

CHAPTER- V

The Secret Agent and Under Western Eyes: Sceptical Studies in Revolutions

“You must be a savage, tyrannical, pitiless, thick- and- thin optimist, like Horne, for instance, to make a good social rebel of the extreme type.”

(Joseph Conrad: “The Informer”)

With *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*, we enter into the mature phase of Conrad as a novelist dealing explicitly in the current political themes of the late 19th and early 20th century British society. Conrad’s sceptic musing on the new turn of capitalism found expression in *Nostramo*, which is not apparently a tale of sea- adventures. He leaves his usual field of exotic colonies, and concentrates on the contemporary political milieu of urban life, addressing issues like anarchy, revolution, nationalism and, most importantly, the cultural acceptance of these ideas in the social reality of a capitalist nation heavily caught into debates on the changing role of the empire in the context of the pre- War Europe. Beth Sharon Ash examines the psychic uneasiness of Conrad at this point and infers that the creative artist finds himself once more in between his two utterly contradictory ideological positions envisioning the reality of a fast evolving western imperial society, persuasively threatened by anti- capitalist anarchic and revolutionary ideals. Ash asserts:

The work after *Nostramo* is different, still struggling with ambivalence about irredeemable ideals, but now in a darker, less balanced way. In these later texts Conrad is clearly responding to the modern political realities of revolutionary politics and nationalistic rivalries transforming European societies in the years

before World War I, and it is equally clear that these realities contribute to the darkening irony and hopelessness color[ing] his work. We find Conrad focusing in the novels on revolutionary intrigue, whether the scene is set in London (*The Secret Agent*) or in St. Petersburg and Geneva (*Under Western Eyes*). (1999: 180-181)

Ash draws attention to the unconscious political tie between imperialism and capitalism, eventually giving rise to the strong trend of social democratic thoughts that finds resistant counter-products in revolutionary activities (181). The years between 1880 and 1914 witnessed a sturdy rise of revolutionary thoughts in the West, especially in London. The whole culture of Europe was undergoing a big change in respect of moral, ethical and ideological affinities to the traditional values of a given social world stemming out of the dominant discourse of imperialism. Hobsbawm labels this era as the era of revolution and rebellion, ideologically enamoured of the concept of resistance to the nationalistic hegemony of the empire. He observes:

The revolutionary left of social democracy, initially somewhat marginal in the West, and the revolutionary syndicalist or anarchist tendencies were more likely to attract avant-garde culture of a radical turn of mind. After 1900 the anarchists in particular increasingly found their social base, outside some Latin countries, in a milieu composed of bohemians and some self-educated workers, shading over into the lumpenproletariat – in the various Montmartres of the Western world – and settled down into a general subculture of those who rejected, or were not assimilable by ‘bourgeois’ lifestyles or organized mass movements. This essentially individualist and antinomian rebellion was not opposed to social revolution. It often merely waited for a suitable

movement of revolt and revolution to which it could attach itself, and was once again mobilized *en masse* against the war and for the Russian Revolution. The Munich soviet of 1919 gave it perhaps its major moment of political assertion. Yet both in reality and in theory it turned away from Marxism. Nietzsche, a thinker who was for fairly obvious reasons deeply unattractive to Marxists or other social democrats, in spite of his hatred of the 'bourgeois', became a characteristic guru of anarchist and anarchizing rebels, as of non-political middle-class cultural dissidence. (2009: 180-181)

This "non-political middle class cultural dissidence" was unsettling to Conrad by virtue of its challenges heaved against the conservative cultural environment of the nationalist as well as imperialist berths of London. Andrea White reminds us in the essay "Conrad and Imperialism" that Conrad was a staunch conservative in his attitude and detested anything undermining for the romance of sanity, rationality, enlightenment and progress of the sacred British Empire. By 1890, Conrad was already a proud British subject and for him, "'home' by this time was the 'hospitable shores of Great Britain'...and the empire he served was doing, as far as he could see, good work. His sympathies were clearly conservative" (White, 1996: 181). The argument becomes especially relevant in understanding the ideological stand of Conrad in *The Secret Agent* when White continues her observation that only a few years back Conrad is seen writing to a friend of his utter disappointment "at the Liberal victory in the 1885 General Election and had despaired that 'all that is respectable, venerable and holy', the 'great British Empire' had gone 'over the age'" (181). There is no denying of the fact that Conrad's political or ideological stands are not quite easy to locate and never straightforward to grapple with, yet, on a moderate scale, it might well be argued that they are never conducive to any idea of revolution that attempts to upset the given nationalist form of a conservative society sustaining on the capitalist logic of the empire. Such exercises, in the name of anarchy or revolution, had to be stereotyped and marginalised culturally, and Conrad

subsequently subverts their political implications through ironic ideological treatments sufficiently in his *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*.

Thus, this part of the thesis will explore one of Joseph Conrad's most socially colourful and darkly humorous 'political novels' - his 1907 classic, *The Secret Agent*. Based upon a rather mysterious attempt on 15 February 1894 to blow up a very modern symbol of time, imperial power, scientific advancement, and cultural modernity - the Greenwich Royal Observatory - Conrad's fiction dramatizes the political unconscious of modern, urbanized societies. The textual milieu is one in which a murky, mutually reinforcing interdependency of the police and the rebel, social authority and cultural threat, law and terror surfaces in the diplomatic parlours of Knightsbridge, the public houses and pornographer's premises of Soho, and on the pavements of Whitehall. Caricatures of Marx and Nietzsche, as well as Bakunin and other anarchists of the period, discuss and plot the intrigue, an act which is riddled with heavy ironies. Conrad grafts this potent and probing political fable into a domestic tragedy in the making - the household of the Verlocs - Adolf, Winnie and Stevie. Secret agents, agencies of social and familial secrets, emerge amid scenes of intimidation, farce, terror, and familial horror. Conrad not only depicts modern political disillusionment, but also suggests unusual sources of modern social and emotional agency.

The novel is set against the backdrop of the late Victorian period. Mr. Verloc, one of the key protagonists of the novel, is a secret agent under cover working for a foreign embassy and hired to provoke activities amongst migrant political dissidents, in this case the anarchists, in London. Apparently, the man is a shambling, slothful middle-aged person who owns a shop in a dingy part of London which sells a variety of tawdry items, mostly pornographic articles. Verloc lives behind the shop with his unsuspecting wife Winnie and her mother and brother, Stevie, who is a mentally retarded young man. Winnie is exceptionally weak on her mentally challenged brother, and always looks forward to a good relationship between Verloc and Stevie for better safety and security of the latter. We soon learn that the shop is a cover for Verloc's real profession as a secret agent. The foreign embassy (possibly Russian) utilises Verloc for a number of years, while he kept

gathering around him an anarchist cell – not because he himself is an anarchist but because he is paid to act as a double-agent with the task of infiltrating underground movements in order to pass on information about them. In recent years however, Verloc has grown fat and complacent. A new ambassador has come to the Embassy who has looked hard at the value Verloc is giving in return for his monthly stipend and calls him in to the Embassy for a dressing down. Verloc's new director Mr. Vladimir tells Verloc that an international conference is about to take place in Milan and a startling event is required to shock the European leaders out of their complacency and to take strong action against what we would today call international terrorism. It is imperative that a series of outrages is required, here in England, because the British take no notice of terrorism unless it happens within borders. What is required is a strike at something which symbolizes Britishness, something which will shock the nation to the core and stiffen their resolve to combat the anarchists in their midst. Mr Vladimir instructs Verloc to blow up the First Meridian, the Royal Observatory in Greenwich. A “dynamite outrage” is required, and Verloc arranges to meet a man known as “the Professor” through the anarchists, who is obsessed with the idea of inventing the perfect detonator. The professor is out and out a nihilist whose sole objective is to annihilate everything. And then the whole plan goes terribly wrong, both for Verloc and for his family. Verloc is not a clever man, and neither are his anarchist friends. They are far more used to armchair debates than actually taking action to bring down society. Verloc sets up Stevie to carry out the task of blowing up the Observatory impressing the innocent young man that the act would help to alleviate poverty from the society. Stevie, while carrying the bomb across the Greenwich Park in order to plant it, trips over it and accidentally blows himself up in pieces.

The police, represented in the person of Inspector Heat, are fully aware of the anarchist cell around Verloc, but for various reasons are prepared to let it continue on the basis that it is better to be able to observe it than to stamp on it and have its members back on the mainstream in secret. Inspector Heat is a master of managing situations in a tolerant and compromising way, even to the extent of allowing the Professor to carry on with his dynamite factory than to eliminate it entirely. The politicians, both Russian and British are schemers too, and we soon realise that no-

one in this novel is quite as one would expect, each one labouring under confused motives and unclear objectives. The false detonation however has its appalling fallout. Winnie comes to know that her husband is responsible for the unfortunate death of her dear brother and murders Verloc. One of the anarchists, the philandering Ossipon, learns the truth, tricks Winnie out of her money by pretending to help her flee the country, abandons her midway. Winnie, being in desperate situations, jumps off the cross-channel ferry and commits suicide. This utterly gloomy tale increases the unease of the reader quite to a degree, as we see the psycho-pathetic Professor as the survivor of the entire qualm, heavily busy over his search for the perfect detonator.

It is noted that the whole fabric of *The Secret Agent* is ironic. The ideological location of the author is made difficult at the very beginning through the ironic dedicational inscription:

To
 H. G. Wells
 The chronicler of Mr. Lewisham's love
 the biographer of Kipps and the
 historian of the ages to come this simple tale of the
 nineteenth century is affectionately offered. (Conrad,
 1994: 314)

This statement could be interpreted as ironic partly because *The Secret Agent* is such a complex novel, at least in terms of its narrative structure. However, we could argue that the central "story" of *The Secret Agent* is in fact a simple tale (something which Conrad himself discovered to his shock when he came to dramatise it) which is told in a complicated way. It is for this reason that I believe Conrad's dedication is most profoundly ironic on the grounds of the contrasting philosophies of Conrad and Wells. In Wells' *The History of Mr Polly* (1910) the narrator declares that:

Deep in the being of Mr Polly, deep in that darkness,
 like a creature which has been beaten about the head

and left for dead but still lives, crawled a persuasion that over and above the things that are jolly and "bits of all right", there was beauty, there was delight; that somewhere - magically inaccessible perhaps, but still somewhere - were pure and easy and joyous states of body and mind. (Wells, 1963: 24)

Mr. Polly, Wells' 'Everyman', stands as proof that humans need not or, may be, do not necessarily possess a heart of darkness. In the Wells of the scientific romances there is a significant degree of pessimism: the future dystopia (regardless of whether it is an extrapolation of the Victorian class system) of *The Time Machine* (1895); the semi-Swiftian nightmare of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896); the corruption and abuse of science by *The Invisible Man* (1897). But nevertheless there is an important channel of optimism too that runs through Wells's oeuvre, perhaps best exemplified in *The War of the World* (1898) where the endangered Earth defeats the Martian threat. Although the victory is not secured by the human race but by bacteria our world wins through. Most profoundly, Wellsian optimism can be located in the Edwardian novels: *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910) and in the two novels Conrad alludes to in his dedication, *Love and Mr Lewisham* (1900) and *Kipps* (1905). A remarkable exception to the optimism in Wells' Edwardian writings is *Tono-Bungay* (1909) which, written just a year before the account of Mr Polly's discovery of paradise is a sustained and panoramic critique of capitalism and western society. It contains an amusing pastiche of *Heart of Darkness* and ends with a pessimistic vision of 'waste' containing an apocalyptic image of Destiny. It is thus fair to say that in Wells we find an oscillation between optimism and pessimism. Nevertheless, Wells lived long enough to see the foundations of the optimism he did possess severely battered. He placed all his faith in the power of science and engineering, believing that it could transform our stupid and wasteful society into a sane and efficient one. He declared the First World War to be the 'war to end all war', but lived to see the Nazi death camps and atomic bombs drop on Japan. Central to his optimism was his Fabian socialism. A similar kind of euphoria can be found in another Fabian writer, George Bernard Shaw. Their nineteenth century form of socialism led them to indulge in the somewhat elitist fantasy that with a powerful and technocratic

individual at the helm of society the future would be inevitably progressive. Especially in Shaw we find the notion of the Superman who can control his will for the good of himself and others. The idea of this Nietzschean superman is however thoroughly debunked in *The Secret Agent*. Written in 1907 and ostensibly set against the nineteenth-century London, *The Secret Agent* gives an eerie depiction of mentalities and events that were to dominate the first two decades of the twentieth century. Conrad, being psychically abhorrent of any kind of messianic change, did not share the revolutionary utopian glee and faith in the power of reason and science to produce a better world for all. In an amusing letter, dated the 16 February 1905, to Cunninghame Graham, Conrad expresses his sentiments towards the believers of change in the capitalist mode of production with respect to essential human values:

The stodgy sun of our future - our early Victorian future - lingers on the horizon, but all the same it will rise - it will indeed - to throw its sanitary light upon a dull world of perfected municipalities and WC's 'sans peur et sans reproche'. The grave of individual temperaments is being dug by [G. B. Shaw] and [H. G. Wells] with hopeful industry. Finitä la commedia! Well they may do much but for the saving of the universe I put my faith in the power of folly. (Vol. III, 1988: 217-8)

Conrad, it can be inferred, believes in "individual temperament" and prefers "folly" to rationalism, thus disparaging any idea of human transcendence or sublimation. This can be used, I believe, in relation to Robert Penn Warren's notion that Conrad suffered a "trauma inflicted by nineteenth-century science, a 'mystic wound' (quoted in Warren, 1989: 147). The author's idea on science can be enlightening in an analysis of *The Secret Agent* as well as placing Conrad as an antithesis to Shaw and Wells. There is a parallel to be drawn here between the idealistic politics of Michaelis and Ossipon, on one side, and the extremist worldview of the Professor, on the other. Indeed, the above quotation is quite useful to relate to *The Secret Agent* because in the novel we are presented with the "rational" world of

political activism and conviction which are being shown as pathetically deficient to reveal any potential to initiate changes in the social destiny of men and women. To Conrad, history is a process which is, as Daniel Schwarz writes, "inexorably indifferent to man's aspirations" (1980: 162). Wells' optimism, depending on the notion of "improvement" (of society and thus humanity), is utterly mistrusted by Conrad as he creates a tragic and pessimistic arena of futile activities for the anarchists in *The Secret Agent*. Baines writes about the difference between the two writers quoting from an anecdote, dated 23 January 1918, as it is recorded in Hugh Walpole's diary:

Conrad was fundamentally pessimistic and aristocratic in outlook, whereas Wells was optimistic and stridently plebeian. Conrad himself neatly expressed his notion of their temperamental antagonism: 'The difference between us, Wells, is fundamental. You don't care for humanity but think they are to be improved. I love humanity but know they are not!' (1960: 283)

Conrad's view was moulded by his own form of pessimism, and by his upbringing under the repressive power of Russia. Born into Russian-occupied Poland in 1857 and five years later exiled into Russian Siberia with his political activist father Apollo Korzeniowski, Conrad was always sceptic of the potential of any political solution to change, as it were, 'the way of the world'. Allan Ingram describes Conrad as a political agnostic that substantially posits the ideologue in him in between political extremes (1986: 39). Zdzislaw Najder describes how Conrad was prompted by his radical friend Cunninghame Graham to attend a mass meeting of pacifists in 1899, but sat there "revolted a little" as he listened to Liebknecht, Jaures and others (1983: 251). Conrad's non-fiction can be illuminating for us to understand his political views. In a letter, dated the 9 October 1897, to the publisher William Blackwood, Conrad complains about a review in *Blackwood's Magazine* (Vol. 162) of a book by Hallam Tennyson in which the reviewer criticises the British "pride in

affording an asylum to bloodthirsty ruffians" and makes a pejorative comment about "dirty rascals who wave a cap of liberty upon a pike". Conrad comments:

Not every man who "waved a cap of liberty on a pike" was a scoundrel. And England has not only given refuge to criminals... Of course I do not defend political crime. It is repulsive to me by tradition, by sentiment, and even by reflexion (sic). But some of their men had struggled for an idea, openly, in the light of day, and sacrificed to it all that to most men makes life worth living. (Vol. III, 1988: 401)

This is obviously an interesting remark to consider in relation to *The Secret Agent*: the rejection of political crime and yet the defence of the struggle of certain radicals pursuing, totally and cleanly, one 'idea'. The concept of an 'idea' is crucial in *The Secret Agent*, and we shall look at it later. More directly in relation to *The Secret Agent* Conrad wrote that he certainly did not mean to attack revolutionaries. He wrote to Cunninghame Graham on 7 October 1907: "I don't think that I've been satirizing the revolutionary world. All these people are not revolutionaries -they are shams" (491). Similarly, Conrad wrote in a letter to John Galsworthy on September 1906 commenting on the remarks made by Galsworthy on the manuscript of *The Secret Agent*:

The whole thing is superficial and it is but a tale. I had no idea to consider Anarchism politically, or to treat it seriously in its philosophical aspect; as a manifestation of human nature in its discontent and imbecility. The general reflections whether right or wrong are not meant as bolts... They are, if anything, mere digs at the people in the tale. As to attacking Anarchism as a form of humanitarian enthusiasm or intellectual despair or social atheism, that - if it were worth doing - would be the work for a more vigorous hand and for a mind

more robust, and perhaps more honest than mine.

(1986: 78-9)

As a point of interest, Conrad defined the true anarchist in the letter of October 1907 to Cunninghame Graham: "By Jove! If I had the necessary talent I would like to go for the true anarchist - which is the millionaire. Then you would see the venom flow. But it's too big a job" (Vol. III, 1988: 491). Conrad's mutually opposite stands in relation to his attitude to the anarchists hint at the uneasiness that Conrad had in dealing with the idea of upsetting the capitalist state power by means of revolutions. Jocelyn Baines is particularly scathing in discussing the deliberate mystification of Conrad's political stand in *The Secret Agent*. He writes:

But if it wasn't Conrad's main purpose to satirize anarchism and anarchists he leaves no doubt as to his contempt for them and treats them throughout with scornful irony, untouched by pity. In his Author's Note he speaks of 'the criminal futility of the whole thing, doctrine, action, mentality...the contemptible aspect of the half crazy pose as of a brazen cheat exploiting the poignant miseries and passionate credulities of a mankind always so tragically eager for self-destruction'. (1971: 401)

Returning to the matrix of power in the novel, it might well be said that the subject of *The Secret Agent* is the political culture of the age, albeit viewed with the lacunae of an ambivalent man. Hence, the novel, as a text about society, is very much a satire rooted in specific history. Moreover, within this analysis of the state politics - or perhaps we should say 'English' or even 'London' society - enter the issues of a wider anarchy and its opposite, conservatism, in relation to, in part, politics but also the 'human condition'. The predominantly ironic tone and the sardonic manner of narrating the most gruesome scenes in the novel subvert the human import of the anarchists, even in death. Ossipon, being pushed by Winnie into the room after

Verloc's murder, discovers the innate morbidity of the human existence with a telling effect produced by an unsettling slow-motion technique:

The true sense of the scene he was beholding came to Ossipon through the contemplation of the hat. It seemed an extraordinary thing, an ominous object, a sign. Black, and rim upward, it lay on the floor before the couch as if prepared to receive the contributions of pence from people who would come presently to behold Mr. Verloc in the fullness of his domestic ease reposing on a sofa. From the hat the eyes of the robust anarchist wandered to the displaced table, gazed at the broken dish for a time, received a kind of optical shock from observing a white gleam under the imperfectly closed eyelids of the man on the couch. Mr Verloc did not seem so much asleep now as lying down with a bent head and looking insistently at his left breast. And when Comrade Ossipon had made out the handle of the knife he turned away from the glazed door and retched violently. (Conrad, 1994: 482)

Alexander Ossipon, the anarchist, is shown by Conrad as lacking in required energy and determination in times of action. Karl Yundt, the other revolutionary in the novel, is old and bald, while an "extraordinary expression of underhand malevolence survived in his extinguished eyes" (38). Michaelis is absurd and the Professor is puny, unwholesome, with a lamentable physical inferiority. The physical impropriety of the anarchists is pointer to the metaphor of their moral repulsiveness and corrosive political ideal. The most sound among the lot, Ossipon, is also physically deficient and has features associated with the cultural "other" s of Europe. Baines suggests that Ossipon "has 'flattened nose and prominent mouth cast in the rough mould of the negro type', a mark of degeneracy to Conrad, and there is obvious irony in Ossipon's dubbing Stevie a degenerate on the basis of Lombroso's theories" (1971: 403).

Conrad's pessimistic view of society and its agents with various political and cultural aspirations envelops each character's personal relationships. Throughout *The Secret Agent*, the usage of geometric imagery shows the flowing effects of evil within society on the micro level. Wright observes the "web-like involvement of the forces of lawlessness and those of the law" (1966: 179) and Rosenfield notes major similarities between both conservatism and anarchism in their cyclical worlds (1967: 80). Holland claims that each major character throughout the book has "doubleness" and "triple-ness" in their private relationships with others (1986: 54), and in expressing the "chaos and maze of human relations," Conrad uses circle after circle and loads the novel with "geometric images," as if he "were trying to squeeze some order out of chaos" (55). An inverted observation on the impact of the essentially imperialistic societal structure may be taken as Conrad's only solution to achieve a balance among hostile forces throughout the novel. The dualistic framework within *The Secret Agent* gives each major character, including the police, a similar opposite, and seems to imply that everyone, even the models of justice, has a double life. Conrad's particular portrayal of Winnie Verloc's character and the role played by Winnie in the socio-political drama of *The Secret Agent* calls forth special attention indeed to locate the exact nature of Conrad's anti-anarchist agenda in the novel. Critics essentially agree that the novel's ironic tone conveys pessimism towards society and relationships, but they differ over Winnie Verloc's morality. Many critics consider her the pivotal character of the novel and takes Winnie as a tragic heroine due to her sacrificial role. Conrad himself seems to support this interpretation to some extent. In his preface to the 1920 edition of the novel, he states that this is "Winnie Verloc's story" (Conrad, 1953: 13), which could imply that she has the key role to play in the complex plot of *The Secret Agent*. John Palmer elaborates that "morally, however, Conrad's deepest interest lies with Winnie and Stevie, the norms of male and female innocence, and Verloc's essential victims", implying that Winnie is a victim of circumstances, undeserving of her suffering (1968: 118). In Tillyard's essay, "*The Secret Agent* Reconsidered," he calls Winnie Verloc pathetic and noble, someone who should cause sympathetic feelings in readers (1966: 104). Richard Curle claims that Conrad's "women portraits are the most finished, delicate, and poignant of all his portraits" and goes on to claim Winnie as a tragic heroine and indeed, "[Conrad's] finest women are *good* women" (1968: 145).

But any reading of the text would reveal that the character of Winnie has many layers, it is dark and sombre, and is unmistakably affected by the author's Victorian attitude to female gender. Though Winnie has some positive characteristics, such as a maternal love towards her helpless brother, she hardly is invested with any trace of transcending elements in her character. Her passive obedience to social conventions makes her mostly responsible for the death of her brother, her murder of her husband, and her subsequent suicide. The complex morality of Winnie Verloc is the central question of the novel. Despite a surface appearance of nicety, Winnie is the most chilling character in what Berman calls Conrad's "most chilling novel" (1977: 111). Winnie is a stereotypical Victorian wife, and Conrad uses her magnetic attraction towards destruction to criticize women who obey unreasonable social expectations. The idea of anarchy is indeed receiving a double meaning here. Conrad's use of a biblical allusion to Satan warns readers that the Victorian idea of an 'ideal wife' dehumanizes women and that women passively following Victorian social conventions by sacrificing all of their dreams and relationships for others, not communicating with their husbands, and marrying primarily due to economic concerns will never reach their full potential. Winnie has been married to Mr. Verloc for seven years, yet she never knows his true occupation until the end of the novel, never questions why he stays out late in the morning on a regular basis, and never asks why the only visitors to their house are anarchists ranting about the "cannibalistic" nature of capitalism (Conrad, 1994: 53). Winnie is completely incurious, her "force" and "safeguard" in life being a "distant and uninquiring acceptance of facts" (132). Later, Conrad states that "she felt profoundly that things did not stand much looking into" (151). Her passive acceptance of life as it appears destroys those around her and the irreconcilability of her private self with the public surrounding foments the pessimistic irony of the novel. Even the humanistic essentialities like love, fellow feeling and sympathy cannot any more save Winnie's domestic world from blowing into pieces, as that has been poisoned by the larger unsettling issues of the public life of revolutionary politics. Beth Sharon Ash observes this "cultural demise" in Winnie's life and suggests that Conrad's emphasis is "everywhere placed on 'human imbecility' – on the folly that appears in the current social establishment" (1999: 192). She further makes it clear that,

[T]he type of irony that envisions all aspects of life in terms of 'unrelieved bondage' and beholds 'a blasted world of repulsiveness and idiocy, a world without pity or hope', is on the other side of tragedy – Sisyphean instead of Promethean, bleak instead of tragic. And ... irony of this extreme form often 'arises in an atmosphere of social breakdown and cultural demise.' The political climate in English society in 1907 may not exactly have constituted an atmosphere of 'breakdown' or 'demise,' but this was unquestionably Conrad's perception of it. The period's fierce partisanship, heading toward societal polarization and unrest...aroused all of Conrad's political anxieties. (192-193)

As with much of Conrad's fictions, *The Secret Agent* has its roots in factual events. In his "Author's Notes" Conrad indirectly refers to an actual explosion in Greenwich Park on the 14 February 1894, which killed the bomber, a man named Bourdin (Sherry, 1973: 202). It is generally agreed that the Bourdin incident was a direct source of inspiration for Conrad. Likewise, Conrad's depiction of Russian anarchist groups, a Special Crimes Department, secret police agents, and the surveillance of subversive groups is also fairly historically accurate in relation to the development of the Special Branch and its work in London at that time. In reading *The Secret Agent*, it is essential to recognize that it is ultimately Conrad's portrayal of a type of society that is more important than the basic components of his story. He delineates this society through the story's events and descriptions and through his narrative technique of disjunction and irony, along with his manipulation of the detective story's expected form. Policing or surveillance with its dual function has a big role to play in the game of power of the novel. The role of the state police as security provider and preventer of terrorism in public life cuts across ironically in their intrigues and secret plots. In consequence, the duality inherent in their action, challenges the commonplace of the benevolent peaceful status of London, basking in the seeming security and cultural assurance of a vast empire. This secrecy and these

duplicitous motives shake the reader's trust and confidence in the police and lead us to look critically at what lies beneath the apparent security and order they offer. As a result, Conrad's portrayal of the police questions the credibility of police-based security and the end of the police plot and the rest of the novel only serve to dispel it completely. The expected sanity and balance of a bourgeois capitalist state is also therefore subverted by Conrad as he scrutinizes the role of police in *The Secret Agent* with an exclusive ironic perspective, often quite characteristic of him. Eagleton observes that in doing so, Conrad finds himself in between his "unswerving commitment to bourgeois 'normality' and its dissentient 'metaphysical' impulse to reject such 'false consciousness' for a 'deeper' insight into the 'human condition'" (1996: 160). He adds further significantly:

This contradiction, in fact, arises from the internal conflicts of the Conradian ideology – a form of 'metaphysical' conservatism equally hostile to petty-bourgeois myopia and revolutionary astigmatism. The form of the work is an attempt to 'resolve' this contradiction by operating a naturalist mode which nevertheless, in its self-parodic quality, detaches itself ironically from its own vision...The text, indeed, operates here...irony on the reader. Its contemptuous caricaturing of the anarchists as conformist parasites or febrile freaks, coupled with its resolute fetishising of social reality, reassures the reader of the anarchists' despicable impotence...Yet this 'resolution' of contradiction merely produces...the sickening vision of a universe endlessly, mechanically permutating its various materials – the ideology, in short, of crass bourgeois scientism and positivism which the anarchists set out to explode. (160-161)

James F. English perfectly captures Conrad's anxieties of imperialism in the thematic mechanism of the novel while responding to the issues of anarchy and

revolution and asserts in his essay "Anarchy in the Flesh: Conrad's 'Counterrevolutionary' Modernism and the Witz of the Political Unconscious" that,

In *The Secret Agent* Conrad, like so many social commentators of the day, displaces his representatives of the cultural 'soft spot' or 'place of decay' to the squalid neighbourhoods of London, but these prevailing anxieties about imperialism remain very much a part of the landscape. In this respect the text captures a key displacement in the discourse of national/ racial decline. The oft-asserted 'degeneration' of the urban populace, though centered on casual labourers and other poor, was often linked in a scientifically empty but ideologically powerful way to a blood-thinning urban atmosphere of decadence and non-productivity whose subject, at least implicitly, was the bourgeoisie of late imperial capitalism. (1992: 621)

The cultural crisis of Conrad in *The Secret Agent*, indeed, consists in his typical ideological location between the seeming security of capital's "Social Imperialism" and a threat, posed up to that security, by his "pre-existing dread" of "revolutionary methods" (Ash, 1999: 201). This ideological stupor combines with an acute personal agenda in Conrad's next political novel in discussion, *Under Western Eyes* that deals in the themes of Russia and revolution in a singular way. As a son of one of the most spirited participants in the Polish National Committee, and with a profound fear of Russian autocratic power in his blood, political issues like nationalism, the forces of imperialism and rebellion, were the first and deepest parts of his inheritance. Conrad's character was linked to the patriotic and nationalistic ardour of his father's nature, an idealist revolutionary, and to the conservatism of his uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski, his guardian during youth. The duality of thought conditioned by Apollo Korzeniowski, the father, and Tadeusz Bobrowski made his character divided all his life long. The political approach in *Under Western Eyes* exemplifies the writer's duality of thought. In order to write this novel Conrad found

suggestions in the writings of Russian novelists, mainly Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866). Although the book fully justifies this assertion, the writer denies it and even affirmed in a letter to a friend that he had a "Russophobia", and that he did not like the works of the famous Russian writer (Baines, 1971: 433). Baines is one of the critics who discuss the parallels between the course of events in *Under Western Eyes* and *Crime and Punishment* and he even talks about "verbal echoes" of the latter in the first (444). Starting from the idea that Conrad attacks the anarchists that politically challenge the existing capitalist social order, it is legitimate to claim that in *Under Western Eyes* he cultivates an acquired distaste for the revolutionary ideology as well. General T might be Conrad's mouthpiece when he says:

I detest rebels. These subversive minds! These intellectual debauchees! My existence has been built on fidelity. It's a feeling. To defend it I am ready to lay down my life – and even my honour – if that were needed. But pray tell me what honour can there be as against rebels – against people that deny God Himself – perfect unbelievers? Brutes! It is horrible to think of.
(Conrad, 1994: 530)

On the other hand, Conrad insists that revolutionaries are also victims and that revolt is as hopeless as submission. In fact, *Under Western Eyes* documents Conrad's apathy against the idea of any kind of revolution on a much larger scale than what he did in his *The Secret Agent*. Russia is regarded by Conrad as a land of complete negation of values, and in such an enunciation the author is merely replicating the image of the country already stereotyped by the imperialist Western Europe. Before going into a systematic study of Conrad's stereotypical representation of the ideas of revolution and Russia, we may proceed by outlining the plot of the novel in brief.

Conrad's prejudice does have its ideological ramifications in the novel. And yet in spite of his lack of objectivity, Conrad achieves a great artistic success in the novel because of his favourite theme of isolation. *Under Western Eyes* has for theme moral "isolation" as represented by the case of its protagonist - the Russian student Razumov. As in many of Conrad's stories, the first-person narrator is somewhat

removed from the action of the story; in this case, it is an old English professor of languages residing in Geneva, who has received the personal record of a young orphaned Russian student named Razumov. An orphan and a child left to live on fortune, the protagonist, at the outset is as lonely in the world as a fish swimming in the sea. His prospects are destroyed by the uninvited confidence shown in him by Haldin, a student revolutionist, who, having brought off a political assassination, takes refuge in Razumov's rooms. Since that moment, Razumov is ill-fated to endure a trapped and anguished conscience in utter loneliness. This is his state as he tramps the streets in the winter night, crystallizing his decision to give Haldin up. He betrays Haldin to the police, but the betrayal does not save Razumov's career. He is involved, and the police have a use for him. He seeks to terminate his association with Councillor Mikulin, a cold and creepy Russian bureaucrat, and vainly asserts his 'right to be done for all with that man':

An unhurried voice said:

'Kirylo Sidorovitch.'

Razumov at the door turned his head.

'To retire,' he repeated.

'Where to?' asked Councillor Mikulin softly. (560)

It is significant to note that the last phrase occurs in *The Secret Agent* also at a crucial moment. Chief Inspector Heat having come to the conclusion that Stevie's identification was indisputable advised Mr. Verloc to "vanish, clear out" (438). The sense of an existential entrapment of human soul is echoed in the voice of Verloc too when he snarls at the Commissioner in response to the following words: "Where to?" (438). It is told that Razumov is the symbol of agony and affliction in the inane and tyrannical atmosphere of Czarist Russia. He is an ordinary young man with a healthy capacity for work and sane ambition and has an average conscience. Being nobody's child, he is justified in looking on all Russia as his heritage. He feels for his country and sees into its history of distress and tyranny, yet he cannot think of the insanity of revolutionary activities as a political solution to the predicaments of the state. His conversations with Haldin are very useful to cast focus on his ideological stand:

I have no domestic tradition, I have nothing to think against. My tradition is historical... You came from your province, but all this land is mine—oh I have nothing... I am content in fitting myself to be a worker. And what can you people do by scattering a few drops of blood on the snow ? On this Immensity. On this unhappy Immensity. (536-537)

The violent futility of the crimes and the sacrifices stuffed in that amorphous mass crushes and repels Razumov. He is also shown to be a man of fine potentialities but yields to temptation or fear at the critical moment like Conrad's other protagonists, namely, Kurtz, Jim, Nostromo, and so many others in his fictions. But he is primarily a Russian— an abstracted, self-analysing, questioning Slav. Conrad diagnoses a solid speck of Russian cynicism engraved in Razumov. He has something of Hamlet in him as well. He was sceptical about killing Haldin in the room because “the corpse hanging round his neck would be nearly as fatal as the living man” (518). Finally he thought of giving him up. The psychologically tormented man plays upon the theme of betrayal in his thought:

Betray. A great word. What is betrayal? They talk of a man' betraying his country, his friends, his sweetheart. There must be a moral bond first. All a man can betray is his conscience. And how is my conscience engaged here; by-what bond of common faith, of common conviction, am I obliged to let that fanatical idiot drag me down with him? (522)

But the actual betrayal, if successful from one point of view, did not help. He was torn asunder and knew no mental rest. He tried to write an essay but could do nothing except scribbling five lines one after the other:

History not theory
Patriotism not internationalism
Evolution not Revolution

Devotion not Destruction

Unity not Disruption. (539)

The act of betrayal took its toll on the heated mind of Razumov, who passed the following night in anguish and nightmares. Countless complications followed in its wake. The process by which everything he had planned to accomplish seemed hopeless of attainment. He was led finally to espionage for the Russian government. When he met Haldin's sister, Nathalie, in Geneva, a new weight of remorse, mixed with bitter love, penetrated his soul. His whole existence was a living lie, based upon theories, the outlines of which were losing their validity. After a brief period of deceptive tranquillity he knew that he must confess to Nathalie, tell her of his betrayal and perish. Like Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, Razumov remained a split personality and had some relief in the confession of his guilt. But one of the revolutionary scamps, Nikita, deprived him for life by a fearful blow on either ear. Later he was seen crippled, ill, getting weaker every day, and Tekla the Samaritan tended him untiringly with the pure joy of unselfish emotion. Thus Razumov, Conrad's ordinary young man from Russia of the pre-Haldin era ends as one of the most complex studies of the Russian mind. But Conrad claims more than usual authenticity and perfection of his portrayal of the Russian mind in the person of Razumov. In the "Author's Note" Conrad discusses his convictions on the Russian national nature and says:

The ferocity and imbecility of an autocratic rule rejecting all legality and in fact basing itself upon complete moral anarchism provokes the no less imbecile and atrocious answer of a purely Utopian revolutionism encompassing destruction by the first means to hand, in the strange conviction that a fundamental change of hearts must follow the downfall of any given human institutions. These people are unable to see that all they can effect is merely a change of names. The oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together; and the world is brought once more

face to face with the saying that then tiger cannot change his stripes nor the leopard his spots. (Quoted in Baines, 1971: 433-434)

Therefore, as a Russian, Razumov, according to Conrad's bias, is free of the ideologically corrosive imbecility of a quintessentially Russian self. If Razumov shows the perception and self-questioning Slav, Haldin represents the height of senseless desperation provoked by senseless tyranny. This is the spirit of noble, disinterested and perhaps fanatical idealism. His patriotism is shown in contrast to the hollowness of Peter Ivanovitch and Madame de S. But Conrad has given his due to such devoted souls as Sophia and the poor Tekla. The bunch of revolutionaries in *Under Western Eyes* seems to be a supplement to that in *The Secret Agent*, and Conrad does not spare a single chance to criticise the creed of revolution by making its representatives as inwardly improper and inept on the moral ground. Razumov's political philosophy is conducive to the maintenance of the conservative order in the state and therefore is shown as heroic, though futile, by Conrad in the final evolution of thought in the novel. The narrator of the novel, being a self proclaimed foreigner to things Russian, observes incidents through a western cultural viewpoint.

Conrad's obsession with the issues of honour, responsibility, fidelity and betrayal can only be properly understood in the light of Polish Romantic literature and the Polish Romantic tradition. In nineteenth-century England the ethos of chivalry did not play such an important role as it did in Poland. The Polish nobility or *szlachta* (a term referring to the Polish nobility or gentry, all of whose members were equal under the law) constituted the most important section of Polish Society and – numerically speaking – was considerably larger than the aristocracy in Germany, England or France. As Conrad says, “[the] life of the nation was therefore dominated by the values now commonly called *soldierly* and *aristocratic*”, “descending from the mediaeval ideals of chivalry” (quoted in Najder, 1964: 2-3). It is evident that only knowledge of Conrad's Polish background might allow a reader to understand Conrad's message in its entirety. In discussing Razumov it is impossible not to begin with a presentation of the novel's narrator, for *Under Western Eyes* is a story told by an old language teacher who translates and edits a secret document – Razumov's

diary. The narrator becomes a transmitter of Razumov's thoughts and emotions. His eyes are the titular eyes of the West. We are surprised when this language teacher – for whom words are the most important medium – says that “words, as is well known, are the great foes of reality” (Conrad, 1994: 501-502). Moreover, he says that although he is able to translate Razumov's diary, he admits to having: “no comprehension of the Russian character” (502). He sees the world “as a place of many words, and man appears a mere talking animal not much more wonderful than a parrot” (502). This narrator is aware of the otherness of his subject matter. He also lacks imagination, assuring the reader that he has no talent and his “excuse for this undertaking lies not in its art, but in its artlessness” (620). *Under Western Eyes* involves a serious political complexity in interpretation of the author's point of view in relation both to the roles of the narrator and the protagonist, Razumov, as well. As it is known from the outset, Razumov, the student dedicated to the conservation of culture, betrays a revolutionary, Haldin, whose friends are plotting against the institutions of national culture. Employed by the official guardians of the institutions, against his desire, further to investigate its enemies, Razumov is finally overcome by remorse and confesses his deed to Haldin's friends. At this moment of moral liberation, he is maimed for life by an anarchist fellow-traveller of the Haldin circle. In the face of this stupefying and almost wanton form of cruelty, the reader is justified in demanding the ethical and dramatic necessity for Razumov's extreme punishment. He had, it is true, betrayed the revolutionary as seriously as Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov had done in *Crime and Punishment*; but, unlike Raskolnikov, he had been forgiven by society, at least on the face of it, for his betrayal. Here, the moral law is in opposition to social law or to false institutions though individual atonement must still be exacted. However, the sardonic narrator of *Under Western Eyes* makes it unmistakably clear that Haldin's circle is arrogant, fanatic and preposterous, so that it would seem as if Razumov's confession reunites him, through the process of guilt, not with human solidarity but with the foes of it. The ambiguity is a subtle one. As in *Lord Jim*, one hesitates how far to identify Conrad with the narrator he has interposed. Our strongest encouragement for uniting Conrad's sympathies with those of the professor in this novel is Conrad's well-known repugnance to things Russian and his horror of the political revolutionary extremist, a type he treated with brilliant and savage irony in *The Secret Agent*. Due to this excessive repugnance, Conrad is

able to 'otherise' Russia and the Russian culture comprehensively by presenting them as something distant, something not normally known to the residents of Western Europe, in this case the English narrator at the very beginning of *Under Western Eyes*. For Conrad, anything Russian is foreign, dark and elusive and frankly regressive to the imperial romance of European progress. In "Autocracy and War" he announces:

Considered historically, Russia's influence in Europe seems the most baseless thing in the world; a sort of convention invented by diplomatists for some dark purpose of their own, one would suspect, if the lack of grasp upon the realities of any given situation were not the main characteristic of the management of international relations... As an ally, Russia has been always unprofitable, taking her share in the defeats rather than in the victories of her friends, but always pushing her own claims with the arrogance of an arbiter of military success. (Conrad, vol. 3, 2004: 72)

Conrad goes even further to suggest that the idea of Russia is comparable only with the idea of a '*Neant*' – a state of extreme negation – as he writes that,

[T]here is an awe- inspiring idea of infinity conveyed in the word *Neant* - and in Russia there is no idea. She is not a *Neant*, she is and has been simply the negation of everything worth living for. She is not an empty void, she is yawning chasm open between East and West; a bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge, every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience. (72)

The English narrator, being an outsider to the Russian milieu ascribes to such ideology of Conrad in stereotyping Russia in the *Under Western Eyes*. Everything that we see of Russian autocracy and Russian revolutionaries through this particular narrator's western eyes seems to be incomprehensible and tragic. As he explains: "If to the Western reader they appear shocking, inappropriate, or even improper, it must be remembered that as to the first this may be the effect of my crude statement. For the rest I will only remark here that this is not a story of the West of Europe" (Conrad, 1994: 514). The reader is given a story (that of Razumov) within a story (that of the narrator), and again, as in *Lord Jim*, it is up to the reader to find the novel's message. There is a multitude of opinions on the role of the old language teacher in *Under Western Eyes*. A few examples will show just how broad the spectrum of interpretation is. There are critics who have seen the narrator as Conrad's mouthpiece. Douglas Hewitt claims that "the teacher speaks for Conrad himself" (1952: 81). Jacques Berthoud says that he is trustworthy and reliable – "a reasonable, liberal Englishman" – and if he does not understand the Russians, then it is "because [...] they are not understandable" (1978: 161). For Keith Carabine "the narrator in the *story time* of Parts Second and Third" is turned into "a stooge and a dupe" because Conrad decided to keep his readers "in the dark" (1996: 213). Carabine argues that at the beginning of Part Four the old teacher reveals "the central theme of the novel – humankind's *miserable ingenuity in error*" and at the same time the reader is invited to modify his or her "relation to both the teller and his tale" (213). When the old teacher sees that Razumov is going to make a confession by telling Miss Haldin the truth, he says that the "[Westerner] in me was discomposed" (Conrad, 1994: 694). In the narrator's "western eyes" the Russians become a nation of suffering people:

It is strange to think that, I won't say liberty, but the mere liberalism of outlook which for us is a matter of words, of ambitions, of votes (and if of feeling at all, then of the sort of feeling which leaves our deepest affections untouched), may be for other beings very much like ourselves and living under the same sky, a heavy trial of fortitude, a matter of tears and anguish and blood. (694)

At moments like this the narrator's voice, as Carabine rightly observes, "no longer detaches his creator" (1996: 239). If the provision of a western and non-Russian narrator provides Conrad with an opportunity to justify his position as an authentic commentator on Russian revolutionary life to his English readers, then Razumov professes for his ideological justification more intimately. Razumov's theoretical preference of 'evolution' over 'revolution', as quoted earlier in this chapter, unequivocally echoes Conrad's ideological stupor. Revolution is a rupture in the wake of tradition, and consequently challenges the rampart of a given capitalist society, thriving as empire in Conrad's era. Conrad deliberately prepares ground for such a rupture in the thematic design of the novel, and then subverts the process by being utterly critical of the ethical value of revolution as he is writing in between two seemingly opposite ideological standpoints. His polish background and his weakness for his dead father's lifelong ideal install the strong anti-Russian feeling in him. But Conrad is not hopeful of any political solution to the autocracy prevalent in Russia even in his strongest antipathetic feeling for the latter. Revolution for him is yet another creed that cripples the imaginative capacity of any human being and he attaches more importance to the scientific and natural process of 'evolution' to bring forth a viable change in the socio-political fabric of a doomed country. He writes in "Autocracy and War":

The ground of every revolution had to be intellectually prepared. A revolution is a shortcut in the rational development of national needs in response to the growth of worldwide ideals. It is conceivably possible for a monarch of genius to put himself at the head of a revolution without ceasing to be the king of his people. For the autocracy of Holy Russia the only conceivable self-reform is – suicide. (Conrad, vol. 3, 2004: 79)

Fleishman argues that Razumov's creed is also Conrad's profession of faith and that it is not only "an anti-revolutionary utterance, but also an anti-individualistic one. The philosophy that stands behind each of its values is that of the organic state, evolution through history in the direction of patriotic unity" (1967: 228). The critic

further says that both the men, i.e., Conrad and his hero want “to separate themselves from [...] the liberal individualism of the West, which minimizes the communal life of men and from the populist revolutionism of Russia, which pushes the theory of organism into mysticism and terrorism” (228). According to Carabine, Razumov’s political creed can be read as Conrad’s attempt “to balance the competing ideological traditions of his Polish heritage in relation to the painful accusations of betrayal he endured” (1996: 122). One might agree with these opinions concerning Razumov’s creed as he is shown imagining a country where there is no contradiction between morality and legality and where “political institutions are justified by ethical principles and ethical principles substantiated by political institutions” (122).

In *Under Western Eyes*, the textual strategy is to identify the culture of the revolutionaries with that of the Czarist Russia, which is located in Eastern Europe, and therefore is a natural ‘other’ to the culture of the Western Europe. Thus stereotyped the idea of political revolution, resisting the hegemony of imperial Europe, is adequately subverted. To follow the history of this subversive treatment, we may go back to one of Conrad’s famous observations made in “Autocracy and War”: “To pronounce in the face of such a past the word Evolution, which is precisely the expression of the highest intellectual hope, is a gruesome pleasantry. There can be no evolution out of a grave. Another word of less scientific sound has been very much pronounced of late in connection with Russia’s future, a word of more vague import, a word of dread as much as of hope – Revolution” (Conrad, vol. 3, 2004: 77-78). Conrad’s anxious ideological relationship with the idea of revolution consists in his critical yet desperate belief on the innate goodness of a monarchical system of empire. He declares:

In Europe the old monarchical principle stands justified in its historical struggle with the growth of political liberty by the evolution of the idea of nationality as we see it concreted at the present time; by the inception of that wider solidarity grouping together around the standard of monarchical power these larger agglomerations of mankind. This service

of unification, creating close-knit communities possessing the ability, the will, and the power to pursue a common ideal, has prepared the ground for the advent of a still larger understanding: for the solidarity of Europeanism, which must be the next step towards the advent of Concord and Justice; an advent that, however delayed by the fatal worship of force and the errors of national selfishness, has been, and remains, the only possible goal of our progress. (75-76)

The unflinching hope of the author on the monarchical, feudal culture of Western Europe is dialogically related to his conviction in the futility of any revolutionary creed. The teacher of languages, speaking with Conrad's voice, articulates his belief to Nathalie Haldin:

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 to the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and the leaders. You will notice that I have left out the real rogues... Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured – that is the definition of revolutionary success. There have been in every revolution hearts broken by such successes. (Conrad, 1994: 582)

While discussing Conrad's obsession with the idea of a predestined failure of any revolutionary activity, Baines argues that the author's "insistence that revolutionaries are also victims and that revolt is as hopeless as submission again reveals his extreme pessimism and, as in *Nostramo*, his conviction of the ultimate futility of all political action" (1971: 436). Conrad makes the terms 'revolution' and 'Russia' contributory to each other in their negative effect of holding up resistance to

anything positive, stable, and therefore, western and imperial in essence. Sarah Cole perceives this ideological branding in Conrad in her essay “Conradian Alienation and Imperial Intimacy” as she says that, “Conrad’s ‘double mapping’ of empire and Europe involves the positioning of Russia as a limit against which ‘the West’ invents itself, that Russia functions in multiple senses as a location of instability for Conrad” (1998: 270). *Under Western Eyes*, in reality, generates a political tragedy that is fashioned out of a sensitive mind’s anxious musings on the future of empire- states in the early part of the twentieth century. In this sense, the two overtly political novels of Conrad, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*, practically apply in their thematic concerns on issues of culture and empire and fits in well with the tempo of Conrad’s famous series of novels comprising of *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Nostramo*. The average imperial enterprise of Western Europe in the Victorian era was not on accord with the contemporary cultural trends of Russia and therefore the latter have been subverted by Conrad in the political novels.

The journey of the characters in *Under Western Eyes* is preoccupied by a range of presences or spectres. Razumov is repeatedly haunted by his idea of Russia, the land of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations. It might be argued that Haldin haunts Razumov throughout the novel as the spectre of revolution, reminding the latter of what he wants to forget but cannot. The preoccupied psyche of the protagonist, as part of the purpose of *Under Western Eyes*, is to present Razumov's moral and political dilemmas and eventual maturation into a human agent failing the revolution but sustaining humanity. If we turn to issues like revolution, political idealism, personal moral code and their manifestations in *Under Western Eyes*, Razumov’s crisis may be approached as having difficulties in developing parameters of preferences for such issues in one’s own experiences. Firmly placed in an existential context, Razumov appears as blank and empty as the Russia which he or the narrator figures as “a monstrous blank page awaiting the record of an inconceivable history” (Conrad, 1994: 519). And if Razumov has difficulty in conceiving his history, there are others only too ready to do it for him. For the Revolution has indeed, in the person of Haldin, sought him out to his instinctive and unconscious aspirations. Conrad's presentation of Razumov's psychology is firmly placed in its cultural context and Razurnov is not presented in isolation from his

autocratic environment. Every attempt of the protagonist to isolate himself from his surroundings is part of his denial of a growing awareness of the world outside himself.

The true degree of the calamity of this denial may be traced in Conrad's ultimate acceptance of the imperial discourse, despite his vicious criticism of the same in his novels. *Under Western Eyes* is as well steeped in the language of enlightened cultural superiority of Western imperialism. It is this vocabulary that provides the lexical structure for debate, and Conrad's lexical reconstruction of revolutionary Russia appropriates its cultural marginalisation in the power play of politics dominated by the empire. The split that was set up between Europe/not-Europe in the construction of an imperialist hegemony is replicated internally as a split between Western Europe and Eastern Europe in *Under Western Eyes*. With specific reference to the novel, the Russian domination of Poland indeed may be read as displaced by Conrad in this novel onto an internal struggle within Russia, where he geographically projects the past Poland to Geneva, where the Russian revolutionary exiles gather. Thus a geographical and conceptual split between the colonist and the colonized, which legitimates imperialist intervention in foreign territory, the oppression of native peoples and the suppression of indigenous cultures, is replicated and modified in the division between Western and Eastern Europe. In a country like Russia every effort of revolution against the established norm is vain and therefore satirized and subverted. Irony serves the purpose of Conrad to this end, as individuals capable to foment disruption to the imperial nation states by anarchic or revolutionary deeds have deceptive identities and ideals as double agents either in *The Secret Agent* or in *Under Western Eyes*.

Yet, Conrad's acute ideological ambivalence leaves the moral viability of an anti-capitalist revolution still open as it is debated in *Under Western Eyes*. Razumov's fragmented textual production (which also includes his would-be prize winning essay) can also be read as a self-reflexive attempt at the writing and rewriting of the accretion of contradictory and confusing experiences that plot the text of the novel. Najder has assembled them under the rubric of "confessions" (1997: 79). Under this generic term he includes Razumov's journal, his report to Mikulin and the verbal

confession to Nathalie Haldin (79-81). *Under Western Eyes*, as confessional narrative, incorporates both the textual and bio-political aspects of the confessional mode which locates Conrad writing in between national culture and trans-national political movements leading to revolutions. Benita Parry, in discussing the relationship between empire and the revolutionary cultures cropping within its matrix, recalls Lenin's assumptions on the issue. Parry records:

It is well known that Lenin's writings enlisted Hobson's model of imperialism as a stage of capitalism where the export of European capital exceeded that of goods. The structural explanation of Marxists attributes imperialism's aetiology to the dynamics of a system which in the epoch of advanced capitalist production was under pressure to find further sources of raw material and new world markets in order to sustain its continued growth: in the words of Rosa Luxemburg, '[i]mperialism is the political expression of the accumulation of capital in its competitive struggle for what remains still open of the non-capitalist environment' (2004: 115).

The "non-capitalist environment", mentioned above, is ideally the goal of the revolutionaries, which is perceived by Conrad as a flat impossibility. His predominant tragic vision of individual futility and betrayal precludes his vision to imagine any hint of socio-political or cultural transformation in the revolutionary creed. Thus Kurtz betrays the imperial myth of cultural superiority, Jim betrays the gallant European heroic code, Nostromo betrays himself in stealing the silver, Verloc betrays his wife's absolute trust on him and Razumov finally betrays Haldin and the revolutionaries. The entire corpus of Conrad's literary exploits is strictly woven around the binary of fidelity to and betrayal of one's own ethical values or ideas. This idea of fidelity is vital enough to appreciate Conrad's deliberate juxtaposition of two notions: the notion of Russian national culture, the 'Russian-ness' and the destructive cruelty of the creed of revolution, both of which, according to Conrad, are corrupt

from within. The conscious effort of describing both in terms of a futile negativity is easily seen in lines like the following:

The nineteenth century began with wars which were the issue of a corrupted revolution. It may be said that the twentieth begins with a war which is like the explosive ferment of a moral grave, whence may yet emerge a new political organism to take the place of a gigantic and dreaded phantom. For a hundred years the ghost of Russian might, overshadowing with its fantastic bulk the councils of Central and Western Europe, sat upon the gravestone of autocracy, cutting off from air, from light, from all knowledge of themselves and of the world, the buried millions of Russian people. Not the most determined cockney sentimentalist could have had the heart to weep for joy at the thought of its teeming numbers! (Conrad, vol. 3, 2004: 67-68)

Therefore Russia appears as marginalised being a land without knowledge and any hope of redemption while the ideal of revolution appears marginalised by virtue of its being “corrupted”. Beth Sharon Ash looks at the process of marginalisation in the novels and examines:

Like *The Secret Agent*, the central conflicts in *Under Western Eyes* involve the phantasmatic polarities of melancholia—abandonment/idealization, suicide/murder - against which Conrad defends by means of irony, whether in the form of argument or authorial posture. Razumov's primary psychodrama moves from defensive idealization of the father to the collapse of this defense into an uncanny ambivalence that cannot be dispelled, and into self-loathing, abandonment, and isolation as he traces the downward

trajectory of depression. Yet by staging this ill-being within a Dostoevskian frame Conrad can label it a malaise of the 'Russian soul,' as if such malaise were endemic to a national type rather than a consequence of the way Conrad displaces his own psychological idiom onto that 'soul'. (1999: 273-274)

The English narrator chronicles the incidents in the text with a certain cultural distance and makes repeated efforts in the novel to suggest that the features of the fundamental values like honour and shame of the persons depicted in the novel are ways different from the usual aspects of the Western culture. Therefore, the underlying fact remains that Western Europe forms the gaze that scrutinizes the social worlds of Russia and revolutions, and the same gaze impels Conrad to define his text with the title *'Under Western Eyes'*. Being engaged in the process of this cultural estrangement of the narrator with his subjects, Conrad unconsciously marginalises the social environ of the events narrated and politicises his authorial stand. The narrator, though claimed to be impartial in judging the cultural and political values and motives of the revolutionaries in the text, practically expresses his ideological commitments covertly through Razumov. Razumov's conviction in the imperceptible evolutionary changes of a society without perceptible revolutionary interventions does betray the noncommittal cultural mindset of a traditional imperial British subject. The cultural narrative of empire is maintained without disruptions like anarchy and revolts in the social, political and the cultural spheres whatsoever.

And yet, Conrad is suspicious of the utopian and benevolent discourse of the empire, whose reckless capitalistic ambition is no more sacrosanct to him, as is already evinced in the previous chapter on *Nostromo*. This dual and ambivalent position of Conrad is imperative in appreciating the narrator's ideology in *Under Western Eyes*, and Ash casts light on this aspect as she highlights that the narrator's "conventional English decency, modified by a general refusal to take responsibility, is actually the irresolute liberal response to social conflict (utopianism and authoritarianism) in the Western world" (275). The final position that Conrad takes ideologically in the texts like *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* is that of a complete rejection of all possible political creeds as the key characters in his novels

remain ultimately in “an equivocal deferral of all positions” (286). The experience of the revolutionaries in Russia, or the devastating aftermath of the anarchist activities in London are all cordoned off in their otherness. The essentialist power of the empire represents resistance in the failure of the anarchists and the revolutionaries and simultaneously critiques its myths of rationality and enlightenment in the Western Institution’s intrinsic vulnerability to any attempt of disruption. If Razumov carries within him the essential aspects of the Western enlightenment and rationality, in contrast to the ardent emotional sentimentality of the revolutionaries in *Under Western Eyes*, then his maimed condition at the end of the novel brings to light the inner vulnerability of the same discourse of enlightenment that is ingrained within the culture of the individual. In fine, we may close in with the brilliant observation of Ash when she perceives the ideological duality of Conrad working behind the political themes of *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes* as a product of the author’s psychosocial dilemma and further adds that “in effect, [Conrad] leaves himself no location that is not woven from the strands of a dangerous ambiguity, wherein all political places or affiliations become susceptible to subversion by his view of a world collapsing under the weight of vainglory and duplicitousness” (286). Joseph Conrad, born as a Polish subject of Russian autocracy and afterwards naturalized into British citizenship, finally remains ideologically located between culture and empire as his position in the narrative of European imperial eminence is at once that of an insider and an outsider.