of his existence. He uses the fact, that Razumov has no ties. Thus, no one would suspect him nor suffer if he was identified. Without no doubt, Haldin's appearance disrupts Razumov's conservative and withdrawn way of life.

Haldin is trying to appeal to Razumov and convince him about the good intentions of his actions. As a consequence, it confuses Razumov's existence. He imagines the painful future that might occur because as a Russian he had the "personal knowledge of the means by which a historical autocracy represses ideas, guards its power, and defends its existence."⁵¹ He was aware of the possible expulsion from the university, which would be a more subtle way of punishment. These hopes, that the authorities would provide a milder alternative, implies his naivety. The reader can observe the decision-making process. He is forced to choose between his fellow student and the autocracy. He considers both, committing suicide and the murder of Haldin.

His first decision to help Haldin escape escalates into frustration. The extensive indecision leads to the overall failure of making the best decision. As a result of the anger that had arisen in him since Haldin's appearance, Razumov beats the driver Ziemianitch. On his way back, Razumov is trapped in his thoughts. Even though he pictures Russia as inanimate, cold, full of abuses and corruption, it is still his native soil full of devoted hearts. With his newly charged knowledge and belief, he decides to betray and give up a man that presents a threat to his future. Even though he tries to produce the best solution, he realizes the police will have him in a viewfinder from now on. The Councillor Mikulin's appeal to Razumov about his independence and the claim that he is "free as air, but you shall end by coming back to us,"⁵² suggests the political power over ordinary citizens. Thus, in the end, he is forced to leave his dreams behind. Mikulin's "Where to?"⁵³ represents the imaginary transformation of Razumov from a student to a Russian spy.

⁵¹ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 25.

⁵² Conrad, 295.

⁵³ Conrad, 99.

The misfortune of this betrayal is that he is put into a position where he must act in a way he despises. As a traitor, spy, and a non-revolutionary, he is sent to Geneva—full of Russian emigrants and revolutionaries. Nevertheless, he is not familiar with his purpose there and as at the beginning of the novel, seems to lack direction once again. He assumes that he is safe, but safety is only an ephemeral concept. Indeed, he is safe from autocratic Russia and managed to get accepted between the revolutionaries. On the other hand, he is not safe from his thoughts and consciousness.

Razumov later finds out, that Ziemianitch—the only person who could expose his connection to Haldin, has hanged himself. Subsequently, Razumov could live without the fear of being exposed hanging upon him. However, because of his affection to Nathalie, and as a man of good character and values, he persuades himself to confess the betrayal to the revolutionaries in Geneva. After his confession, he is brutally beaten and deafened, later run over by a car. The long process of recovery excludes him from public life. The exclusion is intensified with the deafness. As the brute Nikita clarifies: “... He shall never be any use as a spy on any one. He won’t talk, because he will never hear anything in his life—not a thing! ...”⁵⁴ As a result, the ability to share knowledge through an intellectual conversation was not possible anymore. By the end, he concludes he has changed. He is not the person he considered himself to be anymore. He believed, that Haldin had stolen his security, hopes and truth. Finally, he comes to a definitive conclusion and declares Haldin’s death resulted in his own as well: “In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely.”⁵⁵

Although he is used by the government, it does not seem that he demands any revenge. In the end, the reader finds out that Razumov went back to his native country. After his injury, he moved to “a little two-roomed wooden house, in the suburb of some very small town,”⁵⁶ in the south of Russia. Razumov’s return can be perceived as a sign of relative freedom. He lost everything and is aware of it. On the other hand, after his confession, he truly became independent on both autocratic and revolutionary parties. He was not valuable and trustworthy to them anymore. Ultimately, he reaches his initial dream—to be respected within the society, yet not stand out a lot. He lives in a remote part of Russia, but people still come and admire him. Thus, returning to where it all began might be perceived as symbolic. Lastly, Hay delivers Conrad’s statement: “Razumov is a

⁵⁴ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 371.

⁵⁵ Conrad, 361.

⁵⁶ Conrad, 379.

human, but subjected as he is to autocratic despotism on one side and to revolutionary despair on the other, his tragedy is, according to Conrad, peculiarly Russian.”⁵⁷

All things considered; he is the representation of the tragedy of Russian life. The tragedy Conrad describes is the senseless worship of the authorities, by people blinded with fear. On one side, it appears that Russian authorities made him a free man. However, they only took advantage of his devotion and fear. He became kind of a man, he never wanted to be. I believe that through the character of Razumov, Conrad tried to evoke the feeling of compassion in the reader. He tried to demonstrate the impossibility of Russian reasonable individual to live in nor escape such an oppressive society. His fate suggests that the statement about the Russians and the oppression hanging upon them is very true. For Russians, the only place where to find peace is in a grave.

ii. Haldin

The revolutionary concept is examined by Conrad through the character of Victor Victorovitch Haldin—an idealistic, but honest revolutionary, who is described by the authorities as “restless” and “unsound.”⁵⁸ He does not believe in the modern civilization that is presented by the government. His stubborn belief that there is a Russian soul in all of us and that it has a mission represents the devoted revolutionary he is. He is willing to die because of the fanaticism and believes in the immortality of his soul: “They can kill my body, but they cannot exile my soul from this world.”⁵⁹

Haldin’s claim to Razumov that: “Men like me are necessary to make room for self-contained, thinking men like you,”⁶⁰ shows that he believes that the action he executed was necessary to create better conditions for those living in the oppressed society. He correctly believes that the only way how to restore order in Russia is through violence. Besides, Conrad himself in *Autocracy and War* confirms that: “For the Russian Autocracy the only conceivable self-reform is suicide.”⁶¹

Haldin is, of course, aware of the risk he puts on those around him. As Hay suggests: “... Haldin, has in a matter betrayed Razumov by coming to him.”⁶² Haldin’s decision to choose Razumov was precisely thought through. As mentioned earlier, it is justified by the absence of his family. Andrew Mozina’s article *An Outcast Twice*

⁵⁷ Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study*, 313.

⁵⁸ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 15.

⁵⁹ Conrad, 58.

⁶⁰ Conrad, 19.

⁶¹ Conrad, “Autocracy and War,” 46.

⁶² Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study*, 270.

Removed: Conrad, Razumov, and the Martyr as a Model in Under Western Eyes suggests, that Haldin's precautions in a form of moving his family to Geneva, in an ironic way mimic Conrad's father precautions that were not taken and the willingness to endanger his own family.⁶³ Furthermore, Haldin did not put much thought on Razumov's existence and his possible suffering. His latter realization that he made Razumov an accomplice against his will, is symbolized by Haldin's disappearance from the quarters.

Razumov later learns that Haldin refused to reply to every question the commission had asked him. Hay perceives this as an act of devotion and pictures Haldin as a sympathetic character: "Haldin's revolutionary ideal, and his ideal of human solidarity, remain pure through torture until his execution."⁶⁴

Conrad presents two perfect opposites—Haldin with a loyal family supporting him and thus clearly defined identity and home ground, in contrast to Razumov—searching for personal and national identity. Razumov does not consider himself a revolutionary. He is rather satisfied with a background that the historical development and current government had created for him. While, Haldin and other revolutionaries, believe in the progress and promote radical changes. Further, if Razumov was killed by the hands of the revolutionaries, it would have created an excellent duplicate of Haldin's execution by the Russian autocrats.

To conclude, the young student Haldin serves as an example of the result of living in such a society. He was not born as a revolutionist. He is simply a product of living in Russia. On one hand, his character was designed to be perceived sympathetically and as a brave one. On the other hand, the outcome of his longing for a change puts him into a position of a reckless fanatic.

⁶³ Andrew Mozina, "An Outcast Twice Removed: Conrad, Razumov, and the Martyr as a Model in *Under Western Eyes*," *Conradiana* vol. 30, no. 2 (1998): 126, accessed February 13, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24635316.

⁶⁴ Hay, 271.

iii. Peter Ivanovitch

Conrad creates a hypocritical character who considers himself a feminist, although his treatment of women suggests otherwise. Therefore, paradoxically, he is the antifeminist of this story. Very much alike as in the process of creating Vladimir in *The Secret Agent*, Walton observes some of Conrad's father traits projected into Ivanovitch as well and further claims that: "... in a sense, paternal figures toward whom Conrad's attitudes range from gentle irony to fierce contempt."⁶⁵

It appears that Conrad had based this character on real figures. Firstly, a revolutionary anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, alongside with the novelist L. N. Tolstoy. Ivanovitch's feminist views are most likely based on Dostoevsky. Hay explores the possibility of Ivanovitch's resemblance on these men: "As against Conrad's preoccupation with the ghost of Dostoevsky, his concern with Tolstoy is slight. His treatment of Tolstoy in the person of Peter Ivanovitch, reminds one more of Bakunin, ..."⁶⁶ Indeed, several similarities with Bakunin can be noticed. For example, the imprisonment in a fortress or his feminist views. Bakunin was a representative of so-called anarcha-feminism. He tried to suppress the male-dominated power structure, but as a result, he only benefited from his feminist views in the interest of anarchy. Hearder also describes him as a critic of the Nicholas' I. regime, which was reasonless and did not support individual freedom.⁶⁷ Moreover, David R. Smith in his article *Dostoevsky and Conrad for The Conradian* explains Conrad's intention to emphasize his dislike for all things Russian while drawing on the Russian authors: "... when it came to criticizing things Russian, he chose Russian writers as his target because, in his view, they were the most visible examples of how the autocracy had corrupted a people."⁶⁸

Peter Ivanovitch is an egoist and one of the leading figures of the revolutionary camp in Geneva. He is described as a typical bearded Russian without any trace of character in his face and regarded as "the greatest genius of the century."⁶⁹ His external persona is ridiculous. He declares himself to be a feminist, but the reader finds out, that he treats women very poorly. The most exploited person is warm-hearted Tekla. She describes the treatment as follows:

⁶⁵ Walton, "Conrad and *The Secret Agent*: The Genealogy of Mr. Vladimir," 31.

⁶⁶ Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study*, 283.

⁶⁷ Harry Hearder, *Europe in the Nineteenth Century, 1830-1880*, 333.

⁶⁸ David R. Smith, "Dostoevsky and Conrad," *The Conradian* vol. 15, no. 2 (1991): 1, accessed February 14, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/20873977.

⁶⁹ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 146.

... First of all, you have to sit perfectly motionless. The slightest movements you make puts to flight the ideas of Peter Ivanovitch. You hardly dare to breathe. And as to coughing—God forbid. Peter Ivanovitch changed the position of the table to the wall because at first I could not help raising my eyes to look out of the window,... That was not allowed. He said I stared so stupidly. I was likewise not permitted to look at him over my shoulder. Instantly Peter Ivanovitch stamped his foot, and would roar, ‘Look down on the paper!’ ... He said that my air of unintelligent expectation irritated him. These are his own words.⁷⁰

The events of his life might shape his personality and be the cause of his behaviour. Until the death of a girl he was supposed to marry, he led an utterly self-indulgent life. As a result of the tragic incident, he abandoned his existing life and engaged himself politically: “He was imprisoned in fortresses beaten within an inch of his life, and condemned to work in mines, with common criminals.”⁷¹

In conclusion, his anti-feminist behaviour and treatment of women represent him as a stereotyped Russian who enjoys the abuse of the opposite sex. The reader is provided with an insight into how Russian men treat women. The text, in general, leans towards a more negative perception of men: “... men alone are quite capable of every wickedness,”⁷² which is perfectly pictured by Ivanovitch as well as the other male characters.

iv. Nathalie Haldin

Overall, the women in *Under Western Eyes* are depicted as strong and morally dominant, while the men represent the weak part of the nation. Conrad creates an image of a physically strong Russian woman whose strength is crucial to surviving the hardships of their lives. The reader is provided with a story about an exemplary Russian woman who “had worked her way across half Russia and nearly the whole Siberia to be near him, ...”⁷³ This not only supports the picture of their unbelievable strength, but also the devotion to their partners. In addition, Russian women are obviously celebrated. It ought to be mentioned that the following passage comes from Peter Ivanovitch:

⁷⁰ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 147-148.

⁷¹ Conrad, 120.

⁷² Conrad, 151.

⁷³ Conrad, 121.

In Russia we have no classes to combat each other, one holding the power of wealth, and the other mighty with the strength of numbers. We have only an unclean bureaucracy in the face of a people as great and as incorruptible as the ocean. No, we have no classes. But we have the Russian woman. The admirable Russian woman! I receive most remarkable letters signed by women. So elevated in tone, so courageous, breathing such a noble ardour of service! The greatest part of our hopes rests on women.⁷⁴

The sister of Victor Haldin is pictured as a highly intelligent and attractive girl. She is a trustworthy, unselfish, with a sense of solidarity, yet the opinions and efforts she represents, are limited by her naivety: “Miss Haldin, so true, so honest, but so dangerously inexperienced! Her unconsciously lofty ignorance of the baser instincts of mankind left her disarmed before her own impulses.”⁷⁵ Even though she is in the Genevan exile, yet she cannot detach herself from her Russian life. The shadow of the Russian autocracy will lie upon her for life. When she and her mother does not hear from Victor for a few months, she assumes that something has happened. She is very well aware, that everything is possible in Russia.

Her character should serve as a stereotype of a Russian woman in this story. She is described as a tall woman with some masculine characteristics, such as her deep voice: “slightly harsh, but fascinating with its masculine and bird-like quality”⁷⁶ or “the grip of her strong, shapely hand.”⁷⁷ Despite those features, she is still attractive to the opposite sex: “... I became aware, how attractive physically her personality could be to a man capable of appreciating in a woman something else than the mere grace of femininity.”⁷⁸ Thus, when she is betrayed by her emotions, Conrad creates a comparison of the strong Russian female to the fragile European girl, more precisely French girl who is perceived as kind and tender: “She had behaved unworthily, like an emotional French girl.”⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 119.

⁷⁵ Conrad, 142-143.

⁷⁶ Conrad, 141.

⁷⁷ Conrad, 118.

⁷⁸ Conrad, 102.

⁷⁹ Conrad, 171.

v. Nikita

Another stereotype is provided with the character of Nikita, nicknamed Necator—a brutish revolutionary leader in Geneva. Considering the name origin once again, Conrad cleverly uses the Latin word *necātor*, meaning killer, to emphasize Nikita’s violent tendencies. His is a feared man and his reputation precedes him: “He was supposed to have killed more gendarmes and police agents than any revolutionist living. He had been entrusted with executions.”⁸⁰

His description is fully self-explanatory. He was a man with “big, livid cheeks, heavy paunch, bull neck, and enormous hands.”⁸¹ He is stereotyped into an example of a powerful Russian individual, with the exception that he does not possess political power, but a physical one. After Razumov’s confession, Nikita puts himself into the position of a person executing an act of revenge on behalf of the revolutionaries. The reader is shown the horrible terrorism he possesses. Instead of killing Razumov, he decides to brutally box his head, focusing primarily on the ears. He causes Razumov’s deafening, which is according to Nikita prevention from communicating with anyone ever again. The disgust the reader is supposed to feel from Nikita’s action should furthermore arise from the claim that he has “burst the drums of his ears for him... I know the trick. Ha! Ha! Ha!”⁸²

vi. Ziemianitch

Similar to the process of inventing the name of Razumov, Conrad was again inspired by the Russian language. In Debra Romanick’s contribution to *Conradiana*, she observes the source of the derivation from a Russian word *земля*: “...; Ziemianitch comes from *ziemia* meaning land, which, like the English word, can mean both country and dirt.”⁸³ Thus, the character of Ziemianitch represents a member of the lowest class—a peasant.

By this time, it is relatively obvious that Conrad tried to provide several characters, each presenting some typical Russian stereotype. Hence, the drunken driver Ziemianitch is no exception. Alcoholism has been a major issue in Russian history and is often used, not only in literature, while portraying Russian males. Therefore, Conrad incorporates the image of a drunk Russian man.

⁸⁰ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 266.

⁸¹ Conrad, 367.

⁸² Conrad, 371.

⁸³ Debra Romanick, “Victorious Wretch?; The Puzzle of Haldin’s name in *Under Western Eyes*,” *Conradiana* vol. 30, no. 1 (1998): 44, accessed February 15, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24634889.

vii. The Prince, the General & Councillor Mikulin

These men are the representation of the Russian autocracy. They are its servants. Alongside with Razumov, they all believe that Russia is the chosen nation of the world. This belief is supported by Hay: "... are all possessed by the dream of Russia's sacred mission among the nations of the world..."⁸⁴ They all hold high political functions, yet the autocratic system controls them. The claim: "Whenever two Russians come together, the shadow of autocracy is with them, ..." ⁸⁵ supports the idea, that not only the upper class but also the ordinary people are controlled by the autocracy.

The Prince K— represents the autocratic hierarchy and its moral values. Even though he is a powerful man, he has to cooperate with the authorities. He is an example of a Russian privileged man, who gained his power through collaboration with the regime. Furthermore, he is the real father of Razumov, but does not publicly admit his paternity. Razumov comes to him for advice and afterwards follows him to report Haldin. It is possible that through this character, Conrad shared his criticism of the Russian people blindly following the autocratic leader. However, in their defence, they had no choice.

Furthermore, the figures of the General and Councillor Mikulin, are both a flawless personification of Russian autocrats. They represent the tyranny and repression of society. The General is described as a cold-blooded "champion of autocracy,"⁸⁶ whose "smile had an air of jovial, careless cruelty."⁸⁷ The reader also learns that he does not identify himself with people seeking liberty and attempts to destroy every rebel. In contrast, Conrad creates the less tempered, but very clever, faithful and manipulative Mikulin, who "exercise a great influence over the methods rather than over the conduct of affairs."⁸⁸ They are both very powerful officials that suspect everyone.

⁸⁴ Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study*, 284.

⁸⁵ Conrad, *Under Western Eyes*, 107.

⁸⁶ Conrad, 70.

⁸⁷ Conrad, 44.

⁸⁸ Conrad, 305.

V. The Secret Agent

Conrad's episodic short story *Verloc* grew into a novel that was retitled as *The Secret Agent* and is considered the world's first political thriller. It was published in 1907 and is based on a real event that took place in 1894—an attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory. The novel reflects the early stage of anarchism and its destructive ambitions towards the social system. As Paul Theroux in the preface to *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* points out, Conrad not only shows his pessimistic view of the British society, but primarily depicts the devilish power of Russia: “But *The Secret Agent* is also a portrait of Russian wickedness, and that had a deeply personal resonance for Conrad, too. He had reason to regard the Russians as satanic.”⁸⁹ Thus, through the character of Vladimir, Conrad explores Russian negative qualities.

Here, Conrad creates a character of Mr Vladimir, the First Secretary of an unnamed embassy. Even though the author does not mention it directly, there is no doubt that this embassy is a Russian Embassy. The name *Vladimir* itself, which is a very common name of a Slavic, more specifically of a Russian origin, suggests his ancestry very precisely. As well as the Harlequin, Vladimir does not possess the role of the main protagonist. However, Vladimir is a cynical Russian diplomat whose personality is more complex than it appears on the outside.

Conrad again successfully creates a mysterious character. Vladimir, besides being an agent of the disliked Russian tyranny, is described as an entertaining man who is popular and whose presence is pleasant especially among women. By passing as a member of the upper class, he may compensate for his origin and wickedness. Walton suggests that Conrad displayed some of his father's features and talents into Vladimir: “he attracted women by his ugliness, his originality and his talents.”⁹⁰ The most notable characteristic is his chameleon-like capability of changing languages and accents. He speaks French perfectly, yet is able to shift into an “idiomatic English without the slightest trace of a foreign accent.”⁹¹ Undeniably, this is the perfect ability for an agent or a foreign spy.

This novel is based on both the face of violence and terror in a physical way, as well as in a mental way. When Mr Vladimir meets the protagonist, the reader is coldly shown his capacity for verbal abuse and persuasion. He humiliates and insults Verloc in

⁸⁹ Paul Theroux, preface to *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (London: Campbell, 1992), viii.

⁹⁰ Walton, “Conrad and *The Secret Agent*: The Genealogy of Mr. Vladimir,” 31.

⁹¹ Joseph Conrad and Paul Theroux, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (London: Campbell, 1992), 17.

order to break his mentality and push him into the bombing. Conrad gives us an exemplary Russian character that pulls the strings from the shadows. The fact that he was capable to convince the protagonist into the execution of the bomb attack, demonstrates his persuasive capacity and terrifying personality.

Vladimir is involved in extreme politics and terrorist acts. He despises England and its scope of individual liberty. He is propelled by the fact that the London police ignores the anarchist movement and refuses to intervene. His plan to bring Britain into line, by producing an outrage in the form of a bombing under the anarchists' name, should have an extensive impact on the public and change the British perception. Mark Hama contributes to *Conradiana* with his article *Time as Power: The Politics of Social Time in Conrad's The Secret Agent* and believes that if Verloc can carry out the orders, the British public will be forced to react and Vladimir will achieve his political aims.⁹²

According to Vladimir, people do not mind what artists have to say, so rather than attacking the National Gallery, he targets the Greenwich Observatory that he sees as a symbol of intellectual thinking. Mark Conroy is aware of Vladimir's intelligence and through his article *The Panoptical City: The Structure of Suspicion in The Secret Agent* presents his fear that the choice of the target might be too clever:

Astronomy, besides being an embodiment of the fetish of science, is also the most powerful symbol for the "benign and punctual vigilance" that should characterize the eye of God... It embodies—in fact, it operates—a desire for universal knowledge, for the most thorough appraisal of the time and space alike... No other branch of science crystallizes so well the abstract search for truth as astronomy; as Vladimir points out, "no material interests" are "openly at stake" (40) in the case of astronomy... It is the man-made equivalent of the eye of God... The eye of benign vigilance is still an instrument of social control,... The first meridian is a political function, if only because it brings unprecedented precision to a valuable political component: time.⁹³

Additionally, Hama works with a concept of the Observatory serving as a symbol of time and the British power, but argues that: "The bombing attack, then, should not be understood to symbolize an attack against Time and Space, ... but rather an attack against British international prestige and autonomy..."⁹⁴ He continues and claims that: "Vladimir

⁹² Mark Hama, "Time as Power: The Politics of Social Time in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*," *Conradiana* vol. 32, no. 2 (2000): 127-128, accessed February 3, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24634881.

⁹³ Mark Conroy, "The Panoptical City: The Structure of Suspicion in *The Secret Agent*," *Conradiana* vol. 15, no. 3 (1983): 205-206, accessed February 20, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/24634197.

⁹⁴ Hama, 126.

wants to send a message to the complacent British middle class ..., their ability to control the social time structure of Europe and the world beyond, is under attack.”⁹⁵ Therefore, the choice of the home of the world’s Prime Meridian and of the World Standard Time shows Vladimir’s extraordinary intelligence. As he suggests the importance of the place and that: “The whole civilized world has heard of Greenwich,”⁹⁶ supports the idea that he is aware of the enormous consequences and the upheaval it will cause.

In his final scene, he is confronted and defeated by a character of an Assistant Commissioner who is the personification of the English morality and law in general. He is astonished that the English police—whose incompetence he previously made fun of, managed to discover his involvement in the bombing. Vladimir, who at the beginning of the story demonstrated his absolute control over Verloc, is in the end overpowered by something greater. At this stage, we are shown the superiority of the government power, that substitutes Vladimir on his imaginary throne. Despite Vladimir’s effort to remain calm and serious, his anxiety is obvious. Hay works with the scene. She highlights Vladimir’s pleading: “... we ought to be good Europeans,” and makes a further comment that: “the Assistant Commissioner retorts with perhaps the only indelicate jest discoverable in Conrad: “Yes... Only you look at Europe from its other end.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, according to Conrad, the fear of higher authority was Vladimir’s inherited weakness: “Mr. Vladimir was racially, nationally, and individually afraid of the police.”⁹⁸ By this confrontation, he realizes that he has lost his power and that he cannot plan any similar act of terrorism again.

All in all, Vladimir is a sovereign individual whose art of persuasion is perfect. His cunning lies in his cleverness. The selection of the target and its possible outcome indicates his outstanding intelligence. Vladimir attacks with strong words and provokes fear yet is afraid to take any action by himself. As for a Russian, freedom means everything to him. Thus, at the end when confronted by the British police, he tries to come out of the situation as an innocent person. This behaviour might represent the imaginary Russian superiority and pride, as well as their overall fear of responsibility.

⁹⁵ Hama, “Time as Power: The Politics of Social Time in Conrad’s *The Secret Agent*,” 126.

⁹⁶ Conrad and Theroux, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*, 30.

⁹⁷ Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study*, 249.

⁹⁸ Conrad and Theroux, 204.

Conclusion

The first part of my thesis provided a picture of the historical background and the development of Russia. The main focus was put on the changes that Russia has faced over the centuries. I explored the origins of this country and their isolation from the outside world. Then, the focus shifted to the emerging power of this large country and the desire to establish the Russian Empire that posed a threat to its neighbours.

With the help of relevant historical events, I tried to explain how the hatred relations between Poland and Russia arose. The sinister actions of the Russian Imperium shaped the Polish perception of their oppressors and created a background for the emerge of Polish nationalism. I also referred to the creation of the Polish Kingdom.

Furthermore, I mentioned the insurrections initiated by Polish people, which resulted from the frustration of the freedom being taken away from them. It is worth mentioning, that in one of these insurrections, Conrad's grandfather was involved. Unfortunately, both were suppressed by the Russian army and as a result, the participants were punished.

The first chapter ended with an explanation of so-called russification and its impact. After the annexation, Poland has faced a critical cultural shift. Russia, blinded by the lust for power, tried to apply the forced integration. They tried to enforce their culture and language.

To understand Conrad's dislike for all things Russian, it was necessary to provide an overview of his life. I started with the early years of his life and examined his family. I put an emphasis on Conrad's father Apollo and his political activities, which brought misfortune to the family. Mainly because of him, the Korzeniowski family went through hell.

The adoption by his uncle Bobrowski and relocation followed. I concluded that it was his uncle who caused the shift from Apollo's radical views and shaped Conrad's later personality, values, and most importantly his own political views. The beginnings of Conrad's naval career were also mentioned. The turbulent events of this period of life influenced his mental health but also have given rise to an extraordinary writer.

The next part of chapter two was devoted to Conrad—the novelist. It appears that he became interested in the literature already in his childhood and it was his father's credit. The information about his English language competence was also mentioned and without no doubt, it is reflected in the linguistic style of his writing.

I decided to explore Conrad's relationship towards Russian people in this chapter as well. It cannot be argued that events that took place during his childhood alongside Apollo's pessimistic views shaped his perception of Russia. The influence of stereotyped thinking upon his works was also suggested. However, the pessimism towards Russia persisted and as the power of Russia grew stronger, so did Conrad's dark vision.

At the beginning of the third chapter, the first analysed novella—*Heart of Darkness*, was introduced. In this work, the influence of Conrad's personal experience can be noticed. It may seem, that the Russian possess an insignificant role in this work. Indeed, he is not the main protagonist of the story. However, he represents the symbol of youth and might represent Conrad himself during his early naval years. He should pose Conrad's Russian prejudices but is pictured rather positively. Overall, the most emphasized features are his naivety and manipulability.

One of the most interesting information about this character is the origin of his name. The name Harlequin appears in many cultures and not predominantly in a good sense. A few possible parallels were mentioned. There is a high probability that Conrad has indeed drew on some of the mentioned data. As a result, he succeeded in the creation of a mystical character.

The events of his life are mentioned next and the reader can notice the similarity between Harlequin and Conrad himself. Both of them became sailors just to escape their lives and obligations. However, Harlequin, unlike Conrad, felt the need to devote to someone. Thus, the extreme devotion to Kurtz has begun. It was suggested that this devotion might have been unconscious and what he had experienced was blamed for forming his personality and baffling his mind.

Until the end, his naivety and innocence prevail. Unfortunately, his wicked personality is revealed at the end. Even though he claimed that Kurtz has enlarged his mind and had an impact on him, he deserts him and vanishes into the jungle.

Chapter four is devoted to the most comprehensive work of this thesis, to the novel *Under Western Eyes*. Based on a real historical event, it is Conrad's most political creation. In this work, Conrad deals with the Russian autocracy and its impact upon Russian individuals. The powerlessness of their lives is also observed as one of the themes of this novel. As the title suggests, the novel portrays Conrad's critical perception of Russia. He puts himself in the position of a Westerner. The main intention of this work is to influence the reader's point of view and fuel their notions of the Russian nation and its people.

Conrad's central dilemma revolves around the young student Razumov, who is the main figure in this story. Razumov is described as the brightest soul among Russians. Conrad's innovative usage of names emphasizes Razumov's reasonable nature. He is a man of good manners, who dreams of balance in his life. Moreover, his character represents proof that even the most innocent person's life can be destroyed by the oppressive society. The fact that he is an orphan reinforces his desire to belong somewhere and later causes his devotion to Russian autocracy.

To support the analysis, several different stereotypes were mentioned. It cannot be doubted, that Conrad tried to provide and highlight almost every possible Western stereotype of Russian people. The male characters were presented quite negatively. The reader could have read about the egoistic feminist, who was not feminist in any way possible; the terrorist-like character capable of every physical harm; a drunkard peasant; but also, about the autocratic representatives who benefit from the cooperation with the regime. Although there are a few female characters, Conrad does not develop them fully. However, the women of *Under Western Eyes* are more dominant than the men.

In conclusion, Conrad did not only criticize the autocratic authorities and Russia itself but its people as well. He tries to create a contrast between the two parties. However, in the end, he finds out, that both the revolutionaries and the autocrats are equally vicious. In this novel, Conrad illustrates common and to the Western reader familiar images. The overall aim of *Under Western Eyes*, apparently, was not only to present Russian stereotypes but to help the reader to understand the behaviour of the characters and perhaps evoke some degree of compassion.

The final chapter and the last book which underwent my analysis is *The Secret Agent*. This story, which was not intended to become a novel at first, deals with the Russian wickedness and its diabolic power. Even though Conrad never mentions any hint (perhaps only in the form of the name Vladimir) which would indicate the connection with Russia, it is more than clear that the unnamed embassy and its First Secretary are Russian. Conrad demonstrates the Russian capability to adapt, become esteemed members of society and destroy it from within.

Finally, it appears, that Conrad, despite his background and ostensibly persistent aversion to autocratic Russia, did not manifest any hatred towards Russian people. Even though it seems that he tried to remain unbiased and create his personal and new types of Russian characters, he only promoted already established stereotypes and further contributed to the hostility between the West and Russia.

Resumé

Úvodní část mé práce poskytla náhled do historie a vzniku Ruského státu. Hlavní důraz byl kladen na změny, kterým Rusko čelilo v průběhu staletí. Zabývala jsem se původem země a její izolací od vnějšího světa. Poté se pozornost stočila k rozvíjející se moci této země a k její touze založit obávanou Ruskou říši.

S pomocí relevantních historických událostí jsem se pokusila o vysvětlení vzniku nenávislného vztahu mezi Polskem a Ruskem. Byly to zlověstné činy Ruského Impéria, které utvořily polské předsudky vůči jejich utlačitelům a podílely se na vzniku polského nacionalismu. Zmínila jsem se také o vzniku Polského království.

Dále jsem popsala povstání iniciována frustrovanými Poláky, kterým byla odepřena svoboda. Za zmínku stojí informace, že v jednom z těchto povstání byl zapojen i Conrádův dědeček. Obě povstání byla bohužel potlačena a jejich účastníci potrestáni.

První kapitolu jsem zakončila vysvětlením tzv. rusifikace a jejího dopadu na utlačované státy. Po anexi čelilo Polsko kritickým kulturním změnám. Rusko, zaslepené touhou po moci, se pokoušelo aplikovat nucenou integraci. Snažilo se prosadit vlastní kulturu a jazyk.

Aby byla Conrádova nechuť ke všemu ruskému lépe pochopena, bylo nutné poskytnout přehled jeho života. Začala jsem v dětských letech a zajímala se především o jeho rodinu. Důraz jsem kladla na otce Apolla a jeho politické aktivity, které rodině přinesly samá neštěstí. Hlavně díky němu si rodina Korzeniowskich prošla peklem.

Následovala adopce Conrádovým strýcem Bobrowskim a přestěhování. Došla jsem k závěru, že to byl především jeho strýc, který změnil Conrádovy radikální názory zděděné po otci. Zformoval Conrádovu osobnost, hodnoty, a jeho vlastní politické názory. Byly zmíněny také začátky Conrádovy námořnické kariéry. Bouřlivé události z tohoto období života ovlivnily jeho duševní zdraví a podnítily jeho spisovatelskou kariéru.

Další část druhé kapitoly se věnovala Conrádovi, spisovateli. Zdá se, že o literaturu se začal zajímat již v útlém věku, a to zásluhou jeho otce. Byla zmíněna i skutečnost o jeho jazykové kompetenci, která se bezpochyby odráží ve stylu psaní.

V této kapitole jsem se také rozhodla prozkoumat Conrádův vztah k Rusům. Události jeho dětství a Apollovy pesimistické názory bezpochyby utvořily Conrádovo vnímání Ruska. Byl také naznačen vliv stereotypního myšlení na jeho díla. Pesimismus vůči Rusku ovšem přetrvával a jak jeho moc sílila, sílila také Conrádova temná vize.

Na začátku třetí kapitoly bylo představeno první analyzované dílo *Heart of Darkness*, v němž lze pozorovat vliv osobních zkušeností autora. Může se zdát, že Harlequin, vedlejší postava, zaujímá zanedbatelnou roli. Reprezentuje mládí a je možné, že ztělesňuje Conrada v jeho raných námořních letech. Měl by představovat Conradovy předsudky vůči Rusku, ale je zobrazen spíše pozitivně. Do popředí vystupuje jeho naivita a manipulativnost.

Jednou z nejzajímavějších informací o této postavě je původ jeho jména. Jméno Harlequin se objevuje napříč mnoha kulturami, spíše v negativním slova smyslu. Bylo zmíněno několik příkladů. Existuje vysoká pravděpodobnost, že Conrad z některých podobných pramenů opravdu čerpal. Výsledkem bylo vytvoření tajemného charakteru této postavy.

Dále jsem zmínila události jeho života, díky kterým si čtenář může všimnout několika podobností mezi Harlequinem a Conradem. Oba se stali námořníky, aby unikli od svých životů a povinností. Harlequin na rozdíl od Conrada cítil potřebu někomu sloužit. Proto se fanaticky oddal Kurtzovi. Bylo naznačeno, že tato oddanost mohla vzniknout bezvědomě, a to, čím si prošel, utvořilo jeho osobnost a pomátlo mysl.

Až do konce u něho převládá naivita a nevinnost. Je odhalena jeho prohnaná osobnost. Přestože tvrdil, že Kurtz ovlivnil jeho mysl, nakonec jej opustí a zmizí v džungli.

Čtvrtá kapitola je věnována nejrozsáhlejšímu dílu této práce, knize *Under Western Eyes*. Jedná se o Conradovo nejvíce politicky orientované dílo, které se zakládá na skutečné události. V tomto díle se Conrad zabývá ruskou autokracií a dopadem na její obyvatele. Pocit bezmoci těchto obyvatel je také jedním z témat. Jak název napovídá, Conrad se staví do pozice obyvatele západní země a sdílí svůj kritický obraz ruské společnosti. Hlavním záměrem tohoto díla je ovlivnit čtenářův pohled a podnítit zmiňované pesimistické představy o ruském národě.

Conradova klíčová zápleтка se točí kolem mladého studenta jménem Razumov, který je také protagonistou tohoto příběhu. Razumov je popsán jako čistá ruská duše. Conradovo inovativní použití jmen slouží jako zdůraznění Razumovy rozumné povahy. Je to muž dobrých mravů, který sní o poklidném životě. Jeho postava je také důkazem, že utiskující společnost může zničit život i té nejnevinnější osoby. Skutečnost, že je sirotkem, posiluje jeho touhu o začlenění a způsobí jeho oddanost ruské autokracii.

Abych podpořila svou analýzu, uvedla jsem několik dalších postav představujících různé stereotypy. Nelze pochybovat o tom, že se Conrad pokusil poskytnout téměř každý

možný západní stereotyp ruského lidu. Mužské postavy byly prezentovány poněkud negativně. Čtenáři byl představen egoistický feminist, jehož chování spíše naznačovalo jeho anti-feministické myšlení; tyran schopného jakékoliv fyzické újmy; opilec; ale také podpůrci autokracie, kteří těží ze spolupráce s režimem. Přestože Conrád poskytl jen několik plně nerozvinutých ženských postav, zaujímají v této knize dominantnější roli než muži.

Shrňme-li tato fakta, Conrád kritizoval nejen řídicí orgány této autokracie a Rusko, ale i jeho obyvatele. Snažil se poskytnout kontrast mezi oběma stranami. Nakonec ale zjišťuje, že revolucionáři i autokraté jsou stejní. Conrád v tomto díle představuje běžné a západním čtenářům známé skutečnosti. Celkovým cílem *Under Western Eyes* nebylo pouze vykreslit ruské stereotypy, ale především pomoci čtenáři pochopit jejich chování a možná vyvolat určitý stupeň soucitu.

Poslední kapitolou a knihou, kterou jsem analyzovala, je dílo *The Secret Agent*. Toto dílo, které se původně nemělo stát knihou, pojednává o ruské prohnanci a její d'ábelské moci. I přes absenci jakéhokoliv náznaku (snad jen kromě jména Vladimir), který by spojoval tento příběh s Ruskem, je více než jasné, že nejmenované velvyslanectví a jeho zaměstnanci jsou Rusové. Conrád vykresluje ruskou schopnost přizpůsobit se, stát se váženými členy jakékoliv společnosti, a následně ji zničit zevnitř.

Zdá se, že Conrád navzdory svému původu a zdánlivě přetrvávající averzi vůči autokratickému Rusku, výslovně nevyjádřil nenávist k Rusům samotným. I když se zdá, že se snažil zůstat nezáujat, nabídnout nové a osobní typy ruských postav, pouze propagoval již ustálené stereotypy, a tím nadále přispíval k nepřátelství mezi Západem a Ruskem.

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Annotation

Author: Nikola Valášková

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Abstract: This bachelor thesis explores Joseph Conrad's relationship to Russia in his creative works. Its main focus is on his perception of Russians in the novels *Heart of Darkness*, *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent*. The first chapter is the historical background dealing with the Polish-Russian relations that are relevant to the fate of Conrad's family. A short overview of Conrad's life is presented in the second part. Finally, the last part deals with the three analysed novels and concerns Conrad's attempt to create authentic Russian characters.

Anotace

Autor: Nikola Valášková

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Abstrakt: Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá vztah k Rusku v tvůrčích pracích Josepha Conrada. Hlavním zaměřením je jeho vztah k Rusům v dílech *Heart of Darkness*, *Under Western Eyes* a *The Secret Agent*. První kapitola se zaměřuje na historické pozadí a zabývá se polsko-ruskými vztahy, které jsou relevantní vzhledem k osudu rodiny Conrada. Následuje krátký přehled autorova života. Poslední kapitoly pojednávají o třech analyzovaných románech a Conradově snaze vytvořit autentické Ruské postavy.