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## Insurgent Testimonies

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## **Compelled Confessions and Forced Attachments in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* and "Poland Revisited"**

Through the framing narrative of an English witness, Conrad's 1911 novel, *Under Western Eyes*, depicts the underground dealings of administrators and challengers of the Russian state as they travel across various geopolitical, cultural, and linguistic terrains of Europe. Suggesting the central role testimony will play in this text, Conrad places readers before the law in the first sentence. The novel commences with the flourish of a paraph, a confession sealed by the novel's narrator, an English teacher of languages: "To begin with I wish to disclaim the possession of those high gifts of imagination and expression which would have enabled my pen to create for the reader the personality of the man who called himself, after the Russian custom, Cyril son of Isidor—Kirylo Sidorovitch—Razumov."<sup>1</sup> By disclaiming possession of these gifts, the narrator confesses that he cannot take responsibility for the narrative that follows. He cannot claim authority for the events about to unfold and therefore cannot guarantee that the story will be a truthful or accurate account of the personality on which it centers or a faithful rendering

of the common nouns to which that man's proper name refers: the Russian language, particularly writing (Kirylo, or Cyrillic), and reason (Razumov, or son of reason). Confessions of this sort repeat throughout the novel, insisting that the work we are reading is not an original text but a transcription of one that already exists. The English work, recites the narrator, "is based on a document; all I have brought to it is my knowledge of the Russian language" (3). The document that forms the novel's central embedded narrative is another confession, composed by the Russian student-turned-spy-turned-double agent, Razumov.

That confession would play such a prominent role in one of the most autobiographically inflected of Conrad's novels is intriguing, given the distaste Conrad expressed for this act in his actual autobiography, *A Personal Record*. Conrad associates confession with excessive self-exposure and revolutionary ideologies, which are embodied in the corpus of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Conrad worries that confession will overtake his autobiography; "the matter in hand is to keep these reminiscences from turning into confessions, a form of literary activity discredited by Jean-Jacques Rousseau on account of the extreme thoroughness he brought to the work of justifying his own existence."<sup>2</sup> Rousseau uses this debased form to justify himself because he was "not a writer of fiction" but rather an "artless moralist, as is clearly demonstrated by his anniversaries being celebrated with marked emphasis by the heirs of the French Revolution."<sup>3</sup> Despite its association with assaults on established authority and literary artfulness—or because of them—confession drives not one but two of Conrad's most personal pieces, *Under Western Eyes* and the 1915 essay "Poland Revisited." It links these later works focused on Europe to Conrad's earlier fictions, whose plots are located in colonial peripheries and whose topics are the vicissitudes of colonial encounter: the crystallization of compelled communities. The emergence of these disturbing and unwilling connections to others is dramatized in narratives of "going native."

Conrad's later works, however, are typically read in light of his shift away from conflicts attending imperial-national and colonial consolidation, charted across such fictions as *Almayer's Folly*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Nostramo*. In 1905, Conrad's subject turns "from the map of Empire to the map of Europe,"<sup>4</sup> as his fiction enters metropolitan spaces populated with cosmopolitan characters whose identities are hybrid and who speak a

globalized English detached from a national origin: London in the 1890s in *The Secret Agent*, St. Petersburg and Geneva during the Russian revolution of 1905 in *Under Western Eyes*. In recent years, these later “political novels,”<sup>5</sup> and even some earlier ones, have elicited a more generous account of their author’s response to imperial modernity than previously. Critical tenets following Chinua Achebe’s famous takedown of *Heart of Darkness* that identify in Conrad’s oeuvre “complicity with (at best) or perpetuation of (at worst) racist, sexist, and classist,” nationalist, and imperialist ideologies have been revised and even reversed.<sup>6</sup> Such readings argue that his works’ rhetorical tactics challenge the foundations of categories “East” and “West,”<sup>7</sup> that his characters’ performances denaturalize the national as the primary mode of subjective identification,<sup>8</sup> and that his cast of English speakers reflect a diffused, internally split language that interpellates a global imagined community of readers while undoing the hierarchy between metropolitan center and colonial periphery.<sup>9</sup>

Confession in *Under Western Eyes* and “Poland Revisited” complicates this critical refashioning of Conrad from an author guided by romantic, organicist principles of political community, whose fiction rehearses imperial-national epistemologies, into one whose worldly perspective suspends or contests imperial-nationalist determinations of subjects, languages, and collectivities. Of course, *Under Western Eyes*—a “Russian novel” written in English by a Polish subject-turned-British citizen, framed as a translation composed by a multilingual teacher of languages, and addressed to a supranational community of readers, the West—appears to embody just this perspective. And indeed, through its handling of confession, the novel registers the deteriorating boundaries of the nation-state, decline of imperialism, and the eruption of revolution by articulating subjectivity, language, and “East” and “West” as constructed and contingent rather than grounded. But it is precisely because it illuminates these instabilities that the work undercuts the critical valence critics impute to their disclosure. Shifting linguistic, geopolitical, and social formations of the first decades of the twentieth century are presented as a crisis because they threaten intolerable kinships. The conflict animating the novels of empire does not disappear when Conrad’s plots travel from colonial contact zones to revolutionary and pre-War Europe, therefore. It is redirected onto the form of confession, which is propelled by traumas of anticolonial resistance and revolution.

Bearing witness to intertwined revolutionary and colonial histories in Poland and Russia in which alliances are ambivalent and collectivities amorphous and contested, confession in Conrad's works creates unintended binds and commitments to others. It elaborates a structure of responsibility that departs from and unsettles not only conservative organicist models of community based in race or nation but also a humanist ethic of conviviality and cosmopolitanism. This ethic is conceived as a conscious obligation to those beyond one's ethnic, religious, and national affiliations, a "recognition of our responsibility for every human being."<sup>10</sup> It constitutes willed efforts "to act morally and justly . . . in the face of otherness" by citizen-subjects "dissatisfied by the prospect of being forcibly attached by patriotism and nationalism to cultural and political formations that are wrong, unjust, evil, or misguided."<sup>11</sup> The crossing of borders and mixing of cultures that defines modernity is often thought to encourage cultivation of this pacifist ethic.<sup>12</sup> In "Poland Revisited" and *Under Western Eyes*, borders are crossed, cultures mixed, and obligations to others made; however, because they are orchestrated through confession, these commitments are neither the result of consciousness or choice, nor peaceful. As *A Personal Record* warns, confession can operate without witnesses' consent. Responding to political violence, it forces attachments and regulates the formal staging of revolution and resistance, topics connected to personal and collective pasts Conrad has been reluctant to address. *Under Western Eyes*'s story "had long haunted me," he confides; "now it must come out." The book aims to "capture the Russian soul" but also hopes to "make peace with [his] Polish shades." Written four years after its publication, "Poland Revisited" indicates that the novel has failed to exorcise these specters, that its confessional mode cannot bring things to an end. The essay serves as a lens through which to view *Under Western Eyes* not only because Conrad "treated the problems of Russia from a Polish perspective"<sup>13</sup> but because it both employs and enacts an autocritique of the earlier work's central mode of expression, providing instructions for reading the formal predicament of confession the novel relates.

### *Double Thought in "Poland Revisited"*

Launched with a condemnation of revolutionary violence, "Poland Revisited" recounts the author's return to Poland with his family a year earlier on

the eve of the Great War. That it is his first visit to Poland in twenty years and Cracow in forty evinces his ambivalence toward his Polish past, itself rife with revolutionary conflict. The son of Polish anticolonial revolutionaries who died when he was very young, Conrad was raised by an uncle who was critical of their political views. The divided perspectives on empire and resistance that resulted inhabit many of Conrad's works, including "Poland Revisited."<sup>14</sup> While it would seem that the contours of this travel narrative are determined by external factors, the journey Conrad undertakes, this is not the case. More psychobiography than documentary, it is nevertheless not an accurate account of the personal experiences it relates. It mistakes dates and chronologies, sentiments and so-called facts about emotional states are contradicted by Conrad's letters, and its management of time dilates certain periods and truncates others. These inconsistencies, along with other elements, suggest that the confessional form, rather than the trip itself, directs the narrative's unfolding. This form is spurred by events that have yet to settle into the past, namely, Polish revolutionary struggle and Conrad's family's participation in it.

The essay, however, repeatedly insists on separating personal from political realms and the present conditions of world war from Poland's long history of colonization, partitions, and insurrections, which are barely noted. When it does acknowledge this history it is in spiritual, nearly Messianic nationalist terms, describing a Poland that stubbornly remains despite being effaced by geohistorical inscriptions: "Poland then, if erased from the map, yet existed in reality; it was not a mere *pays du rêve* where you can travel only in imagination. For no man . . . would push the love of the novelist's art of make-believe to the point of burdening himself with real trunks for a voyage *au pays du rêve*."<sup>15</sup> Condemning the attack on dynastic rule, the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, and observing the rise of imperial and anti-imperial nationalisms throughout Europe and the Balkans, the essay takes care to distinguish these political tensions from "private" matters, using the latter—whether a "conjuncture which, in a most private sense, was somewhat trying" (114), or thoughts of Conrad's imminent Poland trip, "the simplest sort of Continental holiday" (119)—to explain neglect of the former in the days leading up to war. Conrad implies that cries of "race, liberation, justice" (115) of the time are located mainly in "these Eastern nations [that] were not far removed from a savage state" (116), and he derides their "trivial demonstrations. One could not take today a ticket for Petersburg.

'You mean Petrograd' would say the booking clerk. Shortly after the fall of Adrianople a friend of mine passing through Sophia asked for some 'café turc' at the end of his lunch. 'Monsieur veut dire café balkanique,' the patriotic waiter corrected him austere-ly" (115–116). Until the very end, the essay seems to ignore the fervor for national independence that has captured contemporary Poland, as it had the Poland of Conrad's youth. Escaping to a Polish health resort on the last train out of Cracow after war is declared, the family is surrounded by Poles from all over the country also unable to travel. Claiming "it was a wonderful, poignant two months" (135), Conrad immediately writes the contemporaneous crisis and long history of partitions, failed uprisings, and repressions out of the text while differentiating himself from this "whole people" and "its last illusions" (136) about the possibility of an independent Poland:

This is not the time and perhaps not the place, to enlarge upon the tragic character of the situation: a whole people seeing the culmination of its misfortune in a final catastrophe. . . . I am glad I have not so many years left to me to remember that appalling feeling of inexorable Fate . . . come after so many cruel years, a figure of dread murmuring with iron lips the final words: Ruin—and Extinction.

But enough of this.

(135–136)

Yet the history of Polish insurgency is not so easily expelled from the piece. Displaced across the entire work, it troubles the author's aims by activating the confessional mode he wants to avoid and attaches him to this people he asserts are without a future.

Confession dissolves the limits between personal and political that Conrad attempts to establish, and it fortifies the filial and political bonds it endeavors break. *Under Western Eyes* has not made peace once and for all with those "Polish shades." They haunt "Poland Revisited" too, especially the specter of his father, Apollo Korzeniowski. Conrad's image of his father was shaped by his childhood memories but also largely by his maternal uncle and guardian, Tadeusz Bobrowski, who represented Korzeniowski in a less than flattering light. Bobrowski painted a picture of a privileged member of the *szlachta*, or ruling class in Ukraine, whose opinions were naïve and incoherent. While agreeing that Korzeniowski's program was not always well

defined, Zdzislaw Najder has also corrected Bobrowski's interpretation.<sup>16</sup> After leaving Ukraine for Warsaw in 1861, Korzeniowski became a leading member of the Reds, the most radical revolutionary faction of anti-Russian Polish nationalists of the time. They pushed for broad social reforms across classes and the abolition of serfdom. They advocated liberation from Russian rule in the Congress Kingdom, Ruthenia, and Lithuania but were not chauvinistic or expansionist. They hoped to achieve a formation that could accommodate the existence of other nations from the old Polish Commonwealth within a single state, if necessary. The Korzeniowskis' home in Warsaw became the headquarters for the movement in 1861, and Korzeniowski was eventually imprisoned and then exiled with his wife, Ewalina, and young son. Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues that "Conrad registered not just the *similarity* of family and nation, father and Fatherland, but their near *identity*, and he did so at the moment of his father's funeral."<sup>17</sup> "Poland Revisited" leads to the site of his father's funeral and supports Harpham's point that the subject of Poland produces disruptive effects in his writing. Here, it generates confessions while interrupting them, inducing the predicament of "double thought." Disrupting the essay's itinerary and proving, just as *A Personal Record* fears, that confession can overtake reminiscences, the essay's ironic detours disclose a process of witnessing compelled by a confrontation with anticolonial revolt concentrated in the figure of the unmourned father.

This ironic mode is theorized by J. M. Coetzee in an exploration of the confessional discourse of Dostoevsky, a writer whose literary practices and politics, like Rousseau's, Conrad criticized. The essay's oscillating resistance and capitulation to confession enacts what Dostoevsky names and Coetzee analyzes as double thought, "a potentially infinite regression" driven by contradictory desires: "the doubling back of thought that undermines the integrity of the will to confess by detecting behind it a will to deceive, and behind the detection of this second motive a third motive (a wish to be admired for one's candor), and so on."<sup>18</sup> This process threatens the project of confession in the secular literary tradition, which is to achieve absolution and closure, "liberation from the oppression" of a known truth as well as one not known to the confessant. Double thought thwarts the confessant's efforts to reveal the unknown truth, which emerges through irony as a discrepancy between a confession's statement and performance. It slips out "in strange associations, false rationalizations, gaps, contradictions."<sup>19</sup> In "Poland Revisited,"



the known truth is that Conrad has entirely separated himself from his early life in Poland, and the unknown truth is twofold—that this life has not separated itself from him and that instead of enabling him to make peace with and disconnect from those Polish shades, confession only binds him to them more tightly.

The essay announces itself as a search for a hidden truth sealed away in Poland and as an attempt to resolve a discontinuity within the self created by a break with the past. Conrad describes the journey, and by extension the essay, as an archaeological expedition, a recovery of a moment sedimented into an internal archive that has become foreign to him. The instituting and sealing of this archive from conscious memory is tied to the life and death of the father, for it was in Cracow, he tells us, “where I spent with my father the last eighteen months of his life” that “I began to understand things, form affections, lay up a store of memories and a fund of sensations with which I was to break violently by throwing myself into an unrelated existence. It was like the experience of another world” (117). Conrad hopes to discover whether imagination is betraying “shadows in my youth” and to test “the reality of my past” (117). This truth-seeking mission is more a matter of war than peace. The journey is metaphorized as “the invasion of a tribe” (117), a phrase that identifies Conrad with colonizers rather than colonized. The ironic metaphor highlights the essay’s ambivalence toward his native land and the return to it and signals the challenges confession will face in making known the essay’s unknown truths.

A stronger signal that confession struggles to establish knowledge and accomplish ethical and narrative closure is registered by the essay’s structure and sequencing, which imply that, as the narrator of *Heart of Darkness* describes Marlowe’s methods, “the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze.”<sup>20</sup> Divided into four parts, the piece breaks its title’s promise; despite the announced subject, it does not revisit Poland until part 4. Its circuitous forays into an ever-retreating past through a slow regression in time as readers move forward in narrative space mirrors the voyage itself, which “would have something of a migratory character” (“Poland Revisited,” 117). This is quite an understatement: The Conrads embark on a route that makes the journey *thirty-six times* longer than necessary. Foregoing an expedient passage seems especially odd because Conrad declares his

desire to begin this long-awaited journey so intense that it blinds him to the danger brewing throughout Europe. He explains the current deferral of “this Polish journey which for so many years had been before us in a state of a project full of colour and promise but always retreating, elusive, like an enticing mirage” (119) by placing responsibility on his wife, who chooses this passage. Conrad agrees to her request because it offers an “air of adventure in better keeping with the romantic feeling of this Polish journey” (119).

This rationale of manufacturing narrative tension in the name of romance notwithstanding, other aspects of the piece hint at why both journey and essay possess a migratory character. The sequencing not only betrays the expectations the title establishes but mimics the anxieties of betrayal that organize this work as well as *Under Western Eyes*, along with so many others, as Ian Watt has demonstrated.<sup>21</sup> In part 1, Conrad unwittingly intimates why the essay delays reaching its destination by recounting that the journey will land him “in a country house in the neighborhood of Cracow, but within the Russian frontier” (117). He does not mention that this topos condenses the tension structuring his early life, the opposing allegiances of his father and uncle to the Russian state. Instead, he inexplicably relates that his initial reaction to the journey is “dismay” (117). While this dismay would be understandable given his conflicted family history, this is not the reason Conrad gives. Instead, he explains his dismay in terms of betrayal, a betrayal twice displaced: “Since leaving the sea to which I have been faithful for so many years, I have discovered that there is in my composition very little stuff from which travelers are made,” he confides. “I confess that my first impulse about a projected journey is to leave it alone” (117). Betrayal is indicated via its antonym, “faithfulness,” to an entity that signifies an alternative genealogy. His faithfulness to the “sea” is a displacement of his fidelity to another set of parents, not Polish but British. Britain’s Merchant Shipping Act gives birth to his life on the sea; it had been “in a manner of speaking a father and mother to me” (123). The essay’s architecture belies what remains unstated, a crisis of memory caused by contradictory attitudes toward a different set of parents and their role in antistate rebellion.

Although both journey and essay hope to gain possession over Conrad’s Polish past, the mission is compromised by double thought, which is initiated by a transposition from confession to excuse. Conrad is detained in Poland as a consequence of war, and he is detained in the essay by the confes-

sional form. In addition to deferring the trip and the projected redemption of the past, narrative strategies disrupt the work in another way. The text slides continuously from confession, a mode directed toward truth revelation, to excuse, a mode directed toward self-exculpation.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, "Poland Revisited" originates with an excuse: "I have never believed in political assassination as a means to an end, and least of all in assassination of the dynastic order" (114). The sentence seeks to justify the events the memoir recalls, namely, Conrad's decision to allow himself and his family to travel into Eastern Europe on the brink of World War I. Increasing references to guilt and innocence code this statement as excuse rather than mere explanation. Echoing sentiments uttered by *Under Western Eyes's* English narrator, Conrad claims that "it fitted with my ethical sense that an act cruel and absurd should be also useless" (115). He excuses himself by citing ideological presuppositions, which prevent him from reading the signs of future disturbances in Europe's political stability, but only a few sentences later, he excuses himself for an entirely unrelated reason. "There was no man capable of forming a judgment who attended so little to the march of events as I did at that time," he asserts, because "my mind was fixed on my own affairs, not because they were in a bad posture, but because of their fascinating, holiday-promising aspect" (115). Leaving aside why he mentions the negative, "bad posture" when he hopes to underline the positive aspects of his affairs, the need to exculpate himself for leading his family into Poland on the verge of war is made clear when soon after this statement Conrad describes his desires to revisit Poland as "innocent" redundantly, insisting that "whatever sinister passions were heaving under its splendid and complex surface, I was too agitated by a simple and innocent desire of my own to notice the signs, or interpret them correctly. The most innocent of passions will take the edge off one's judgment" (116).

The piece suggests that summoning confession to take responsibility for the past and unify a divided self is a losing game, for it demonstrates the failure of the excuses to exculpate the confessant. This failure is disclosed through the ironic articulation of the hidden truth as contradictions and false rationalizations that are the symptoms of double thought. These occur when Conrad protests his innocence excessively. Comparing the past framed as excuse to the past represented elsewhere illustrates the weakness of these protestations and the memoir's contradictions. In his excuse, Conrad states

he overlooks the violence of the present and future because he turns toward a past absent of violence, “the past that one can not suspect and mistrust, the shadowy and unquestionable moral possession, the darkest struggles of which wear a halo of glory and peace”(116). The depiction of the past Conrad goes forth hesitantly and circuitously to encounter in Poland troubles this statement. Although the “holiday-promising” aspect of the journey allegedly diverts his attention from the imminent geopolitical conflict, his description of the journey’s commencement implies a different cause for distraction. His companions were

looking forward to a voyage in space whereas I felt more and more plainly that what I had started on was a journey in time, into the past; a fearful enough prospect for the most consistent, but to him who had not known how to preserve against his impulses the order and continuity of his life—so that at times it presented itself to his conscience as a series of betrayals—still more dreadful.

(120)

The memoir expands and consolidates the evidence that an underlying ambivalence slows its pacing by formally negating Conrad’s encomiums to a peaceful, hallowed Polish past and anticipation of this “enticing” journey. When Conrad finally arrives in Poland, the essay orchestrates a shameful conscience that prompts him to relive a time marked by revolution led by his father, painful memories of witnessing his father’s death, and a homeland from which Conrad has violently “thrown” himself. The excuses offered throughout therefore paradoxically fold back on themselves, inculcating more than exculpating their confessant, indicating double thought.

“Poland Revisited” enacts double thought as an abyssal structure animated by shame, a crucial element in the choreography of any confession, according to Coetzee. The essay, however, also departs from the dominant understanding of shame as self-consciousness, which Coetzee also voices. Double thought operates through the concealing of truth, which generates shame, which generates more confession, which generates shame, which generates more confession, ad infinitum.

Either the confessant was aware of the deeper truth but was concealing it, in which case he was deceiving his confessor; or, he was not aware of the deeper truth (though now he acknowledges it), in which case his competence as a confessant is in question: what was being offered as his secret, the coin of his

confession, was not the real secret, was false coin, and a de facto deception has occurred, which is fresh cause for confession.<sup>23</sup>

Coetzee's explication contains an inconsistency, however, that Conrad's text illuminates. The testimony's form shows that in question is not simply whether the confessant acknowledges the "deeper truth" about his desire to return to Poland and endanger his family or conceals it and thereby deceives his readers. Rather, in question is whether the confession acknowledges this truth without its author's knowledge.<sup>24</sup> "Poland Revisited" indicates that an unknown truth can be acknowledged to the confessor—or reader—without the confessant's awareness of this acknowledgment. The distinction between truth and lie, acknowledgment and concealment, is undone by what Coetzee himself calls the "ironic confession," the confession that says more than or other than what it intends to say, for example, though elisions. An acknowledgment emerges, indirectly, through the narrative production of this other truth, or truth of the other within the self, constituted as much by absences as by what the confession states.

Shame toward what remains unknown results in a proliferation of confessions that never own up to a "deeper truth" except obliquely, impeding the essay's successful end through narrative evasions and a tropological movement by which Conrad at once refuses to take responsibility for his actions while simultaneously taking responsibility for them as an other. He ironically admits shame without acknowledging the truth of his motives both to return to Poland and to confess his desires in this piece. The *OED* defines shame as a result of consciousness: "The painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dishonouring, ridiculous, or indecorous in one's own conduct or circumstances (or in those of others whose honour or disgrace one regards as one's own), or of being in a situation which offends one's sense of modesty or decency." "Shame" in Conrad's text, therefore, becomes a term without a proper referent. It cannot be understood as a reaction to an act of the conscious self. Desire to return to Poland to gain absolution and respite from ghosts of those he has betrayed might be "selfish" because it endangers others, but it is also "selfless" because it seems to operate outside the limits of the conscious self. By separating "thought" from consciousness, Conrad's text offers a new reading of double thoughts. An instance of such double thought appears when the text collapses the two moments, revelation of truth and suppression of truth, in one sentence in which responsibility

is enfolded in its concealment and vice versa. The essay expresses a desire while repudiating it through the contradictory meanings of “unconscious.” “All unconscious of going towards the very scenes of war,” Conrad confides, “I carried off in my eye this tiny fragment of Great Britain” (119). This passage supports Paul de Man’s claim that “excuse occurs within an epistemological twilight zone between knowing and not knowing.”<sup>25</sup>

This staging of shame through double thought culminates in a frustration of the goals of both journey and essay. The final section does not conquer the distance between the two Conrads but rather concludes in an act of doubling and expropriation that returns once again to the spectral revolutionary father haunting the piece. In terms of narrative plotting, this section proves anticlimactic: it spends a total of three pages recounting Conrad’s past in Cracow. In those three pages, Conrad discusses witnessing his father’s death in terms that transmit a desire for absolution difficult to achieve. About to enter Poland, he comments, “Each of us is a fascinating spectacle to himself, and I had to watch my own personality returning from another world, as it were, to revisit the glimpses of old moons” (131). In Cracow, the uncanny doubling continues when the writing identifies Conrad as specter or spectacle by oscillating between first- and third-person narration. Perspectival shifts situate him as an other to both the Polish language and national identity, as when the essay details a police officer who “turned his head to look at the grizzled foreigner holding forth in a strange tongue” (131).

The memoir’s final attempts to achieve absolution and closure are blocked, also, by the simultaneous exposure and denial of shame. In Poland, Conrad shamefully reproduces his lack of shame, inducing the need for more excuses. Discussing his father’s death, he writes,

I looked forward to what was coming with an incredulous terror. I turned my eyes from it, sometimes with success; and yet all the time I had an awful sensation of the inevitable. I had also movements of *revolt* which stripped off of me some of my simple trust in the *government of the universe*. But when the inevitable entered the sick room and the white door was thrown wide open I don’t think I found a single tear to shed. I have a suspicion that the Canon’s house-keeper looked upon me as the most callous little wretch on earth.

(134, my emphasis)

Shame is confessed and not confessed at once; the essay’s assertion that he did not feel shame for his lack of tears is at odds with his repeated exposure

of reputed shamelessness. After this first exposure, Conrad once again exposes and condemns himself in a mitigated manner by examining himself from the point of view of others, presenting his refusal to mourn the father in the third person: “The day of the funeral came in due course. And all the generous ‘Youth of the Schools,’ the grave Senate of the University, the delegations of the Trade-guilds might have obtained (if they cared) de visu evidence of the callousness of the little wretch” (134). The desire to put shame on display is made clearer when we consider that he invents this shameful scene—he did, in fact, shed tears for his father. The repetition of this fiction suggests that like Rousseau, who spectacularizes his shameful behavior in the famous stolen ribbon episode of *The Confessions*, Conrad finds pleasure in theatricalizing shame, a pleasure that cannot be directly confessed but only displaced.<sup>26</sup> This relentless logic of shame and exposure heralds confession’s endlessness, its failure to provide absolution.

“Poland Revisited” demonstrates that confession cannot accomplish the two goals set forth and that it produces unintended consequences. It neither makes known a truth unknown nor does it solve the discontinuity within the self; in failing to bring things to an end, it interminably binds one to others so that Conrad becomes “the helpless prey of the Shades [he] had called up” (135). For the passages cited above also fail to suture the gap between the Conrad of the past and present for another reason—not his announced conscious refusal but rather an unannounced, unconscious failure to mourn. When Conrad depicts his reaction to his father’s death in the language of politics, not sentiment, his phrases convey a failed mourning, a melancholic identification, the swallowing of an exquisite corpse.<sup>27</sup> Rather than separating him from this specter, his words identify him with the revolutionary. Conrad incorporates the father through his metaphors of political resistance: The father’s death effects “revolt” and a loss of “trust in the government” of the universe. Thus, the piece does not conclude with the coming to consciousness of the loss of the father, who is also a metonym for Polish revolutionary aspirations and hence an avowal of what these losses mean. Rather than providing a cure to self-splitting, confession “ends” without ending, with a melancholic identification that is at the same time a self-othering, an unconscious insertion of the other within the self who can haunt indefinitely. This conclusion supports Harpham’s point, although in a way different from his own reading, that the case of Conrad evades psychoanalytic and

political-theoretical distinctions; “Conrad’s personal experience seems to be graspable by theory but in fact falls on both sides of distinctions—family and nation, mourning and melancholia—that theoreticians (Anderson and Freud) wish to maintain.”<sup>28</sup>

Prompted by unrest in Europe that results in the redrawing of national, regional, and colonial boundaries, confession pathologically attaches the confessant to a “family and nation” whose history of rebellion he criticizes while nevertheless championing one aspect of it: its nationalist spirit. Only this spirit can redeem revolt against the state. In spite of the wry dismissals of those calls for “race, liberation, justice” ringing across Eastern Europe, Conrad asserts that spiritual nationalism—not the materialist demands that comprised the Reds’ program such as class equality, democratic representation, and a state that would accommodate ethnic pluralism—is what saves Poland’s unsuccessful insurrections. The difference between revolutionaries and Polish rebels, specifically his father, is that the former work “for the subversion of any social or political scheme of existence” while the latter are “patriots” who, “believing in the spirituality of a national existence could not bear to see that spirit enslaved.”<sup>29</sup> Nationalism can even redeem confession itself, the essay suggests.

The piece naturalizes national community by remarking on the effects of the father’s confession of faith, and it opposes these to the dissolution of national community and perverse attachments Conrad’s own confessions engender. It insists that both Korzeniowski and the crowd of mourners who flood the street for his funeral “were victims alike of an unrelenting destiny which cut them off from every path of merit and glory. They had come only to render homage to the ardent fidelity of the man whose life had been a fearless confession in word and deed of a creed which the simplest heart in that crowd could feel and understand” (134). Korzeniowski’s confession is generative rather than destructive because it is not that of a revolutionary like Rousseau but that of a patriot. It is faithful to and constellates a living social form, a bond of hearts and minds—an organic, spiritual nation. Conrad also shares kinship with Poles, but not through a natural/national organic bond. Because he betrays and deserts his birthplace, his confessions crystallize pathological attachments and manifest a death drive, chaining him to a horde of specters and a country without a future. His confessions transform the collective of mourners from a national community into a mob



of ghosts. He flees Korzeniowski's funeral site because the "shades" he summons are "crowding upon me, enigmatic and insistent, in their own clinging air of the grave that tasted of dust and ashes and the bitter vanity of all hopes" (135).

By contrasting confessions of Polish nationalists to those of revolutionaries and betrayers, Conrad separates the topic of "Poland Revisited" from that of *Under Western Eyes*. Historically, however, there were parallels between dispossessions of state power, insurgencies, and counterinsurgencies in Poland and Russia as well as alliances forged between Polish and Russian revolutionaries. Korzeniowski himself argued that the conduct of Polish resistance should serve as a model for Russian revolt against autocracy.<sup>30</sup> From 1893 through 1914, the main political debate in Poland occurred between the Polish Socialist Party, whose agenda was defined almost solely with the aim of national self-determination, and the Social Democratic Party, who were Marxist internationalists, including Rosa Luxemburg, who opposed the other party's program and allied themselves with the Russian workers when the revolution began in 1905. Moreover, the repressive situation in Russia resembled that of the peripheries, including Poland.<sup>31</sup> "The boundary between 'colony' and 'metropole' (as well as between the correspondingly different attitudes and methods of rule) was much less clear" in the Russian empire than in the transoceanic empires, and "the 1905 Revolution had gone some way toward eroding this boundary between a colonial realm of militarized 'extraordinary rule' and a domestic civil realm."<sup>32</sup> Conrad obscures and even denies any connections between Poland and Russian insurgencies throughout his writings, implicitly distinguishing his novel of Russian revolution from the Polish question.<sup>33</sup> But confession is also the organizing mode of *Under Western Eyes*, and the novel shares the problems of witnessing that the essay enacts. As "Poland Revisited" demonstrates, confession eludes the grasp of those who employ it, and in the novel, too, it threatens nationalist and organicist models of community while creating unwanted responsibilities and attachments to others.

### *Contaminating Confessions*

The narrative effects of broaching the subject of revolution, and thus returning to divided allegiances, have been discussed by critics who read *Un-*

*der Western Eyes* using a biographical approach<sup>34</sup> and by others who examine its methods of witnessing from a legal standpoint.<sup>35</sup> Largely overlooked, however, is the central role confession plays in the novel. Among the few critics who have addressed confession at length is Keith Carabine, who argues that confession, as practiced by Razumov, a double for the author, represents Conrad's attempt to manage a traumatic past. Carabine correctly maintains that confession in the novel does not "promise conversion" as does confession in the Augustinian tradition, can remain "incoherent," and cannot guarantee refuge from Conrad's Polish shades.<sup>36</sup> His analysis, however, considers only those moments explicitly circumscribed as confessions while focusing tightly on Conrad's individual past. But in *Under Western Eyes*, confession fragments, multiplies, and takes over the entire novel, driving the narrative and generating effects that exceed the biographical, which have gone unrecognized in criticism on the text.<sup>37</sup>

The propulsion of confession and its articulation of attachments to others are the result of its structure—key aspects of which "Poland Revisited" illuminated—as well as the novel's reaction to wider geopolitical transformations of the time: resistance to imperial and autocratic techniques of governance in Russia and beyond and shifting alliances between nations and empires across Europe in the first decade of the twentieth century. Responding to these changes but also subject to internal exigencies of form, confession in *Under Western Eyes* reminds us that confession occurs between an addressor and addressee, something "Poland Revisited," detailing only the confessor's position, does not emphasize. Dwelling on the vexed relation it materializes between confessants and confessors, the novel foregrounds that confession not only demands interpretation but also attaches one to others beyond one's national, linguistic, and cultural milieu. In his study of confession, Peter Brooks advises that "we need to ask, in all cases, what purpose is served by confession, what response it solicits, and what the person or persons who receive the confession are supposed to do with it."<sup>38</sup> Examining the purposes and effects of the novel's confessions—those of the student-revolutionary Victor Victorovich Haldin, then of the English language teacher's translation of Razumov's diary, and, finally, Razumov's confessions described within the diary—indicates that the erosion of borders occurring during the revolutionary era and incipient globalization, and the attendant denaturalizing of categories of race and nation, does not lead to a tolerance, much less a welcoming, of others and otherness.<sup>39</sup>

Confession is precipitated in the diegetic narrative—the story of Razumov’s betrayal of Haldin—by the student revolutionary’s assassination of an authority based on Interior Minister V. K. de Plehve, an act that encapsulates what the novel depicts as the irrational and unconscious nature of Russian politics. Haldin confesses the assassination to Razumov, setting off other confessions reported in Razumov’s diary. The frame narrative is also initiated by confession: the language teacher receives Razumov’s confessional text from Haldin’s sister, Natalia, and translates it for Western eyes. The minister Haldin kills is a despot “invested with extraordinary powers” whose own “mystic acceptance of the principle of autocracy” aims at the “destruction of the very hope of liberty itself” (6). That mysticism is innate to Russia and infuses every aspect of Russian life is insinuated in figurations of the land. In terms similar to *A Passage to India*, which presents India as excess, too immense and muddled to be comprehended, *Under Western Eyes* makes Russia resistant to all manner of cognitive and sociohistorical mapping. Referring to the “endless space and countless millions” of which Razumov received an “almost physical impression” (my emphasis), the novel goes on to describe how “under the sumptuous immensity of the sky, the snow covered the endless forests, the frozen rivers, the plains of an immense country, obliterating the landmarks, the accidents of the ground, leveling everything under its uniform whiteness, like a monstrous blank page awaiting the record of an inconceivable history” (25). Just as it refuses attempts to record impressions of it, as “the land of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations” (25) revolutionaries endeavor to realize, Russia refuses the imprint of material processes of development, or “modernity.”

The purpose of Haldin’s confession is to enlist help from Razumov in arranging his escape. Like the “mystic” act of assassination, Haldin’s confession is mystical: it is delivered by a ghost, an uninvited guest whose entry into and exit from Razumov’s rooms are not witnessed. When Razumov returns home, he is startled by “a strange figure” who “loomed lithe and martial” (11). Haldin had entered unnoticed: “Your dvornik was away from the gate and talking to a sleigh driver on the other side of the street. I met no one on the stairs, not a soul. As I came up to your door I caught sight of your landlady coming out of your rooms. But she did not see me. . . . I slipped in” (12). The passage notes clock time repeatedly and highlights that Haldin’s escape takes place in an interval rather than an instant of a present

or presence. Razumov listens to “the faint sounds of some town clock tolling the hour. Haldin, already at the door . . . might have posed for the statue of a daring youth listening to an inner voice. Razumov mechanically glanced down at his watch. When he looked towards the door again Haldin had vanished” (47). This anachronous, spectral Haldin, who might return a second time, as the revolution itself would, is another metonym for this “land of spectral ideas and disembodied aspirations” (25).

As “Poland Revisited” indicates, Conrad uses the language of ghosts and specters when addressing revolution as it pertains to his personal past; however, the novel’s deployment of the rhetoric of mysticism extends beyond the personal. This deployment mirrors historiographic approaches to the Russian revolution of 1905, which viewed it as mystical explicitly or implicitly, wittingly or unwittingly. One dominant approach argues that the revolution was both inevitable or compelled, and prophetic. This teleological view, once Marxist orthodoxy, is summarized in V. I. Lenin’s metaphor of the revolution as a “dress rehearsal” for the Revolution of 1917. It was also long doxa that the Revolution of 1905 was characterized by spontaneous and chaotic revolt rather than by conscious, rational, and programmed action. Other interpretations, which, as Peter Holquist points out, correspond to a strain of Holocaust historiography that sees the Shoah as the effect of a pathology inherent in the German “psycho-social type,” locates the inevitability of the revolution in the Russian “character.” This character is a cultural backwardness thought to be either the result of years of autocratic rule or an innate Russian “special way.”<sup>40</sup>

In recent decades, historians, sociologists, and political theorists have demystified the revolution by challenging these interpretations. Against the teleological understanding, scholars assert that the revolution was shaped by contingencies of the revolutionary era, whose years have also been recalibrated so they begin both earlier than 1905 and later than 1917.<sup>41</sup> Rather than prophecy or fulfillment, “an event that made any one path of development inevitable,” the revolution was “a critical juncture that opened up several alternative paths” of social and political transformation.<sup>42</sup> Correcting its representation as a chaotic and spontaneous event undertaken by a peasantry lacking class consciousness, some have shown that a reciprocal radicalization between the rural peasantry and urban proletariat took place so that both were further politicized during this time.<sup>43</sup> Others refute, as well, the por-

traits of a revolution with its roots in Russian backwardness and cultural and economic stagnation, contending that it actually occurred during a period of rapid industrial and social change.<sup>44</sup> Theorists have, in addition, disputed arguments based on notions of Russian exceptionalism and “character” by situating the revolution in the context of global processes of capitalism and arguing that it was comparable to other insurgencies. As Theodor Shanin writes, “the events in Russia were part of a radical wave which in those years swept the world at large. . . important were the substantive similarities [between these insurgencies] rooted in the underlying social structures which have later come to be known as the ‘developing societies.’”<sup>45</sup>

*Under Western Eyes*, though, airs the interpretations of its time as well as those that would follow in the wake of the October revolution of 1917. Such interpretations are often voiced through the narrator’s commentaries on Razumov’s diary. Readers have argued that the language teacher’s attribution of an irrational Russian nature that underlies both the revolutionaries’ use of violence and autocracy’s systemic depredations—what Conrad calls in his author’s note a shared “moral anarchism”<sup>46</sup> that the language teacher opposes to the morality of an enlightened West—is subverted by Conrad’s stylistic strategies.<sup>47</sup> But to treat the rhetoric of Russian mysticism as ironic is to detach the novel from contemporaneous debates about the meaning and causes of revolution. Conrad himself points to the relationship between text and context in the author’s note to the 1920 edition, confiding that although he hoped “to render not so much the political state as the psychology of Russia itself,” he has been gratified to discover that in many “articles on Russian affairs of the present day reference is made to certain sayings and opinions uttered in the pages” of the novel.<sup>48</sup> Throughout the note he repeats the mystical interpretations of events that envision them as mystical. He states that inevitability and compelled outcomes defined the revolution, and, homologically, his novel of it: “It was only after I had finished writing the first part that the whole story revealed itself to me in its tragic character and in the march of its events as unavoidable and sufficiently ample in its outline.”<sup>49</sup> Having already become “a sort of historical novel dealing with the past,” *Under Western Eyes*, like the historical event itself, was prophetic too, the current political analyses of Russian affairs “testifying to the clearness of my vision and the correctness of my judgment.”<sup>50</sup> The note’s final words stress the teleological view of the revolution and, by way of a metaphor taken from

nature, describe an innate Russian character destined to perpetuate itself: "These people are unable to see that all they can effect is merely a change of names. The oppressor 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."<sup>51</sup>

If the author's note provides extratextual reasons for considering the novel's rhetoric of mysticism as serious, confession in the novel invites us to refine and reformulate the thesis that the work subverts the narrator's naturalizing of differences between the West and Russia on the basis of the latter's "moral corruption" (6) and irrationality. The structural logic of confession operates independently from the language teacher's perspective and challenges ideals he espouses. Resonating with historical portrayals of the revolutionary period in which it emerges, confession is a mystical force that creates outcomes that are not programmed or conscious, and it also disturbs models of identity and community the translator insists upon. In doing so, however, it engenders a crisis of contamination that the novel endeavors to resolve.

The revolutionary's confession initiates the conflict that drives the narrative: Razumov's reputed betrayal of Haldin and the intolerable haunting by the other that propels Razumov's confessions. Haldin's confession takes Razumov prisoner, making the home unhomey. Harboring the revolutionary's confession is "harboring a pestilential disease . . . a subtle pest that would convert earth into a hell" (24). To cure this contamination and fight against parasitism, incorporation of a foreign body, what is needed is yet another confession; "the corpse hanging round his neck would be nearly as fatal as the living man. Nothing short of complete annihilation would do. And that was impossible" (24). This leads to the question, "What then? Must one kill oneself to escape this visitation?" (24). Aside from death, escaping the visitation demands that Razumov confess to Haldin's confession, but this is as impossible as it is necessary because "Razumov had not even a refuge of confidence. To whom could he go with this tale—in all this great, great land?" (24). Confession is as oppressive as the immense Russian land: "Razumov, who amongst eighty millions of his kith and kin, had no heart to which he could open himself" (29). Haldin's confession sets into motion Razumov's encounters with Haldin's mother and sister, the revolutionaries, and state authorities, which form the substance of the confessional work that the language teacher translates.

As in “Poland Revisited,” in the novel, confession induces a self-othering and exposes the fragile and vertiginous character of national identity. In doing so, it undermines the narrator’s sharp delineations of Russia and the West. Ironizing the teacher’s assurance that “it is unthinkable than any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov’s situation” (19), the confessional scene between Haldin and Razumov identifies the latter with that very figure. After confessing, Haldin exclaims, “You say nothing, Kirylo Sidorovitch! . . . To be sure, I cannot expect you with your frigid English manner to embrace me” (12), and a short while later he observes: “Ah! You are a fellow. Collected—cool as a cucumber. A regular Englishman” (16). The effects of Haldin’s confession contradict the narrator’s definitions of national character as enduring and stable. The confession exposes the fragility of Russianness by summoning an Englishman in the heart of the Russian, and the moment it does so, it simultaneously exposes the fragility of Englishness. The confession dissolves the rational manner that prompts the confessant to describe him as English, making Razumov embark on a frantic quest for a confessor to exorcise the haunting “pest”: “It is really a wonder he managed to keep going as he did,” the narrator comments; “no rational determination had any part in his exertions” (20). The dramatization of confession suggests that if there is no firm ground to national identity, it is that much easier to become contaminated by, even turned into, an other.

The purpose of Razumov’s diary to the text as a whole, therefore, as handled by the language teacher, is to contain the contaminating effects of this confessional work by showing how it proves that an unbridgeable gap exists between East and West. The teacher translates it, paradoxically, to prove its untranslatability, to demonstrate to the novel’s implied audience—“Western” readers—that, like Russian autocracy, revolution, and land, this confession is excessive to understanding, even to language itself. Feeling “the difficulty of the task” (49) of translation and intimating that the English language is totally incompatible with the Russian experience, the translator claims he must shape the material by using a key term that best approximates these incomprehensible details: “cynicism” (50). He warns that “If to the Western reader” the details of Razumov’s confession “appear shocking, inappropriate, or even improper . . . this is not a story of the West of Europe” (19). The diary allegedly remains unreadable to Western readers in part because governments and nations determine character, worldview, and the limits of imagination,

for “nations it may be have fashioned their governments, but Governments have paid them back in the same coin” (19). Insisting that national character protects one from being expropriated, prohibits one from occupying empathetically the place of the other in acts of writing, translating, or reading, he proclaims, “it is unthinkable that any young Englishman should find himself in Razumov’s situation. This being so it would be a vain enterprise to imagine what he would think. The only safe surmise to make is that he would not think as Mr. Razumov thought at this crisis of his fate” (19).

Rather than evidence of a critical “cosmopolitan style,”<sup>52</sup> then, the exposure of the foreign within the home and destabilization of national and racial identities confession performs is coded as a crisis of contamination. The anxiety toward contamination elaborated both in Razumov’s response to Haldin’s confession and the teacher’s handling of Razumov’s diary also organizes the novel’s central intertext, Conrad’s 1905 essay “Autocracy and War.” Reading this piece alongside the novel further complicates arguments that Conrad’s works enact cosmopolitan critiques of imperialist models of national belonging, language, and race.<sup>53</sup> It also suggests that substituting an exploration of the novel’s relationship to a philosophical tradition of cosmopolitanism for a culturist approach helps better explain the novel’s depictions of identity and community. *Under Western Eyes* and “Autocracy and War” express a legacy of cosmopolitical thought associated with Immanuel Kant’s “Toward Perpetual Peace.” This work’s vision of cosmopolitanism does not question groundings of race or national belonging or posit a “beyond” or end of the nation—and certainly not of nationalism<sup>54</sup>—as telos. Kant describes a federation of nation-states that weigh the rights of each in relation to one another and insists that nations must not be fused and that boundaries must be maintained. Though he prescribes “universal hospitality” as a duty of all nations to one another’s inhabitants, he actually limits the universal to those who can claim national citizenship. The stateless are not owed hospitality. Although it is written over a century later, “Autocracy and War” echoes arguments of Kant’s influential work and offers another context with which to read the novel’s articulations of national, regional, and linguistic community. Discussing the community of postmonarchic nation-states emerging in Europe, it uses the language of mysticism employed throughout the novel and laments the dissolving of national borders by war, trade, commerce, and journalism during an era of incipient globalization.



“Autocracy and War” suggests why the porous boundaries between the rational and irrational that the narrator aligns with the West and Russia respectively is treated as a crisis in *Under Western Eyes*. Written after the defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War, this piece deploys the revolutionary period’s interpretive discourse of Russian mysticism, exceptionalism, and cultural backwardness. It also reconfigures nineteenth-century discourses of orientalism. Rather than setting the “East” as other to Europe, it poses an internalized orientalism within Europe; East and West are aligned through their radical heterogeneity to Russia. Conrad modifies well-known Hegelian formulations by treating Russia as the introduction to the *Philosophy of History*’s treatment of Africa, writing it out of world history: “By no industry of investigation, by no fantastic stretch of benevolence, can it be presented as a phase of development through which a society, a state, must pass on the way to the full consciousness of its destiny. It lies outside the stream of progress.”<sup>55</sup> He composes Russian autocracy’s epitaph in the first sentence, but by the end of the essay he still cannot exorcise this “specter.” Russia is mysticism itself, “part Ghoul, part Djinn,” both ana-chrony—“curse” (78), “visitation” (82)—and anarchy: it lacks “a law giver with the wisdom of a Lycurgus or a Solon” (85). Conrad announces the death of Russian “might” to look toward Europe’s future as a “brotherhood” (87) of nation-states but continues to disavow that this guest, this “visitation,” still haunts Europe.

The rhetoric of autochthony, heredity, and tellury, which underwrites imperial-nationalist models of community, molds Conrad’s criticism of a world increasingly defined by transnational economic and political relations. The cosmopolitan community of postmonarchic democracies, the “brotherhood likely to be established between the rival nations of this continent, which, we are assured . . . is the heritage of democracy” (87), is doomed by the scission of democracies from their fathers and heirs. Conrad’s text is inscribed within a history of thought in which “brotherhood” among polities is contingent not on a shared paternity but a sharing of paternity, and genealogy.<sup>56</sup> “No leader of a democracy without other ancestry but the sudden shout of a multitude and debarred by the very condition of power from ever thinking of a direct heir, will have any interest in calling brother the leader of another democracy—a chief as fatherless and heirless as himself” (87), writes Conrad. Russia, however, is the extreme example of an orphan. It lacks and can never give rise to a genealogy; it is depicted not merely as a

foreigner but as entirely other—irrational, illegitimate, and barbaric.<sup>57</sup> It is without “rational origin in the vices, the misfortunes, the necessities or the aspirations of mankind,” “has neither a European nor an Oriental parentage,” “no root either in the institutions or the follies of this earth” (81). It comes from the sky, “like a curse from heaven falling in the darkness of ages upon the plains of forest and steppe” (82). There will be no heirs, no future for its people. The revolution “can never be a revolution fruitful of moral consequences to mankind” (84).

The essay repeats ideological premises underlying the historical processes of nation and continent building that excluded “rootless” elements in Europe during the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It also responds to the remapping of the West as both greater than but also smaller than Europe, its “Western” part, the result of Russia’s defeat in the Russo-Japanese war; however, it imagines this new community, the West, in the exclusionary terms that consolidated Europe.<sup>58</sup> Classifying its people as nationless and rootless, the essay expels both an autocratic and a postrevolutionary Russia from its vision of the cosmopolitan community of nations. Although Conrad claims that any democracy that results from revolution and is detached from heirs and fathers must also be excluded, he treats Russia as *inherently* outside of genealogy, disconnected from a past and future. The essay expresses what Étienne Balibar calls “theoretical racism,” which isolates, expels, or eliminates those who are claimed to lack a genealogy. This expulsion of “‘false,’ ‘exogenous,’ ‘cross-bred’ ‘cosmopolitan’ elements,”<sup>59</sup> and “stateless others” helped forge Europe as a community of modern nation-states, through official policies of anti-Semitism and imperialism.<sup>60</sup> Russia, of course, consolidated its empire through anti-Semitism while also denying colonized peoples their own claims to genealogy, their own fathers and heirs. But Conrad’s criticism of Russia uses these same terms, reflecting imperial modernity’s intolerance of rootlessness, imaginations of nationhood based on blood and soil, and visions of cosmopolitan community propped on these values.<sup>61</sup>

The essay argues that testimonial writing is the medium through which Russia contaminates the West. Russia defies logic and truth, “hence arises her impenetrability to whatever is true in Western thought . . . when [the latter] crosses her frontier [it] falls under the spell of her autocracy and becomes a noxious parody of itself” (82). Western journalism gives hospitality to that illegitimate stranger by examining Russia’s political affairs and pon-

dering its future. The materiality of the journalistic letter lodges the parasite within the Western reader, making its host as irrational and “morally corrupt” as Russia’s autocrats and revolutionaries:

All these speculations . . . have appeared gravely in print; and if they have been gravely considered by only one reader out of each hundred, there must be something subtly noxious to the human brain in the composition of newspaper ink; or else it is that the large page, the columns of words, the leaded heading exalt the mind into a state of feverish credulity. The printed voice of the press makes a sort of still uproar taking from men both the power to reflect and the faculty of genuine feeling.

(76)

Writing that documents and speculates about Russian current events—exactly what the language teacher’s writing does in *Under Western Eyes*—contaminates. The West becomes as mystical and delusional as Russia, “a fascination . . . a hallucination” (76). Compounding things is that “*Il n’ya plus d’Europe*—there is only an armed and trading continent, the home of slowly maturing economical contests for life and death and of loudly proclaimed worldwide ambitions” (92). The beginnings of globalization, the shift from nation-based imperialism to “empire,” has collapsed borders, rendering Europe unhomely, permeable to the “moral anarchy” and mysticism of that which lies “on the border of two continents” (87).

“Autocracy and War” indicates why *Under Western Eyes* conveys an anxiety that its readers will become hostage to the Russian story it hosts through its central narrative conceit, translation. The frame narrative tries to immunize readers from the “noxious” contamination caused by documenting events in the Russian confession: the narrator draws a border between his own and the Russian text from the very beginning and throughout, but this border, as many have noted, erodes regularly.<sup>62</sup> As theorists have argued, the act of translation carries with it the potential to activate nationalistic responses. Lawrence Venuti remarks, although “translation is seen as the practice that overcomes the boundaries between national languages and cultures to communicate the universal spirit,” a universalist theory of language poses a threat. “Nationalism . . . goes hand in hand with a literary xenophobia, a fear that foreign literatures might contaminate native traditions”<sup>63</sup> through translation. Whether translation agendas attempt to emphasize or

to erase cultural and linguistic differences, they “depend on the same circularity: the national status of a language and a culture is simultaneously presupposed and created through translation. Insofar as such agendas implicitly reveal the incompleteness of the nation, translation is a scandal to nationalist thinking, providing yet another motive for indignation and offense, for perceiving a translated text as an international act of violence.”<sup>64</sup> In the novel, the nationalist thinking that poses distinctions between Russia and the West is threatened by a universalist theory of language inhabiting the premises of translation the novel articulates.

*Under Western Eyes* orchestrates translation of the Russian confession to prove the impossibility of culturally translating between Russia and the West while linguistically contesting this impossibility by rehearsing the simulacrum of a seamless translation. The translated language is never seen to disturb, interrupt, nor, as Walter Benjamin famously theorized, “expand” the limits of the translating language<sup>65</sup> through idiomatics or straining of syntax. There is no inclusion of Russian words, phrases, or Cyrillic graphematics. English is protected from the influence of a language of a deracinated people, an “heirless” and “fatherless” nation. In *A Personal Record*, Conrad considers the relationship between language and national genealogy. He rejects the claim that he “had exercised a deliberate choice” to write in English rather than French:

I have a strange and overpowering feeling that [the faculty to write in English] had always been an inherent part of myself. English for me was neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice never entered my head. And as to adoption—well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage made me its own so completely that its very idioms I truly believe had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character.<sup>66</sup>

Even before English law, in the form of the merchant shipping act, helps naturalize Conrad as English by serving as a “mother and father” to him (as “Poland Revisited” related), he had a preternatural capacity to write in the language, which then further molded his character. English, then, is a language that produces heirs. It inscribes him into a genealogy. The exclusion of the Russian language in the novel, therefore, might signal another instance of Conrad’s unwillingness to contaminate the rooted with the root-

less, a hypothesis that seems more likely given that another language does appear in text—French. But exclusion of Russian could function as an autobiographical cipher in another way: as a sign of anticolonial resistance. As a Polish subject, Conrad was sensitive to Russia’s imperial policy of the 1880s, which replaced Polish with Russian as the official language of education as well as of social, cultural, and governmental institutions. The burying of the national language in a novel that purports to render “the essence of things Russian” could be a response to the imperial state’s interment of the Polish language.

Whatever the case, the performative contradiction of seamless linguistic translation undermines the cultural distinction on which the use of English is predicated *and* by which it is to be produced, tautologically. The consequences are xenophobic disavowals that the Russian story is incomprehensible to Western readers as well as an ironic literary xenophobia. It is ironic because the narrative, itself structured by confession, denegates the very Russian texts that *Under Western Eyes* resembles. These include *Crime and Punishment*, the confessional work of a Russian female aristocrat and sympathizer to revolutionary assassins, the haunted writing of a “political confession of faith” produced by Razumov, and even the central intratext, Razumov’s diary.<sup>67</sup>

Offering hospitality to a “noxious” force in the form of Razumov’s diary, the novel proves incapable of resolving the haunting effects of the Russian parasite within. The diary is replete with troubling confessions that, like “Poland Revisited,” composed years later, cannot bring things to an end. Just as the frame narrative struggles against the contaminating effects of Razumov’s diary, Razumov’s confessions detailed within the diary, and those that spill outside it, struggle against the contaminating effects of Haldin’s confession. Hoping to reestablish the “reason” for which Razumov is named and that Haldin’s confession suspends, Razumov confesses Haldin’s confession to an autocrat. As “Poland Revisited” made clear, however, confession escapes confessants’ control. In the novel, it generates the need for yet more confessions that endeavor to resecure borders between the West and Russia. Instead of providing closure and relief from shades and specters, however, confession mobilizes a struggle between competing models of responsibility. The ethics that emerges from this struggle is not that of a rational, self-aware cultivation of obligations to others but rather one that locates these

obligations prior to and as discontinuous with decision and choice and that originates with and is sustained by confession.

*In/conclusion: Other Obligations*

A “sort of political confession of faith” (73) attributed to Razumov summarizes an impasse readers encounter in Razumov’s confessions throughout the diary. This document simultaneously illustrates both the task of confession—to stabilize identities, to (re)establish differences between Razumov and revolutionaries, and the rational and irrational—and the failure to accomplish it. The document is intended to dispel any ambiguity on where its signatory’s sympathies lie, but the formal staging of the signature only amplifies uncertainties. Composing it after confessing to having heard Haldin’s confession, Razumov then pins the document to the wall above his bed, where a confession of faith would conventionally appear in the image of one’s god.

He flung the book away and took a square sheet of paper. It was like the pile of sheets covered with his neat minute handwriting, only blank. He took a pen brusquely and dipped it with the vague notion of going on with the writing of his essay—but his pen remained poised over the sheet. It hung there for some time before it came down and formed long scrawly letters.

Still-faced and his lips set hard, Razumov began to write. When he wrote in a large hand his neat writing lost its character altogether—became unsteady, almost childish. He wrote five lines one under the other.

History not Theory.  
Patriotism not Internationalism.  
Evolution not Revolution.  
Direction not Destruction.  
Unity not Disruption.  
He gazed at them dully.

(49)

The passage’s formal elements immediately raise questions: Who confesses here? Is the writer the source of the confession? Is the confession an intentional act? Is this even a confession? For the document appears as a literal interruption of an intended writing—logically, but grammatically as well, as

the dash in the fourth sentence relates—and is presented as an interrupted and doubled writing. The pen begins writing; then, in the next sentence, the passage relates that “Razumov began to write.” Composing it results in the loss of the confessant’s distinguishing features, his “character”—textual persona as well as linguistic mark. Without determining that it is false, other narrative devices render the document’s truth status unverifiable. In the previous scene, the novel relates that Razumov fears arrest, since Haldin had escaped Razumov’s room before the police arrived to arrest him. This fear might motivate him to write the confession as a way of protecting himself from suspicion. Thus, rather than a cognitive act whose truth status can be determined by recourse to an extraverbal referent, this “confession of faith” might function as an excuse. These disruptions of the source and status of confession recur throughout the novel.

*Under Western Eyes* prefigures the disturbances of confession that “Poland Revisited” enacts when that confession addresses colonial and revolutionary unrest. In the novel, however, such disturbances elaborate a staging of responsibility that defies Conrad’s proclamations of the “moral anarchy” of revolutionary Russia while also denying that obligations to others are derived from the state, legally regulated, or a matter of moral decision. Counterposing the effects of the revolutionary’s confession with those of legal and religious traditions, the novel puts into confrontation competing theories of responsibility. Traditions of Western secular and religious thought rely on the autonomous, intending subject as the basis of definitions of moral decision, dissimulating the aporia of responsibility that haunts them.<sup>68</sup> That aporia is that the subject must, but cannot, ground moral decision and responsibility, in part because these acts occur through language. Language, as testimony, separates the subject from herself and leaves her words (or gestures) open to effects that cannot be calculated. Testimony discloses that “decision and responsibility are always of the other[.] They always come back or come down to the other, from the other, even if it is the other in me.”<sup>69</sup> *Under Western Eyes* brings this impasse to the fore and, in a deployment of mysticism unintended by its author, makes the effects of the revolutionary Haldin’s confession the vehicle that elucidates it.

Razumov’s confessions are attempts to relieve the haunting aggravated by Razumov’s supposed betrayal of Haldin when he confesses Haldin’s confession to the authorities. Yet the novel simultaneously and ironically questions

the very reason for Razumov's confessions, leading readers to wonder why they occur at all. The language of legal reasoning asks whether the "betrayal" that induces Razumov's subsequent confessions occurs in the first place. Razumov's first act after suffering the silencing caused by Haldin's confession is to confess to the police, but his next act is to rationalize why such a confession will not constitute a betrayal. Razumov puts himself on trial and applies techniques of logical argumentation. The text spotlights the organizing term of "Poland Revisited": "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" (28). Razumov casts himself as witness on the stand while playing prosecution and defense also, as he examines and cross-examines himself by delivering a series of syllogistic questions and answers:

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? On the contrary. . . . What can the prejudice of the world reproach me with? Have I provoked his confidence? No! Have I by a single word, look, or gesture given him reason to suppose that I accepted his trust in me? No!

(28)

The passage rules that betrayal has not occurred by positing that no bond existed before the confession. Haldin's confession cannot institute a bond; thus no responsibility to Haldin exists.

By indicating that Razumov has not necessarily truly given Haldin his word when he enters into what seems like a verbal contract, the novel supports this rational argument and legal conceptualization of responsibility. After Haldin confesses the assassination to Razumov, he makes a request to his reluctant host: "Confidence" (14). Despite an exchange between the two that suggests Razumov agrees, the novel never determines that he promises to honor this request because it never establishes the conditions that make a promise a promise: the commitment to tell the truth. After Haldin asks Razumov to help him vanish by keeping his secret and carrying a message to the peasant Ziemianitch, a digression into Razumov's mental theater follows that details the punitive consequences and misery to befall him if caught. This concludes with Razumov's summation that "he hated the man



[Haldin]" (16). When immediately after this interior monologue Razumov assures Haldin, "Yes, of course I will go. You must give me precise directions, and for the rest—depend on me" (16), the novel refuses to verify that this is a promise to keep Haldin's confession in confidence. Indeed, the passages preceding this imply that Razumov's acquiescence to sending the message seems motivated by the desire to detain Haldin in his rooms should he decide to hand him over to the authorities. By leaving the status of the promise unclear, the novel apparently underwrites the model of responsibility grounded in reason Razumov's quasi-trial scene relates.

Paradoxically, however, by portraying Razumov's reasoning as sound, confirming that he is not morally bound to and therefore cannot logically betray Haldin, the text accords the revolutionary's confession all the more power, given its narrative effects: the compulsive repetitions of confessions that endeavor to exorcise the haunting within. The irrational, mystical force of the revolutionary's confession challenges the rational, legal notion of responsibility espoused. Because it is never determined whether Razumov promises and it is even implied that Razumov's response is actually composed of empty words, it is irrational that Razumov can neither keep Haldin's confession to himself nor give it up. More irrational is that the confession holds him captive even after he decides to turn Haldin in, for example, by compelling him to confess this betrayal/nonbetrayal to Haldin himself, "to pour out a full confession in passionate words that would stir the whole being of that man to its innermost depths; that would end in embraces and tears" (29). The revolutionary confession produces unintended results. It creates a bond that compels Razumov to make endless confessions.

Haldin's confession's irrational power manifests through the multiple confessions it incites. These attempt to eradicate the pest and make good on Razumov's statement that "I am reasonable. I am even—permit me to say—a thinker, though to be sure, this name nowadays seems the monopoly of hawkers of revolutionary wares, the slaves of some French or German thought—devil knows what foreign notions" (66). His confessions, however, only continue to erode boundaries between the reasonable self and the foreign, mystical revolutionary, and they do so often while eroding boundaries between secular and sacred speech. It would seem that Conrad's modernist novel includes a language associated with the sacred and mystic only to criticize its naiveté, just as the narrator criticizes Russian mysticism's

naïveté. For, “If the novel is indeed the characteristic art form of secularization, in Lukács’s words, ‘the representative art form of our age,’ and if modernity is indeed a secular age, we might expect the modernist novel to be doubly secular.”<sup>70</sup> Pericles Lewis rejects this secularization thesis, however, arguing that novelists such as Kafka, Joyce, and Woolf went on a “quest for a modern form of the ‘secular sacred,’” which inspired the formal experiments we identify as modernist.<sup>71</sup> *Under Western Eyes* also takes the sacred seriously. The formal conduct of Razumov’s confessions maps the Christian ritual onto the legal tradition. Because juridical confession’s stated goal is to reveal a truth but Christian confession’s goal is expiation, this mapping disrupts Razumov’s speech. It generates a shift from confession to excuse, which, as “Poland Revisited” showed, will only prevent the closure and unification of the self that confession sets out to accomplish.

The choreography of Razumov’s confession to the state implies that its aim is exculpation rather than the revelation of truth. When Razumov first confesses to harboring Haldin, he confesses to a godlike figure rather than an ordinary police officer or bureaucrat, whom the novel dismisses as inadequate. Bestowing a transcendent power in a patriarch of the state, the closest thing to (and unbeknownst to him, in actuality) Razumov’s own father—“There were no Razumovs belonging to him anywhere. His closest parentage was defined in the statement that he was a Russian” (8)—a sentence depicts the confessor through appositions that move increasingly toward a higher power, “a senator, a dignitary, a great personage, the very man—He!” (30). Although the novel spends pages building tension as Razumov searches for a confessor with the potency to provide redemption from the haunting “pest,” when it finally describes him entering the palace of Prince K, then being admitted into his room, then on the verge of delivering his statement, it abruptly enacts a lapse where the confessional scene should appear. “Though he saw the Prince looking at him with black displeasure,” the narrative tells us that “the lucidity of his mind, of which he was very conscious, gave him an extraordinary assurance. He was not asked to sit down. Half an hour later they appeared in the hall together” (31). The confession is never narrated but occurs “offstage,” behind closed doors in a time and space from which readers are barred. This scenography invokes the religious sacrament: Confession “occurs” in the self-enclosed, shadowy enclave that marks and separates private communion and communication

from public. This *mise-en-scène* indicates that Razumov confesses to right wrongs and neutralize guilt through expiation by the all-powerful. Instead of God, the all-powerful is the state.

The mystical authority attached to the state here seems to support the narrator's characterization of Russian autocratic power as exceptional, transcendent, total, and nothing like power in the West. Such representations, like those of revolution, reflect widely held beliefs of the time. That Conrad chooses Plehve as the victim of revolutionary assassination is especially symptomatic of these beliefs. This interior minister was the symbol of Russia's "mystique," the figurehead of an apparently centrally coordinated police state with a surveillance system extending to every corner of the empire and that was thought to wield brutal counterinsurgency tactics. This mystique was more imaginary than real, however. Jonathan Daly argues that the picture of an "autocracy which transformed legislation, administration, scholarship, church, school, and family into police [organs]"<sup>72</sup> was exaggerated, and he shows that "the uncoordinated, disjointed nature of the civil administration continued to facilitate revolutionary action throughout 1905."<sup>73</sup> Revising one revolutionary's judgment that in Plehve's death "the autocracy lost not only a most faithful servant: it lost its terrible mystique of power," Daly instead asserts that "Plehve, by fulminating against sedition without vigorously rooting it out, had himself eroded much of that mystique."<sup>74</sup> Despite changes in the laws regulating state crimes and a new criminal code that made it easier to punish instigators in the court, "at a time when more and more public activists were castigating the regime as a 'police state,' when revolutionary conspirators were growing more numerous and bold, and when a relatively broad-based coalition of educated opponents of absolutism was maturing, a relatively modest number of people were being punished for political activism."<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the argument that Russian tactics were exceptional requires that one overlook the parallels and even collaborations between Western European nations and Russia throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries in methods of surveillance and policing and the means used to contain and suppress colonial and revolutionary unrest.<sup>76</sup> In Conrad's novel, though, Haldin's strike against Plehve is presented as strike against an omnipotent state.

Yet it is not Haldin's assassination of Plehve but rather his confession of it to Razumov that actually threatens autocratic power, and it does so as a

result of its own mystical force. While the choreography of the confession to Prince K ratifies the narrator's portrayal of state power as mystical and transcendent, the narrative logic of confession contradicts it: Prince K is not all-powerful because he cannot exorcise the irrational haunting produced by Haldin's confession. Razumov's confession to the Prince, which operates as an excuse, only tightens his attachment to the revolutionary other. By retrospectively relating that Razumov strategically edits his confession, the novel highlights that it operates within the Christian logic of expiation. Because it occurs offstage, readers are not made aware of what exactly or how much Razumov revealed. Did he reveal to Prince K that Haldin confessed *and* that he is complicit in Haldin's attempted escape? Or did he censor these parts of the story, as the narrative censors the confession by omitting it? Only later do we learn that Razumov has not admitted complicity, and this retrospective revelation signals that the confession does not aim toward disinterested truth production but rather exoneration. By accusing Haldin, Razumov excuses himself. Consequently, the need to confess to attain relief from the haunting only gains strength as the narrative progresses.

When Razumov confesses to another representative of the state, the effects of Haldin's confession once again bring to the surface connections between secular and Christian discourses and the limits of reason as well as the limits of autocratic power. The same textual choreography that shapes the confession to Prince K occurs in part 4, when Razumov is called before Councilor Mikulin. Initially, Razumov rejects the possibility of confessing to Mikulin that he has withheld information pertaining to de P's assassination, namely, that he served as Haldin's envoy and then killed the peasant. Razumov's rationalizing converts counterfactuality to truth: "Confess! To what? 'I have been speaking to him with the greatest openness,' he said to himself with perfect truth. 'What else could I tell him? That I have undertaken to carry a message to that brute Ziemianitch? Establish a false complicity and destroy what chance of safety I have won for nothing?—what folly!'" (219). But immediately following this reasonable refusal to wager against safety, the haunting becomes intolerable. "Nothing but Haldin—everywhere Haldin: a moral spectre infinitely more effective than any visible apparition of the dead" (220–221). When the Councilor summons him, Razumov therefore responds with "eagerness," for "Mikulin was the only person on earth to whom Razumov could talk, taking the Haldin adventure for granted"

(224). The novel primes readers for Razumov's confession of complicity and murder—"Mr. Razumov, certain of relief, went to meet Councilor Mikulin with the eagerness of a pursued person welcoming any sort of shelter" (224)—only to frustrate expectations in the next sentence: "This much said, there is no need to tell anything more of that first interview and of the several others" (224). The withdrawal of confession from representation indexes the Christological tradition and conveys that it is delivered with the hopes of exculpation.

But autocracy is not omnipotent, the confessant is not absolved, and the haunting continues. Razumov is forced to confess again, then yet again. Like Razumov's confession of faith and his confessions to Prince K and Mikulin, and Conrad's confessions in "Poland Revisited," disruptions prevent these final confessions from achieving closure. They exacerbate self-othering rather than detaching Razumov from the other. After his confessions to the state, Razumov seeks out Haldin's sister because "there is no one anywhere in the whole great world I could go to . . . Do you conceive the desolation of the thought—no one—to—go—to?" (259). The irony of Razumov's confession to Natalia is that it never takes place all the while it appears to occur. Through interruptions of sentences, clauses, ideas, and voice, the novel frames Razumov's confession in the mode of fiction, a "tale" and "story" that only *might* have happened. Like Conrad at the end of "Poland Revisited," Razumov does not identify himself as the subject or agent of the events but refers to himself as another, speaking in the third person. "Suppose that the real betrayer of your brother," Razumov proposes, "—suppose that he was a young man, educated, an intellectual worker, thoughtful, a man your brother might have trusted lightly, perhaps. . . . But there's a whole story there" (259). When Natalia demands to know this story, the text continues to double and split Razumov, positioning him as the confessor of the tale he presents rather than confessant. "I have heard it," he tells her. "There is a staircase in it, and even phantoms, but that does not matter if a man always serves something greater than himself—the idea. I wonder who is the greatest victim in that tale?" (259). After Natalia demands "the story!" a lapse follows that would be extraordinary if this device did not appear so regularly whenever a confession is about to emerge. "'There is no more to tell! . . . It ends here—on this very spot.' He pressed a denunciatory finger to his breast with force, and became perfectly still" (260). Razumov's confession ends without having begun. Not only is the story, the events that

have occurred, excised, but the framing and pronouns displace responsibility. Situated as the climactic revelation, this “confession” culminates in frustrated expectation. As if to underline that confession has not unveiled the truth, the novel has Razumov leave the scene veiled from sight, literally and figuratively. “Something, extreme astonishment perhaps, dimmed my eyes, so that he seemed to vanish before he moved” (261), the English language teacher, who witnesses this scene, relates, and then he expresses with shock to Natalia, “That miserable wretch has carried off your veil!” (261).<sup>77</sup>

This confession fails to produce truth or to exculpate Razumov. After he confesses to Natalia, Razumov confesses to the revolutionaries. The novel underlines that what follows is not a choice: “he stopped, thinking over the form of his confession, and found it suddenly, unavoidably suggested by the fateful evening of his life” (267). As in the previous confessional scene, the same use of third-person narration and of the self-positioning of confessor as confessor while in the midst of confessing appears in this scene. “Am I to tell you of the feelings of that student, sought out in his obscure solitude, and menaced by the complicity forced upon him?” (268) he asks the crowd of revolutionaries, thus excusing himself as the victim of “forced complicity,” without, however, naming himself as that student victim. After he recounts that “the student went to General T—— himself, and said, ‘I have the man who killed de P—— locked up in my room, Victor Haldin, a student like myself’” (268), the crowd’s response clarifies that the testimony has not been received as confession. It demands that Razumov “name him!” (268). As in the case of the “confession of faith” and his “confession” to Natalia, the grammatical staging makes the source of this discourse unclear and its status as testimonial act uncertain. Here, Razumov does not follow the basic rule required to make a speech act a confession: using the first-person pronoun and inhabiting the subject position in a declarative sentence. He describes the actions for which he would confess in the third person, and then, when he responds to the revolutionaries’ demand to name the perpetrator, his response is an interrogative: “haven’t you all understood that I am that man?” (268). It is no surprise that even after this moment, the revolutionaries wonder whether or not a confession has occurred: “‘But this is a confession!’ [was] uttered by somebody in a desperate shriek” (269).

This supposedly “closing” confession should serve as a narrative triumph of secular and religious discourses of responsibility. Razumov claims to uncover the truth and take responsibility for betraying Haldin, thus exorcizing

the revolutionary “moral specter.” After confessing to the revolutionaries, he declares himself “free.” “‘I beg you to observe,’ he said, already on the landing, ‘that I had only to hold my tongue. Today, of all days since I came amongst you, I was made safe, and today I made myself free from falsehood, from remorse—independent of every single human being on this earth’” (270). The effects of the confession ironize this statement, however. The revolutionaries beat him, he loses his hearing, and then he is hit by a tram-car. At the end of the novel, he is “crippled, ill, getting weaker every day” (278), and is not independent but relies on a caretaker, the peasant woman Tekla, to live.

The novel ironizes Razumov’s claims to freedom in another, perhaps more important way, however. It relates that confession is a double bind: it obligates one to others, but it is also the condition of possibility of community. Rendered deaf as a result of the revolutionaries’ blows, Razumov is without use of an organ that mediates between inner and outer world, self and other, language and silence. That organ opened him to Haldin’s confession in the first place. Left without the alterity that haunts within, Razumov is no longer in danger of receiving such dangerous confessions. He is, as he claims, “safe” (270). But he is also henceforth separated from the rest of the world in crucial ways. His “freedom” emerges at the cost of a loss of the possibility of community.

*Under Western Eyes* contests concepts of ethical agency founded on rationalism, autonomy, or moral decision, all of which the novel aligns with the West. The itinerary of confession rejects Razumov’s claim that in order to betray an other, there must be a “moral bond first,” a bond that arises from one’s choice to commit to another. Irrational revolutionary confession as the language of the other—the other of reason and of the autonomous subject—is the medium through which responsibility emerges. The functioning of Haldin’s confession separates ethics from volition and responsibility from conscious decision by severing language from authorial control and intent while revealing the aporia of responsibility that juridico-legal discourses dissimulate. The revolutionary’s confession commits Razumov without waiting for him to countersign, except through a language that works beyond his control and exceeds, even thwarts, intention.<sup>78</sup> Readers have often addressed Razumov’s actions in terms of “moral character,” but the staging of responsibility as incalculable effects of revolutionary confes-

sion renders the question of moral character moot.<sup>79</sup> According to *Under Western Eyes*, the ethical is not a matter of ego psychology, rational choice, or utility but an obligation to others beyond self-knowledge and intent.

In its elaboration of confession, Conrad's work departs from articulations of community based on genealogy, ethnicity, or race that find historical form in nationalisms and imperialisms as well as from articulations of community often expressed in culturalist theories of cosmopolitanism. Relating that "Western" and "Russian" are precarious markers of identification and fragile subject positions, confession demonstrates that commitments to others do not proceed from the basis of shared blood or soil. Neither, however, are these commitments formed on the basis of shared behaviors, consumer practices, affects, or ideals. They emerge through a testimonial language that repudiates the premise that subjective choice and free will determine one's responsibility to others. It is necessary to point out, however, that although the novel subverts imperial and nationalist models of identity and belonging and attendant subject-centered models of responsibility, it also struggles against this subversion. If Christian and legal models of confession ultimately do not call an end to self-splitting induced by the revolutionary confession and therefore fail to consolidate an ethics founded on rationality, selfhood, and legal models of responsibility, it is not for lack of trying. The multiplication of these confessions, which is driven by unresolved attitudes toward anticolonial insurgency and revolution, warns that an age of increasingly permeable borders in which transnational alliances multiply and shift as they travel through new economic and political circuits does not necessarily herald a postracial, postethnic, or postnational ethics or politics. It is the very porousness of borders that can activate a resurgence of racialized, nationalist circumscriptions of community, a rejection of responsibility to others that confession demands.