

Research article

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Paradoxical Narrative and Cultural Critique: A Study of Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*

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KEYWORDS

*Paradoxical Narrative;
Linguistic Skepticism;
Alienation of the Individual;
Negation of Revolution*

ABSTRACT

This study adopts the method of close textual analysis to systematically examine the intricate paradoxical narratives in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. The research reveals how the novel consistently creates paradoxes across its narrative structure, character development, and narrative perspective in order to create a polysemic and ambiguous aesthetic tension. Narratively the dual narrative voices and meta-fictional framework perpetual constantly suspend any definitive "truth," foregrounding Conrad's profound skepticism toward linguistic reliability and fiction's function to reflect reality. In characterization, the diverse revolutionaries—alienated and trapped in contradictions between identity and action—expose through their hypocrisy, chaos, and disorder Conrad's thorough negation of the Russian Revolution. Culturally, the conflicted identity of the narrator, the "English teacher," simultaneously demonstrates the limit of Western-centric perspectives and manifests the author's critical doubt and a reflection of colonial discourse and Western hegemony. Thus, paradox emerges not merely as Conrad's crucial narrative strategy but as his distinctive mode of critical engagement with history, politics, and culture. This research ultimately demonstrates how *Under Western Eyes* achieves a synthesis of literary aesthetics and cultural critique through paradoxical narration, offering new perspectives for reassessing Conrad's literary project.

INTRODUCTION

Under Western Eyes is one of Conrad's four political novels and his only full-length novel set primarily in Russia. Setting in pre-October Revolution, the novel explores the conflict between autocracy and revolution, describes the fates of various Russians entangled in this conflict, and analyzes the underlying Russian psychology. Due to the themes of "crime" and "repentance", Anglo-American academia regards it as a sister work to

Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

John Peters notes "*Under Western Eyes* perhaps is Conrad's most unusual novel. It is the work closest to his painful memories, the most humanized work, and the finale of his creative peak. In many ways, *Under Western Eyes* contains Conrad's most important ideas. The great questions of political philosophy—solidarity, betrayal, polity, society, the individual, the nature of human life—are fused together in this work. After its publication, Conrad's writing changed dramatically. Under

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Western Eyes amalgamates everything Conrad sought to express in his earlier and later works; thus, it can be seen as the pinnacle of his peculiar and glorious literary career" (Peters, 2013). The comment illustrates the significance of this novel for Conrad and indicate its complexity and appeal as a fiction. One reason for its complex polysemy and compelling nature is the pervasive use of paradoxical narrative throughout the novel. This article categorizes the paradoxes in the work into three types as follows and further explores their implications.

It should be noted that the definitions of paradox, both in Chinese and foreign scholarship, tend to be ambiguous and polysemous (Chen, 2014). This paper adopts the meanings of contradiction, polysemy, irrationality, and apparent plausibility masking actual falsity.

ELUSIVE TRUTH: MULTIPLE NARRATIVES AND META-FICTIONAL STRUCTURE

The text employs a meta-fictional narrative structure through the use of two narrators—the "English teacher" and Razumov—resulting in narration and comment from different perspectives based on one event, leading to ambiguity and polysemy in the text. Furthermore, the first narrator, the "English teacher," consistently reveals doubts about his own cognitive abilities, particularly his understanding of Russians. Meanwhile, Razumov, who narrates through his diary, employs an unconventional diary-writing style that makes readers deeply suspicious of the truth of his accounts and his writing intentions. The paradoxes existing on these two levels create a distance between the events recorded in the text and the actual occurrences, bringing a sense of elusive truth to the reader.

In terms of the entire work, on the surface, all content we encounter in the work is relayed by the English teacher, the first-person narrator. He obtains the diary of Kirylo Sidonovich Razumov and attempts to "present" its contents to the reader: "It is based on a document; all I have brought to it is my knowledge of the Russian language....." (Conrad, 2013). However, beneath the English teacher, the protagonist Razumov narrates through his diary. Thus, the work presents two basic levels: the author Conrad who depicts the storyteller, the "English teacher"; and the "English teacher" describes Razumov, the story's protagonist. This structural arrangement makes readers question and doubt the true narrator of the work and its veracity.

While the structure already suspends the story's truthfulness, it is even more striking that the first-person narrator, the English teacher, expresses self-doubt. Firstly, as a Westerner, he admits his inability "to understand the Russian soul." Secondly, he believes that "words are the great foes of reality." Thirdly, he engages in retrospective narration from an omniscient, even interpretive, standpoint. Fourthly, the entire story is not presented in the sequence of his "moving from igno-

rance to knowledge"—there are a lot of flashbacks and interludes in the text. For example, in Part One, the English teacher uses a flashback to recount how the revolutionary Haldin, after assassinating Minister P in St. Petersburg, turns to Razumov for help; Razumov, after an internal struggle, decides to betray Haldin, leading to his arrest and execution. Razumov then decides to "vanish," wishing to continue his studious life. In Part Two, the elderly English teacher recalls, again in flashback, his various experiences encountered Haldin's sister in Geneva. Part Three is narrated by the English teacher, describing Razumov's meeting with Madame S and conversations with revolutionaries. Part Four begins with the narrator "I" tracing back to the end of Part One regarding Razumov's conversation with Councillor Mikulin. With Mikulin's advice and arrangement, Razumov finally goes to Geneva as a spy, fulfilling his mission to "keep an eye on European revolution." All this significantly undermines the credibility of the narration.

Simultaneously, the account by Razumov—the person involved in the events, the owner of the diary, and the story's protagonist—should be reliable conventionally. But in fact, the diary left by Razumov defies convention, not entirely conforming to the typical form of a diary. For instance, most of the content is not written chronologically; although all items are dated, some span months and extend for dozens of pages. The beginning of the diary is a recollection—narrating an event that happened about one year ago (Conrad, 2013). Moreover, even more unbelievably, the author hints that the very act of writing the diary might be deceptive. For example, when five lines written by Razumov are discovered by the authorities and presented to Mikulin as evidence of his wavering convictions, Razumov explicitly tells Mikulin that his intention was merely to deceive (Conrad, 2013). That is, the protagonist Razumov might have fabricated parts of the facts in his diary; his reason for writing the diary may not have been simply to record daily events truthfully—it might contain fabricated content, even elements intended to exonerate himself. Thus, specifically regarding Razumov as the third-person narrator (within his own diary), everything is fraught with paradox and contradiction, making it impossible to discern truth from falsehood.

In summary, structurally, this work is a story within a story, possessing a typical meta-fictional narrative structure. This aligns with the scholarly observation that most of Conrad's novels have two basic levels. First, Conrad depicts the storyteller, and the storyteller describes the characters. Consequently, the text presents two narrative levels, corresponding to the presence of multiple narrators, leading to the same events and characters being repeatedly recounted and commented upon by different narrators. Second, and more notably, the two narrators—the English teacher and the protagonist Razumov narrating through his diary—both express doubt about the truthfulness of their own narra-

tives, further obscuring the truth within the work. The existence of these two aspects maintains a distance between the reader seeking the truth and the indiscernible reality, creating aesthetic tension. In other words, the use of meta-fictional narrative structure makes the work's implications more polysemous, rich, and ambiguous, thereby leaving ample space for multiple interpretations by the reader.

Why, then, did Conrad employ these narrative techniques to innovate upon and expand the great tradition of literary realism prevalent in his time? This is closely linked to his view of language and his understanding of the relationship between fiction and reality. In the literary tradition before Conrad, novels were typically narrated by a single narrator and were seen as a reflection of the real world; realism was the conventional mode, and the function of the novel was considered to be the reflection of reality. Underlying this proposition was the belief that language could accurately reflect reality. Conrad, however, held a different view, as expressed in the novel's outset through the English teacher: "If I have ever had these gifts in in any sort of living form they have been smothered out of existence a long time ago under a wilderness of words. Words as is well known are the great foes of reality" (Conrad, 2013). That is, in Conrad's view, language is unreliable and cannot fully represent reality; therefore, the novel, constructed from language, lacks truthfulness. Concerning the relationship between the novel and reality, Conrad believed that the novel cannot reflect reality; it is merely a fabrication. As one researcher summarizes, the arrangement of meta-fictional structure and dual narrators "force the reader to understand the constructed nature of the novel, while simultaneously invite the reader to reflect on the subjective construction of the real world we live in. After recognizing the fact of construction, all absolute truth vanishes, and skepticism becomes the only reliable intellectual force" (Deng, 2013). It was precisely Conrad's skepticism regarding language's representational capacity—his sense of linguistic crisis—and his different understanding of the relationship between language and reality that led him to pioneer the novel form that intersperses narration with commentary, thus establishing him as a forerunner of modernist fiction.

FROM PERSONAL ALIENATION TO THE NEGATION OF REVOLUTION

In the author's depiction, Russian citizens—whether university students like Razumov and Kostia, revolutionaries like Peter Ivanovitch, Sophia Antonovna, Nikita, the peasant Ziemianitch, or even Councillor Mikulin, a high-ranking state official—though differing in status and position, are all replete with paradoxes such as the disjunction between words and deeds, the confusion of good and evil, mismatched attire and identity, and severe incongruity between status and actions. This arrangement aims to show that under dark autocratic

rule, the Russian people, from top to bottom, are severely alienated and their humanity is distorted. Placing the burden of revolution on such a nation is doomed to failure and holds no promise.

Through detailed descriptions of language, appearance, psychology, and life experiences, the novel portrays dozens of distinct characters. Nevertheless, they share similarities: first, the vast majority are Russians, or at least directly connected to the Russian revolution; second, they all exhibit paradoxes to varying degrees. Given the relatively abundant research on Razumov, this article will focus on other characters.

Peter Ivanovitch is a Russian exile and one of the main leaders of the Geneva revolutionary group. In his youth, he lived a dissolute life. The sudden death of a high-society girl he was preparing to marry prompted a spiritual repentance. Later, the autocratic government watched him, imprisoned him, and beat him severely. Subsequently, shackled, he managed to escape prison, crossed the Suez Canal and reached the West. Upon reaching the shores of Southern Europe, he stopped and began writing his autobiography. This autobiography became an annual bestseller upon publication. Then he wrote other books, which are all aimed at promoting humanity. A concurrent theme throughout these works is the worship of women.

The text specifically quotes Ivanovitch's writing about his beliefs from his "autobiography" to illustrate his judgment from other perspective: "The great Powers of Europe are bound to shall disappear—and the cause of their collapse will be very simple. They will exhaust themselves struggling against their proletariat. In Russia it is different. 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" (Conrad, 2013).

Here, anyone with slight historical knowledge can spot the flaw—his analysis of the domestic situation in Russia is severely mistaken. How can a revolutionary who fails to accurately grasp the domestic situation lead a revolution? Can a revolution led by such a person succeed? The outcome is predictable. It is from here that the paradoxes in his character gradually emerge.

As a feminist, the words he describes Russian women like this: "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" (Conrad, 2013). But in fact, while praising women, he simultaneously torments and mistreats his female servant. This is presented very directly twice in the text. Once, when Miss Haldin first goes to the Château Borel to meet Madame S, the servant Tekla voluntarily tells Miss Haldin about her plight (Conrad, 2013). Another time is during Razumov's first visit to Madame S; the

maid's reaction to Ivanovitch's actions—"would dart out to the table and pour him out another tumblerful," "She was nervous, tremulous.....Have they terrified her out of her senses with ghosts.....her lips trembled in the manner of a scared person about to burst into speech" (Conrad,2013)—also reveals his usual attitude towards the maid. This directly reveals his true nature—a veritable pseudo-feminist.

Furthermore, he appears enthusiastic about the revolution on the surface, but in reality, he lacks a clear understanding of it and does not organize practical, effective actions, merely inciting Miss Haldin to become a fanatic (Conrad,2013). Simultaneously, his focus is not the revolutionary career but the pursuit of the wealthy widow Madame de S, eagerly hoping to inherit her vast fortune. As a revolutionary, he is money-grubbing and pursues a wealthy widow, which indicates that he lacks of class stance; he is fundamentally a pseudo-revolutionary.

Additionally, he exhibits other behaviors inconsistent with his identity. For instance, the maid says that his forgetfulness or breaking appointments is commonplace (Conrad,2013), a habitual behavior clearly unbecoming a serious revolutionary. The maid tells Razumov: "Don't you understand that Peter Ivanovitch must direct, inspire, influence? That's the breath of his life. There can never be too many disciples. He can't bear thinking of anyone escaping him. And a woman too! There is nothing to be done without women he says" (Conrad,2013). This reveals his desire of control. In fact, this behavior is little different from that of an autocrat.

Beyond his behaviors, his attire is also full of paradox. He ".....in a long dressing-gown of some dark stuff. It descended in straight lines down to his feet. He suggested a monk or a prophet, a robust figure of some desert-dweller—something Asiatic; and the dark glasses in conjunction with this costume made him more mysterious than ever in the subdued light (Conrad, 2013). Generally, leaders of revolutions project an image of uprightness and openness. Here, however, Ivanovitch does not show his true face, giving an impression of inscrutability. Moreover, the cassock, attire clearly inconsistent with his identity, which further deepens the reader's suspicion about his true role.

Sophia Antonovna is a female revolutionary liaison, Ivanovitch's deputy, operating in the United States, Russia, Poland, and elsewhere. She is renowned, possessing a perplexing gaze and an eccentric demeanor (Conrad,2013). As one of the revolutionary leaders, her cautious vetting of Razumov's background seems reasonable on the surface. But upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that her interrogation of Razumov reveals fanaticism, radicalism and violence—"Life, not to be vile must be a revolt—a pitiless protest—all the time" (Conrad,2013), she declares. Razumov's comment and evaluation toward her are, "black and impenetrable like the mental caverns where revolutionary

thought should sit plotting the violent way of its dream of changes." Simultaneously, her word had such a weight in the 'active' section of every party. She was much more representative than the great Peter Ivanovitch. Stripped of rhetoric, mysticism, and theories she was the true spirit of destructive revolution" (Conrad,2013).

As the plot unfolds, through her behaviors, especially her evaluation of Ivanovitch, we see that she is a person who confuses right and wrong and lacks any firm stance. In fact, she knew early that Ivanovitch's approach to Madame S was for money. But when Razumov expresses "disgust" at Ivanovitch's behavior, Antonovna immediately defends him, believing he is "an inspired person" (Conrad,2013). Furthermore, about two years after Razumov's confession, the narrator, the English teacher, meets Antonovna. When discussing that Antonovna knew about Ivanovitch's secret meeting with the Head of the Secret Police, Mikulin, she is not only unsurprised but still defends him. Particularly when the narrator learns that Ivanovitch, failing to obtain Madame S's inheritance as desired, is not living in his coveted Mediterranean resort, the Riviera, but with a peasant girl in Russia, the narrator expresses surprise and speaks disrespectfully. This female revolutionary, abnormally, again emphasizes that "Peter Ivanovitch is a man inspired." That is, even at this point, she still defends him, showing she is a pseudo-revolutionary who confuses black and white.

Among the revolutionaries in Geneva, there is one particularly noticeable figure. This is primarily due to his appearance: "The first, great white hairless face, double chin, prominent stomach, which he seemed to carry forward consciously within a strongly distended overcoat....." (Conrad,2013). Furthermore, the author clearly describes his voice: "The abrupt squeaks of the fat man seemed to proceed from that thing like a balloon he carried under his overcoat" (Conrad,2013). His overall impression left is: "the stolidity of his attitude, the big feet, the lifeless, hanging hand, the enormous bloodless cheek, the thin wisps of hair straggling down the fat nape of the neck"(Conrad,2013), giving Razumov the overall feeling of being "terrible and ludicrous." Such an image and impression of a revolutionary greatly contradict our normal expectations. Usually, regardless of a revolutionary's physical appearance, their involvement in a glorious and great career renders them noble. But here, the author's unconventional description of Nikita's image leaves us deeply perplexed. Later, after Razumov confesses everything, while others hesitate about how to deal with him, Nikita is the first to step forward, ostensibly acting righteously for the revolutionaries, and bursts Razumov's eardrums. But in reality, Nikita "was a legacy from his predecessor to Mikulin." That is, he had long been embedded within the revolutionary party, a spy sent by the secret police.

Ziemianitch was originally a peasant, after moving to the city, who made by a living renting sledges and car-

riages. In the eyes of the brave revolutionary Haldin, the driver Ziemianitch has "a bright spirit!, a hardy soul" (Conrad, 2013), he is even "the bright soul" (Conrad, 2013) of Russia. But in reality, he is a drunkard, often drinking himself into a stupor. In the story, when the protagonist Razumov, following Haldin's instructions, goes to the suburban inn to find Ziemianitch, the latter is dead drunk because a woman he liked (reportedly a witch) has run away. No matter how Razumov tries to wake him, it's useless. Finally, the exasperated Razumov beats him severely. That is, if Ziemianitch had not been drunk then, he might have successfully helped Haldin escape, thus preventing Haldin's arrest, Razumov's confession-induced deafness, and a series of subsequent tragedies. More importantly, as a driver, he transports both good and bad people (Conrad, 2013). Of course, one might interpret his equal treatment with all customers as a means to conceal his true identity as a revolutionary. However, this is not the case; the text repeatedly shows that he fundamentally lacks principles and stance, merely being a muddle-headed laborer.

Furthermore, Councillor Mikulin, Head of the Secret Police, is originally a character loyal to the autocratic system, low-key, resourceful, cautious, and immensely influential, favoring the path of social reform. But his fate—being tried by the state—is completely unexpected by everyone.

Kostia, a fellow student of Haldin and Razumov, has the nickname "the Madman." He comes from a family like nouveau riche, usually foolishly cheerful, rash, garrulous, and restless. However, when asked to escort Razumov away, he becomes "firm in tone," forming a sharp contrast with his usual behavior.

Through analysis, we find that most characters in the text are alienated, existing in a state where they confuse right and wrong, lose rationality and judgment, and thus their behaviors are full of paradoxes. Most of them are superficially closely related to the so-called revolutionary activities, but in fact, their true identities are pseudo-revolutionaries, assassins, and muddled individuals. The author's creation of such a group of revolutionaries is closely linked to his own attitude towards the Russian Revolution. In Conrad's view, revolutionaries in an autocratic, oppressive environment are themselves a motley crew; placing the burden of revolution on their shoulders is doomed to failure. Simultaneously, the novel's portrayal of other characters like the priest who holds multiple roles and related plot arrangements further imply the extensive reach and profound impact of Russian autocracy and its accompanying terror—it covers every inch of Russia, envelops everyone, and no one can escape it. Moreover, the eventual state trial of Mikulin, who served the autocratic regime, is equally meaningful—the barbaric Russian autocratic system has no stance, principle, or bottom line, sparing not even its own friends and servants.

In the self-preface of this book, Conrad states: "the

most terrifying reflexion (I am speaking now for myself) is that all these people are not the product of the exceptional but of the general—of the normality of their place and time—and race.....The oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together; and the world is brought once more face to face with the truth of the saying that the tiger cannot change his stripes nor the leopard his spots" (Conrad, 2013). From this sentence, we can discern the author's basic judgement of Russia as a nation and Russians as a people: autocratic, ignorant, evil, and prone to fantasy; thus, the revolution occurring in this country holds no future or hope.

Connecting this to Conrad's life, we can easily understand why he portrays Russia with paradox and full of satire. Born in a Polish noble family, Conrad's ancestors were actively involved in political movements against Tsarist Russian autocracy, resulting in either execution or exile. The young Conrad lived with his parents in their place of exile—Vologda, Russia. Due to the harsh environment, both parents died of illness successively, and he was raised by his uncle. Poland, his motherland, due to its special situations and geographical location, became the focus of European politics in the 19th century and was ultimately partitioned by Russia, Germany, and Austria. If Poland brought him the bitterness of a lost nation, then for Tsarist Russia, the primary perpetrator of this tragedy, Conrad harbored enduring, deep-seated hatred. It can be said that this sense of loathing permeated his entire life and determined his impression of Russia.

THE PARADOX OF THE "ENGLISH TEACHER" AND THE QUESTIONING OF WESTERN CENTRISM

The "English teacher" in the text is a Westerner who understands Russian, has some contact with Russians, and has a relatively good understanding of Russian society. He is essentially the author's surrogate. On the one hand, he examines the Russian nation and its revolution from a Western perspective, believing that the self-contradictory Russians living under an autocratic regime are doomed to lead their nation towards light; meanwhile, through his boundless praise for Haldin's sister, indicating that he still has a glimmer of hope for the Russian nation. On the other hand, as a Westerner, he not only possesses obvious defects such as narrow horizon and limited cognitive abilities but also holds a skeptical attitude towards the so-called democratic system of which the West is so proud. The aforementioned paradoxes imply his questioning of Western centrism.

Typically, in the Western view, Westerners are the noblest, representing all positive attributes like rationality, justice, and enlightenment. The narrator of this text, the English teacher, is a Westerner, so he should presumably be presented in a very positive character. However, the text presents him as narrow-minded and

possessing a rather superficial understanding of external affairs and people, hence the paradox arises. That is, the Western narrator in this text has obvious flaws; he is not the perfect embodiment or incarnation of truth. This is manifested specifically in the following aspects.

First, as mentioned earlier, he is severely self-doubting, constantly admitting his own inadequacies. For example, at the novel's beginning, while stating that he has "considerable connections" in the Geneva district known as "Little Russia," meaning he is well-acquainted with various people and events, he simultaneously says he "has no comprehension of the Russian character" (Conrad, 2013). A similar situation exists at the novel's end. That is, his cognitive abilities are relatively limited; he is far from the omnipotent being boasted of in Western narratives. Furthermore, in Chapter Four, the final chapter, when "I" witnesses the following: Razumov, having come to Geneva, meets the Haldin women, knowing the mother is tormented by the mystery of Haldin's death while he himself falls in love with Miss Haldin, suffering such mental anguish that he is nearly driven to break down, his "expression of a somnambulist" (Conrad, 2013), the narrator vaguely feels that this state of the one person who could bring hope to the Haldin women might deal a greater blow to their already tragic lives. He subconsciously feels he should visit them, hoping to do something. But "at the last moment," he "hesitated as to going there at all" (Conrad, 2013). That is, on one hand, he sympathizes with the Haldin women, believing he is "not yet callous enough to be incapable of sympathy," especially for Miss Haldin, thinking "there was almost all her youth before her.....a terribly sombre youth given over to the hazards of a furious strife between equally ferocious antagonisms"; but on the other hand, he "felt so helpless" and even thinks her youth has nothing to do with him; he is a person who "lingered over (his) thoughts, more than (he) should have done" (Conrad, 2013). Clearly, such a person, with low initiative and prone to hesitation, differs somewhat from the Westerner portrayed in Western narratives. Another example: near the end of the novel, when narrating Razumov going to the home of Laspara, the "editor of the Living Word, confidant of conspirators, inditer of sanguinary menaces and manifestos, suspected of being in the secret of every plot" (Conrad, 2013), i.e., the place where the revolutionaries gather, to confess the truth about Haldin's arrest, the so-called "confession" event, he admits this event was "my Western eyes had failed to see" (Conrad, 2013). That is, in fact, he does not possess an omniscient perspective; many events he knows only through Razumov's diary, or rather, he processes them based on Razumov's recorded accounts.

Second, as mentioned before, through the "English teacher's" eyes and words, we see that all sorts of Russians, even everything Russian, are presented to the reader in a negative, dark, lifeless, and hopeless light. Besides the mean and contradictory behaviors of char-

acters from different classes and ranks detailed earlier, the novel also repeatedly links the image of "snow and ice" with Russia. For instance, the assassination of Minister P that initiates the entire narrative, Razumov's search for Ziemianitch, and other plot points occur in icy, snowy landscapes. That is, through his "agent" the English teacher's eyes, the author presents readers the entire Russian nation and people as having no merits or aspects worthy of affirmation. Precisely because this judgment does not align with historical facts, many readers and critics view Conrad as a western-centered thinker, or believe the Russia in his writing is the Russia seen through Western eyes, that he examines and even disparages Russia from a view of western centralism, thus echo his work's title.

However, there are also exceptions in the text, mainly manifested in the "English teacher's" unstinting praise for the revolutionary Haldin's sister. When first seeing her, he finds her gaze fearless yet non-aggressive, "a naive yet thoughtful assurance is a better definition" (Conrad, 2013). When he meets her again after she has gone to the Château Borel to inquire about her brother—that is, after she has had contact with the so-called Russian revolutionaries—he finds "her voicefascinating with its masculine and bird-like quality, had the accent of spontaneous conviction" (Conrad, 2013). After she meets Razumov, "Her walk was not that hybrid and uncertain gliding some women affect but a frank, strong, healthy movement forward" (Conrad, 2013). Even when he sees Miss Haldin after she learns the truth about her brother's death and after Mrs. Haldin's death, he finds her "looked matured.....smooth-browed, with a resolute profile. She gave me a new view of herself, and I marvelled at that something grave and measured in her voice, in her movement, in her manner. It was the perfection of collected independence" (Conrad, 2013). That is, in the "English teacher's" mind, Miss Haldin consistently appears in an extremely positive light, even after being influenced by that motley crew of Russian revolutionaries; she remains bright, resolute, and confident.

In summary, regarding Russians, or one could say so-called revolutionaries, the "English teacher's" attitude is full of contradiction—when examining Russia from a Western perspective, he finds it utterly worthless, without any future or hope; but when facing the young woman Miss Haldin, he can discern her shining qualities. That is, he does not completely and utterly negate Russia.

Third is his perception of the Western world. For example, when he learns that Mikulin—the dedicated, loyal, resilient, gentle, and cultivated former Head of the Secret Police—has been tried by the state, he cannot help but exclaim: "It seems that the savage autocracy, no more than the divine democracy, does not limit its diet exclusively to the bodies of its enemies" (Conrad, 2013). Superficially, he is criticizing that Russian autocratic system that devours people. But upon

reflection, one finds that he places Western so-called democracy on par with, and equates it to Russian autocracy, thereby indicating his own severe doubts about Western democratic systems. Moreover, another detail in the text hints the narrator's mockery and scorn for Western democracy: when Razumov is writing on a small island in Lake Geneva named Rousseau Island, he encounters a statue of Rousseau. We know that in the Western world, Rousseau is a key founder of modern democracy. But in the eyes of Razumov, the narrator's subject, it is presented as such an existence—"There was something of naive, odious and inane simplicity about that unfrequented tiny crumb of earth named after Jean Jacques Rousseau. Something pretentious and shabby too"(Conrad,2013). Clearly, through his evaluation of the island, he indirectly expresses his critique of the Western democratic system.

Edward comments the narrators in Conrad's book in *Culture and Imperialism*: "Despite their European names and mannerisms, Conrad's narrators are not average unreflecting witnesses of European imperialism. They do not simply accept what goes on in the name of the imperial idea: they think about it a lot, they worry about it, they are actually quite anxious about whether they can make it seem like a routine thing" (Said,1994). Although this was said analysis regarding *Heart of Darkness*, it is quite apt here. That is, Conrad held serious doubts about Western centrism; he did not agree with the Western world's positioning and evaluation of itself and the Orient—namely, that everything about Western white people represented advancement, civilization, and rationality, while the non-West symbolized ignorance and backwardness, and only the West could guide the non-West towards enlightenment, reason, and the future. Specifically, in *Under Western Eyes*, although the English teacher is a Westerner, he possesses obvious flaws; he is a very real existence, not the idealized incarnation found in Western narratives. Simultaneously, he does not favor everything in Western; rather, his behaviors are full of contradictions and paradoxes, especially regarding the so-called democratic system of the West, about which he has many criticisms. Furthermore, he does not completely negate Russia, indirectly expressing hope for Russia's future through his discovery of Miss Haldin's virtues. It is through the above that we glimpse how the "English teacher," representing Conrad, questioned, negated, and reflected upon the concept of Western centrism and its specific manifestation in that era—colonial ideology. This was very ahead and commendable for its time.

CONCLUSION

Under Western Eyes is filled with contradictions, ambiguities, and polysemy due to the abundance of paradoxes existing from its structure to its characters and even the narrator, the "English teacher," laying the

foundation for multiple interpretations in literary criticism. Furthermore, by breaking the dominant tradition of realist fiction and pioneering and developing a genre that intersperses narration with commentary, Conrad became a pivotal figure in the history of English literature, indeed in the entire tradition of realist literature and its modernist transformation, bridging the old and the new. Hence, the significance of exploring deeply the author and his text is self-evident.

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