

Introduction

This book has a twofold origin. Over the past ten years, as an associate editor of the prospective Cambridge Edition of *Under Western Eyes*, I have worked on the genesis and composition of the novel in its several versions and on its literary, ideological, social, and historical contexts. During these years I have also taught seminars courses on Conrad for undergraduates and on Conrad and Dostoevsky for postgraduates. This interpenetration of teaching and research constantly reminded me that my many hours devoted (say) to textual minutiae and manuscript variations or to a study of Conrad's Polish background should result not only in a scholarly edition of the novel but in a book that will demonstrate the ways in which his "life" and his protracted, uncertain composition of the novel enrich his "art".

I borrow my title from Conrad, who in the summer of 1908 interrupted his writing of *Razumov* (his original title for *Under Western Eyes*) in order to compose a series of "Reminiscences" for the *English Review*, that eventually became *A Personal Record* (1912). On 17 October, with two sketches completed, he told his agent J. B. Pinker that he could advertise them by saying "that in the course of development the inner story of most of my books will come out ... a sort of literary confession as to the sources as well as to the aims. I have even been thinking of a title something like : "The Art and the Life."¹

Conrad's *belle-lettrist* title aptly captures the concerns of my book for two broad and interrelated reasons. First, the novel exists in four versions, namely two complete MSS (a holograph and a *TS*), a serial, and

¹ *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Volume IV*, eds Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, Cambridge, 1990, 139. Correspondingly, on 18 September he told Pinker "These are to be intimate personal autobiographical things under the general title ... The Life and the Art" (125). Four volumes of the letters have been published and henceforward, whenever appropriate, either volume number (I, II, III, IV) and page reference, or the latter alone, will appear in parentheses in the text; and the abbreviation *CL* I, II, III, IV, in the notes. Pinker (1863-1922) was one of the first literary agents in London. He became Conrad's agent in 1900, providing tremendous financial and emotional support. His clients included Ford, James, Wells, Bennett, and Lawrence.

the novel itself.² The holograph differs substantially from the *TS* and the latter is a composite document containing evidence of two huge revisions and cuts in the fall of 1908 and the spring of 1910, and of minor emendations *en passant*. A textual scholar's knowledge of the dramatically different MSS versions, including revisions, cuts, and additions, often made because of interruptions at different times, inevitably highlights as Hershell Parker discovered, an author's writing habits and rhythms, his choices and decisions, his transformations, pervading thoughts, aesthetic, and (dread word) intentions.³ Moreover, because the *TS* underpins the serial and because Conrad used the latter to set the text of the novel for publication, we are able to map his creative process and gauge his fictional effects in a peculiarly complex and available case.

Second, Conrad's finest meditation on the relationship between the art and the life, namely "A Familiar Preface" (1911) to *A Personal Record*, was designed "to explain (in a sense) how I came to write such a novel as *Under Western Eyes* ... so utterly unlike in subject and treatment from anything I had done before".⁴ Thus Conrad can assert in this "Preface", "I know that a novelist lives in his work" because in *Under Western Eyes* he "turned frequently for sustenance to memories" and sought "discourse with" his Polish "shades", especially those of his parents Apollo and Ewa Korzeniowski.⁵ Indeed, as both the novel and the cancelled sequences in the MSS particularly show, and as he acknowledged in his "Author's Note" (1920), his "peculiar experience of race and family" demanded a

² The italicized abbreviation *TS* refers to the Philadelphia Free Library typescript, and *TS* to typescript in general.

³ *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons*, Evanston, 1984, especially chapter 4, "The Authority of the Revised Text and the Disappearance of the Author", 85-114. Like Parker, I also discovered that I could not "avoid the test of 'reader response' in judging the effect of textual alterations" (xiii).

⁴ 13 September 1911, *CL IV*, 477. "A Familiar Preface" was composed in the summer of 1911 when Conrad was also working on "the galley slips" (467) of *Under Western Eyes*, which was published on 5 October.

⁵ *A Personal Record*, xiii, xv. Henceforward, *APR* in the footnotes. All page references, as with all Conrad's works except *The Secret Agent*, are to the Dent Collected Edition, 1946-47; and whenever possible they will appear in parentheses in the text.

“greater effort of detachment from all passions, prejudices, and even from personal memories” than any fiction hitherto (viii).⁶ Hence, in Bernard C. Meyer’s fine formulation:

What imparts to this work its special poignancy and renders it perhaps the most autobiographic of Conrad’s stories would seem to be that here for the first—and last—time in his writing career he ventured boldly within the geographic, ethnic, and personal confines of his remote, unhappy past.⁷

It is, therefore, the first fiction (in the words of its narrator) to depict directly “the political conditions” and “cruel realities” (117) of a brutal tsarism, that had shaped and more often destroyed his Polish “shades”.

My title, therefore, deliberately invokes Conrad’s belief in the inseparability of the art and the life. In the course of writing this book, however, I was always aware that I was revoking the New Critical nostrums I had imbibed as a youth such as the irrelevance of authorial intention to interpretation and the duty to separate the “art” from the “life”, because in Eliot’s rigorous (and self-protective) formulation, “the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind that creates”.⁸ In fact, I could escape neither the unfashionability of my enterprise nor the resistance it is bound to encounter from modern critics who endorse either Barthes’ notion of “the death of the author” (148), or Foucault’s contention that “the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing”; or the variety of claims by post-structuralists and literary theorists that “an author’s personality and life-history disappear irretrievably in the textual machine” and that “the author is a mere fiction or trace of language ... a textual illusion”; or of narratologists who insist that first-person narrators

⁶ *Under Western Eyes*, viii. Henceforward, in the notes, *UWE*. All the quotations from the Dent Edition are identical to the English First Edition.

⁷ Bernard C. Meyer, *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography*, Princeton, 1967, 218. Henceforward *A Psychoanalytic Biography*.

⁸ “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919), *Selected Essays*, London, 1932, 18.

(such as the old teacher in *Under Western Eyes*) and not authors write texts, and who then accuse tellers of tampering with or abusing their "authority".⁹

I take some comfort, however, from Sean Burke's magnificent *The Death and Return of the Author*, which I read as I completed this book. He begins with the notorious and painful case of Paul de Man's youthful anti-Semitism and pro-Nazi sentiments in scores of articles in the collaborationist Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*, and then reviews the various critical and theoretical responses to the great issues of "Intention", "Author-ity", "Biography", "Accountability", "Oeuvre", and "Autobiography" that they raise.¹⁰ Burke notes that all these responses dramatize both the inescapable intersections between an author and his texts and signal "the return of the author" even amongst those who practice anti-authorial criticism (7). For "if authorship were indeed a textual illusion, there would be no charge to answer beyond that of reminding the world that in the reality of text 'Paul de Man' signs and signifies nothing" (5). De Man may or may not be a great theorist. I am certain, however, that Conrad is a great novelist. Moreover, throughout his fictional career he avoided and analyzed "the ideological mystification" (6) to which de Man succumbed in his youth; and he anticipated and rejected the latter's insistence that a writer's life does not bear in any way upon the interpretation of a writer's works when he confessed in "A Familiar Preface", that "a novelist" is "the only reality in an invented world" of his fictions (xiii). Indeed, in *A Personal Record* he austerely and bravely accepted (as de Man perhaps could not) that for "A writer of imaginative prose (even more, than any other sort of artist) stands confessed in his works. His conscience, his deeper sense of things lawful and unlawful, gives him his attitude before the world" (95). Again, to

⁹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author", *Image-Music-Text*, selected and trans. by Stephen Heath, London, 1977, 142-48; Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, London, 1989, 102-03; Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, Edinburgh, 1992, 5, 2; for narratologists see Terence Cave, "Joseph Conrad: the Revenge of the Unknown" in *Recognitions*, Oxford, 1990, 464-88, and Bruce Henricksen, *Nomadic Voices: Conrad and the Subject of Narrative*, Urbana, 1992.

¹⁰ In the "Prologue: The Deaths of Paul de Man", *The Death and Return of the Author*, 1-7. All future references are in parentheses in the text.

appeal to, and identify an author “Conrad” is not, as Barthes maintains, to “impose a limit on” a “text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (147).¹¹ Rather, “We can, without contradiction conceive” of Conrad as one of those “authors”, who Burke insists, “do not issue ‘single theological messages’ and who do not hold a univocal mastery over their texts” (25). Indeed, *Under Western Eyes*, in common with all his greatest works, demonstrates not only that he fully understood the appeal of “single theological messages”, but that he developed an aesthetic and constructed his fictions out of their various, urgent, and competing claims.

i

Throughout this book, and in chapters 2 and 3, especially, I draw on my reading of Polish literature and history and on the facts of Conrad’s life in order to demonstrate the ways in which his “peculiar experience of race and family” and “effort of detachment” imbue and shape *Under Western Eyes*. For the benefit of readers who may have only a passing acquaintance with his Polish background, I outline below its main lineaments and, simultaneously, demonstrate the ways in which they inform his sense of the writer’s task and fictional aesthetic and, consequently, the presentation of his narratives.¹²

At the risk of oversimplification, the four most significant aspects of Conrad’s Polish heritage with regard to his “art” are that: 1) he was from birth simultaneously a subject of the vast, oppressive Russian empire and a member of the *szlachta* who had constituted the hereditary ruling class of Poland since feudal times, and who had cherished and fought to defend the lost freedoms of the Old Polish Commonwealth after the three partitions in the last third of the eighteenth century; 2) the Russian Ukraine of Conrad’s birth was multiethnic, multireligious, and multilingual; 3) his own “closest parentage suffered”, like Razumov’s in *Under Western Eyes*, from the throes of “internal dissensions” (11); 4) the two most significant

¹¹ *Image-Music-Text*, 147.

¹² Readers unfamiliar with Conrad’s life should begin with Zdzisław Najder’s *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, Cambridge, 1983. The documents he gathers in *Conrad’s Polish Background*, Oxford, 1964, and *Conrad Under Familial Eyes*, Cambridge, 1983, are essential background reading. Henceforward, *A Chronicle*, *CPB*, and *CUFE*, respectively.

decisions of his life — his departure from Poland to go to sea and his subsequent career as an English novelist — led to charges of betrayal and desertion of his native land.

The Old Commonwealth of pre-partition Poland, formed from the Polish and Lithuanian Kingdoms, consolidated by the Unions of Krewo (1385) and Lublin (1569), was during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the biggest, most powerful, and most civilized state in Europe. It was ethnically and racially heterogeneous, cherishing traditions of religious and racial tolerance when wars of religion ravaged Western Europe. The dominant class the *szlachta*, “the Polish nation of the gentry” into which Conrad was born, claimed to speak for the needs and aspirations of all the members of the Old Commonwealth irrespective of their native language, their ethnic background or their religious beliefs.¹³ From the beginning of the eighteenth century the Commonwealth was weakened by foreign wars, dynastic rivalries, internal dissensions, and by a constitution, which became unworkable after the adoption of the *liberum veto* in the mid-seventeenth century. The latter was based on the Christian assumption of the absolute political equality of all members of the *szlachta*. The unfortunate corollary of this charitable conception of government was that every measure introduced into the Polish Diet had to be adopted *unanimously* before it could become law. The Commonwealth became ungovernable and was threatened as ever by her historic foe, Russia, the rise of Prussia and by the expansionist ambitions of the Hapsburg Empire. In the First Partition of 1772 Poland lost about one fifth of her population and one quarter of her territories to the Triple Alliance of Austria, Prussia, and Russia.

The Four Years Diet (or “Great Parliament”) of 1788-1792, inspired by the French Revolution, proclaimed a new Constitution on 3 May 1791, which abolished the *liberum veto*, and converted Poland into an hereditary

¹³ Historians differ widely in their assessment of the *szlachta* and their claims: Andrzej Walicki argues they constituted “a *political*”, if not “a linguistic nation”, because they were based on “the unifying force of a common political history and constitution”, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism*, Oxford, 1982, 68; whereas Peter Brock maintains that the *szlachta*’s “boasted republicanism was based on the exclusion from all participation in affairs of state of not only the non-Polish, but also the Polish masses; for it was not ethnic affinity but shared privilege that provided the bond uniting members of the ‘nation’”, “Polish Nationalism”, in Peter E. Sugar and Ivo Lederer, eds *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, Seattle, 1969, 310-11.

limited monarchy with ministerial responsibility and parliaments. The franchise was extended to the burghers, serfdom was mitigated or fudged (depending on one's point of view) in anticipation of its abolition, and religious and racial toleration were confirmed. The most liberal constitution of its day frightened both the autocratic forces of the Triple Alliance and the most reactionary of the *szlachta*, namely the great magnates, who resented any restrictions of their powers and who, as usual, feared anarchy. They colluded with the tsarist forces of Catherine the Great to ensure the defeat of the Polish Insurrectionist army led by General Kościuszko. As a result of the Second and Third Partitions of 1793 and 1795, Poland as a state was in effect wiped off the map of Europe until 1919. Its most central and Eastern territories including Lithuania, and the Ukraine were annexed by Russia.

Thus, when Conrad was born in 1857, Ukraine had been annexed and occupied by Russia for over two generations. After the abortive Polish Uprisings of 1830 and 1863, which led to the banishment of the insurgents and the wholesale confiscations of their lands, severe political and cultural repression occurred, "bent on extirpating" in the narrator's formulation in *Under Western Eyes*, "every vestige of anything that resembled freedom in public institutions" (7). Conrad's historical knowledge and youthful experience of the horrors of a lawless tsarist imperialism was supplemented and confirmed by his subsequent exposure as a mariner to English, Dutch, and Belgian modes of imperialism. Moreover, in the Belgian Congo, to which he went in 1890 both as an adventurer hoping to make his fortune and to fulfil childhood dreams of visiting the "very heart of Africa", Conrad witnessed the disintegration of Western imperialism and the Christian mission into "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience and geographical exploration".¹⁴

Second, the population of the province of Podolia when Conrad was born consisted of a tiny but powerful Russian (Orthodox Christian) bureaucracy and standing army; Polish (Roman Catholic) landowners and landlords; German (Protestant) colonists; a vast underclass of Ukrainian (Uniate Christian) serfs, and in the town of Berdichev, a large Jewish population. Crucially, as Paul Hostowic has noted, "each of these groups

¹⁴ "Geography and Some Explorers" (1924), *Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays*, 17.

had their own truth, separated from others by religion, customs, tradition, profession" and, of course, by language. Moreover they "were not linked by common institutions nor by recognition of common laws and interests".¹⁵ The Polish romantic nationalists such as Apollo Korzeniowski presumed to speak for all these groups; but their inability to realize that they were divided from their serfs by race, class, religion, culture and language was a major factor in the failure of both Uprisings in 1831 and 1863. Conrad mordantly acknowledges these divisions and the misjudgment of his kin in chapter III of *A Personal Record*, when "less than forty-eight hours after the beginning of the rebellion" of 1863 in Podolia (57), a "bucolic mob" (62) of local Ukrainian serfs united with the Cossacks to sack the manor house of his grand-uncle Mr. Nicholas B[obrowski].

Third, it was Conrad's peculiar fate to experience as a youth two opposed ideologies within his own family on how to live as a Pole within the repressive Russian empire. Conrad's ancestors on his father's side were committed insurrectionists. "My paternal grandfather" Conrad wryly notes in *A Personal Record* was "of that type of Polish squire whose only ideal of patriotic action was to get into the saddle and drive them out" (57). His father, Apollo Korzeniowski, as I show in chapter 2, was an ardent romantic nationalist and one of the leading spirits behind the Uprising of 1863. He died in May 1869 when Conrad was eleven and a half years old. His tombstone attests that he was "a victim of Muscovite tyranny" and that he "loved his country, worked for her, died for her". His funeral, as so often in occupied countries, became the occasion of a massive patriotic demonstration. Fittingly "as the orphaned son of a national hero" Conrad became a public figure in his own right when he led the procession of mourners. The vast crowd, as Conrad records in "Poland Revisited" (1915), "had not come to honour a great achievement, or even some splendid failure". Rather, "The dead and they were victims alike of an unrelenting destiny which cut them off from every path of merit and glory."¹⁶

¹⁵ Quoted by F. P. Berka, "Zhitomir and the Ukrainian Background in the early Childhood of Joseph Conrad", *The Conradian*, 8/2 (Summer, 1983), 10.

¹⁶ *Notes on Life and Letters*, 69. Henceforward, *NLL*. Conrad's formulation has a defensive ring, serving as one explanation for why he left Poland. Cf. *APR*, where he recalls the attempts to persuade him not to leave Poland for the sea: "What reward

Apollo died in May 1869, and in August 1870 when Conrad was almost thirteen his maternal grandmother was appointed his custodian. In effect his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski (1829-94) took on the care of his nephew and the other children of his kin who sacrificed either their lives or their careers in the God-given cause of Polish freedom. Bobrowski was, like his father and grandfather, a Conciliator. They all opposed the insurrectionists because, as Bobrowski maintained in his *Memoirs*, they embodied “a manifestation of the inflammable temperament, known for its gullibility, rashness and instability”.¹⁷ Because they took no part in the Uprisings of 1830 and 1863 and tried to work from within the reality of the Triple Alliance, they kept possession of their family estates.

To Bobrowski the nurture of the indirect victims of the Uprising of 1863 was a moral duty: “we are”, as he told Conrad in a letter 14 May 1882, “responsible for each other and the family spirit is based on that”.¹⁸ Thus until his death in 1894, although he was opposed by conviction and by temperament to the noble folly of his insurrectionary kin, he devoted his time, energy, and money to ensure that the sins of the fathers did not descend upon his unfortunate nephews and nieces.¹⁹ He was a cautious and methodical man who grew rich because he leased his estates to the Ukrainian peasants and was instrumental in promoting the lucrative sugar beet industry in the region.

In marked contrast to Korzeniowski, who was a product of the Romantic movement, Bobrowski, as his *Memoirs* and his letters to Conrad reveal, was a product of the Enlightenment, “deeply confident of the inflexibility and unchanging rights and duties of the mind, of critical judgment and free will which make a man a master of his own fate and history”.²⁰ A

could I expect from such a life at the end of my years, either in ambition, honour or conscience” (43).

¹⁷ *CUFE*, 36.

¹⁸ *CPB*, 85-6.

¹⁹ He supported, for example, the eight children of his brother Kazimierz who “on receiving the news of the rising of Poland” in 1863 “voluntarily resigned his commission as an officer in the Russian army”. He was arrested before it began (*CPB*, 37).

²⁰ *CUFE*, 28.

fervent admirer of the French Revolution, he knew that Poland's future as a nation would eventually depend upon their treatment of, and relationship with, the peasants. On the one hand, he was deeply contemptuous of "the widespread torpor" of the *szlachta* and on the other, he was suspicious of the insurrectionists' radical views of, and fanciful designs, upon the peasants.²¹ Therefore, he "devoted", as Andrzej Busza notes, "much of his life to the cause of the peasantry" and became "one of the leaders of emancipation ... in the Polish Ukraine", and after their emancipation in 1864 he tried to ensure that they were neither abused by their landlords or owners (who were often ethnic Poles) nor charged excessive rents.²²

Throughout his life, Bobrowski was a Conciliator seeking "the attainment of a fairly tolerable *modus vivendi* that would find its expression in a complete autonomy of the (Polish) Kingdom, a recognition of our basic needs and, in time, an acknowledgement of certain national rights of the old Polish settlers in Ruthenia".²³ Thus, according to Busza, he "eyed with suspicion all new social developments and detested professional revolutionaries" (143), fearing another *jacquerie*. Bobrowski felt he was squeezed between the reactionary Triple Loyalists who denied all Polish claims to a national (as opposed to a cultural) existence and between the Insurrectionists who believed that a social revolution must either precede or coincide with a forceful reassertion of national freedoms. After the "ineffective revolution" of 1863 which "deprived us, perhaps for ever, of the likelihood of a peaceful and legitimate national development" he began to hope, as he wrote to Conrad in September 1881, "that eventually out of this chaos some form of federation will emerge". "In the meantime", because he felt that Poland's "moral and social situation" was severely threatened by Bismarck's pan-German expansionism and the determination of Russia to deprive us "of our own political and national rights, we have to preserve our individuality and our own standpoint, till the time comes when Nemesis, as a result of our own efforts, spins out some situation

²¹ *CUFE*, 28-9.

²² Andrzej Busza, "Conrad's Polish Literary Background and some Illustrations of the Influence of Polish Literature on his Work", *Antemurale*, 10 (1966), 148. This long, excellent study (109-247) is seminal. All future page references appear in brackets in the text.

²³ *CUFE*, 36.

which will give us the right to have a real national existence".²⁴

As a federationist and a rationalist, he feared the chauvinistic trends manifest both in Bismarck's Germany and the submerged nations of the Austro-Hungarian Empire because they engendered "mutual hatred". In his *Memoirs* he envisaged that after an era of moral and material exhaustion "there must come 'an epoch of peace and reconciliation', an epoch of reflection on the part of the strong and the mighty, that will enable the weak and the oppressed to live and rise in the name of the holiest interests of mankind and of nations, based on experience".²⁵ The universalist tenor of his thought and his vision of an epoch of peace are distinct manifestations of the ideals of the old Commonwealth and of Polish Catholicism; but his stress on "experience" rebukes the enthusiasm of the insurrectionary temperament.

Bobrowski shared the *szlachta's* disdain for speculation and had "no intention of selling myself ... to the devil with the object of exploiting other people's poverty or stupidity".²⁶ Nevertheless he shared the beliefs of the Polish Positivists (who dominated Polish intellectual, culture, and social life after the 1863 Uprising) that "a real national existence" was inconceivable unless Poland embraced capitalism in preparation for its emergence as a modern European state. Money may be "filthy" but, as he and the Positivists recognised, "it is the 'nervus rerum' and the basis of both the external and inner independence of both an individual and a whole society" (84).

Appalled by the failure of the 1863 rebellion and scornful of the folly of the Insurrectionists, Bobrowski composed for his nephew's edification an elaborate family schema which stressed the essential opposition between Conrad's "Nalecz" and "Bobrowski" strains.²⁷ To Bobrowski, Conrad's quixotic wish to go to sea, his failed suicide attempt in 1878, his disastrous

²⁴ *CPB*, 80.

²⁵ *CUFÉ*, 75.

²⁶ *CPB*, 112. All future references, where appropriate, are placed in brackets in the text.

²⁷ For a full (if biased) account of Bobrowski's readiness "to sacrifice truth for the sake of family mythology" cf. Zdzisław Najder's "Introduction" to *CPB*, especially 17-20.

trip to the Belgian Congo (which he strongly opposed) and his youthful pessimism all confirmed the “inherited shortcomings” of his paternal lineage. These included idealistic dreaming, fecklessness, and an unstable and adventurous spirit which ensured that in “your projects you let your imagination run away with you—you become an optimist; but when you encounter disappointments you fall easily into pessimism—and as you have a lot of pride you suffer more as a result of disappointments than somebody would who had a more moderate imagination but was endowed with greater endurance in activity and relationships” (148). To counteract these inherited shortcomings he stressed his nephew’s sober, realistic Bobrowski inheritance. Thus he constantly reminded him “Your whole future depends on work” (49) and urged him throughout their relationship to be useful, hard-working and capable, to master a profession and to be responsible for, and “prudent” in, his actions (55). He supported his imprudent, spend-thrift nephew emotionally, psychologically, and financially for twenty-five years (1869-94), first in Marseilles and then throughout his career in the British Merchant Navy (1878-93). When his guardian died in 1894 Conrad felt “as if everything has died in me” (I, 148): and in *A Personal Record* he lovingly recalls “the wisest, the firmest, the most indulgent of guardians, extending over me a paternal care and affection, a moral support which I seemed to feel always near me in the most distant parts of the earth” (31). Busza rightly concludes that these clashing inherited loyalties which Conrad internalized “were representative of the political possibilities and modes of action open to the nation as a whole and gave him a great start as a writer”.²⁸

The fourth aspect of Conrad’s Polish heritage, namely his complex response to the charges of “desertion” for leaving Poland and of betrayal for writing in English, has attracted a deal of commentary, and figures

²⁸ “Conrad’s Polish Literary Background”, 36. Norman Davies carefully surveys the respective values, hopes, and actions of these respective nationalistic traditions, and in an elegant aphorism argues: “If the Insurrectionists were the high-priests of the nation’s soul, the Conciliators were the guardians of its body”, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland*, Vol. II, Oxford, 1982, 46.

large in chapters 2 and 3 (especially) of this book.²⁹ Indeed, Conrad's

²⁹ This is a huge and controversial subject. Gustav Morf, *The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad*, London, 1930, searches for the "figure behind the veil" in Conrad's guilt over his twofold betrayal of Poland, and proceeds to read all the fiction in relation to Freudian notions of repression and "the guilt complex". Morf's thesis has proved immensely influential, even though his methodology is crude. Thus he construes all Conrad's "heroes" as "more or less his doubles, and their fate is modelled on his own or on what he feared his own fate might be" (96). He wildly reads all the fictions as private allegories, claiming (notoriously) that Jim's jump from the Patna matches "exactly what happened to Joseph Conrad. *The sinking ship is Poland* And finally, Jim ... jumped, i.e Conrad became a British citizen" (163). Again, he alleges that the "Korzeniowski strain" of Conrad's divided heritage is "personified, exteriorized" in a huge range of characters ("utopians, idealists, philosophers, revolutionaries, and gold-seekers") and then postulates "if Conrad hates them, it is because he hates the Korzeniowski strain within himself" (21): an "if" that both grossly simplifies his relationship to his father and then denies the complex mix of scorn and sympathy, of detachment and intimacy, evident in Conrad's presentation of (say) a silver-seeker like Gould in *Nostramo* or more pertinently for this book an idealist such as Haldin in *UWE*, whose political beliefs, as we shall see, do closely resemble Korzeniowski's. Meyer, a practising psychoanalyst, builds on Morf, tracing in both Conrad's life and works a complex of dominant psychic and neurotic manifestations, such as fetishizations, oedipalism, incest motifs, and a fragile sense of identity and masculinity. Though he can be richly suggestive, he reductively insists after a review of "Conrad's efforts to create a variegated cast of characters who are endowed with a differentiation of gender and moral sense and embossed by a stamp of individuality" that "they were virtually all cast from a single mold—a mold that was assuredly the writer himself". (280) Both Morf and Meyer are deaf to tone and ignore Conrad's ambivalence, manifest, as we shall see, in the competing interpretive models canvassed by such complex narratives as *UWE*. Robert F. Hodges, *The Dual Heritage of Joseph Conrad*, The Hague, 1967, and Peter Stine both begin with the notorious divisions in Conrad's Polish heritage and reach opposite conclusions. For the former, Korzeniowski is the source of all the presuming, defeated heroes in Conrad's fiction who seek to reform or redeem their worlds, such as Kurtz, Jim, and Haldin; whereas Stine, tenaciously following Morf, believes that a single crime "energizes all of Conrad's fiction", namely "his sense in exile, of having betrayed the revolutionary ideals that martyred his parents and earned his life-long respect": "Joseph Conrad's Confessions in *Under Western Eyes*", *Cambridge Quarterly*, 9/2 (1980), 95. Conrad's great Polish biographer, Zdzisław Najder, a convinced logical positivist, insists that we can understand the relationship of Conrad to his Polish heritage neither in his personal reactions to it nor in his unconscious, but through a study of the great public themes of Polish literature and history, namely "duty abandoned, of betrayal, and

very Polishness ensured he could not escape these haunting charges because as Bobrowski reminded him in 1881, when he urged him “to write” travel sketches for a Warsaw weekly: “It would be an exercise in your native tongue—that thread that binds you to your country and countrymen, and finally a tribute to the memory of your father who always wanted to and did serve his country by his pen.”³⁰ Thereafter, Poles of all persuasions were bound to query why he wrote about either Dutch dreamers living in the Far East, such as Almayer, or sea novels, when he could “use his talent to glorify Poland’s name ... and depict in his novels the unhappiness of his native land”.³¹ As we know, the inevitable happened when news of his literary career broke in Poland and he was accused in 1899 by Eliza Orzeszkowa of betrayal and of draining away “the life blood of the nation” by writing “popular and lucrative novels in English”.³² Even Conrad’s father, who excoriated the back-sliding Polish bourgeoisie because they were “without principles, without love of their country” and “smeared with mud, and lacking moral strength”, could not have advanced the case for the prosecution more bitterly: and, as we shall see, to his son’s sense of the issue, more unjustly.³³

above all—desertion”: “Conrad’s Polish Background, or, From Biography To A Study of Culture”, *Conradiana*, 18/1, (1986), 4. For the standard “Western” account of Conrad’s Polish background see Eloise Knapp Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad*, Chicago, 1981.

³⁰ *CPB*, 71-72.

³¹ Witold Chwalewik, “Joseph Conrad in Cardiff”, *CUFE*, 175. The account continues: “Conrad seemed quite annoyed. Throwing up his arms he exploded, at first in French: ‘Ah, mon-ami, que voulez vous? I would lose my public ...’ He could not make a living by his writing if he were to use it as a tool of propaganda. It would be impossible for him to write about Poland.” As I show in chapter 2, his most famous political essay “Autocracy and War” (1905) is “propaganda” and, along with *UWE*, can be read as an oblique “tribute to the memory of his father”.

³² “The Emigration of Talent”, *CUFE*, 187. For Conrad’s bitter response to this and other charges of desertion see Aniela Zagorska, “A Few Reminiscences of Conrad”, 210-23.

³³ *CUFE*, 119.

Given Conrad's nation's loathing of Russia, given his multiethnic, multilingual background, and given his career in the British Merchant Service (1878-93), during which he encountered a great variety of competing cultures, truths, faiths, languages, and imperialisms, it is hardly surprising that from the moment he began his first novel *Almayer's Folly* (1895) with Mrs Almayer's disconcerting Malayan screech "Kaspar! Makan!" (3) — which startled her husband, a Dutch trader, from his dreams of a "splendid future" in Amsterdam — the central informing idea of his fiction should be "the essential difference of the races" (2:402). These differences are manifest in the clash and interaction of the various races and in the (often) divided minds and lives of his characters and narrators.

Correspondingly, Conrad's most succinct and compelling definition of the role of the artist and the fate of mankind is to be found in his great letter of 2 August, 1901, to *The New York Times* which was written shortly after he composed "Amy Foster" — a pure illustration of his key idea:

Fiction, at the point of development at which it has arrived, demands from the writer a spirit of scrupulous abnegation. The only legitimate basis of creative work lies in the courageous recognition of all the irreconcilable antagonisms that make our lives so enigmatic, so burdensome, so fascinating, so dangerous—so full of hope! They exist! And this is the only fundamental truth of fiction. Its recognition must be critical in its nature, inasmuch that in its character it may be joyous ... sad ... angry with revolt, or submissive in resignation But, whatever light he flashes on it, the fundamental truth remains, and it is only in its name that the barren struggle of contradictions assumes the dignity of moral strife going on ceaselessly to a mysterious end (2:348-9).

The "courageous recognition of all irreconcilable antagonisms" is central to Conrad's work and to any appreciation of its power, ambivalence, and appeal. His fictional worlds engage and disconcert us because they are constructed out of and explore a play of opposites that are never finally resolved. These (famously) include heart and head, solidarity and

isolation, idealism and scepticism, piety and scorn, loyalty and betrayal, heroism and contingency, fidelity to a code composed of "a few very simple ideas" and truth to one's own sensations, and, finally, competing beliefs that an individual has the capacity to create order and that the world is a cosmic joke.³⁴

These oppositions are also evident in Conrad's sense of his audience and his views on the power and value of language. On the one hand, he believes that the artist works through language for a direct grasp upon humanity, that "one writes only half the book: the other half is with the reader" (1:370) and that "the control of the public (audience, readers) attention is in a sense the beginning and end of artistic method" (4:422); and on the other, he distrusted his reviewers, thought his audience elusive and fickle, felt with the narrator of *Under Western Eyes* that "words are ... the great foes of reality" (3), and that "half the words we use have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit" (2:17). Again, on the one hand, he advocates in his "Preface" to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* a Flaubertian "care for the shape and ring of sentences", and in "A Familiar Preface" proclaims "Give me the right accent and I will move the world" (xii); and, on the other, claims that "words blow away like mists" (2:17) and both fears and distrusts, as Kurtz's case supremely exemplifies, humankind's "gift of expression" because it is simultaneously "the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness" (113).

Conrad's recognition of the ceaseless "struggle of contradictions" springs from an inclusive vision of man's fate: and because "the *whole* of the truth lies in the presentation ... This is the only morality of *art* apart from its *subject*" (II, 200), his vision sponsors his search for the correlative form, for what the narrator of *Under Western Eyes* calls a "living form" (3) that would entertain, negotiate, and shape the competing languages, perspectives, and points of view on the world. Reviewing this search late in life Conrad remarked on "my unconventional grouping and perspective ... wherein all my art consists it is fluid depending on (grouping) sequence, which shifts, and on the changing lights giving varied

³⁴ APR, xix.

effects of perspective”.³⁵ Hence, famously, Conrad’s fondness for multilayered, multivoiced and multimediated fictions, and for dazzling switches of chronology and perspective, which oblige us as in *Nostromo* (1904) to build up the picture and history of Costaguana for ourselves, or as in *Under Western Eyes* demand we negotiate between the competing interpretive models proffered by both the Janus-faced narrator and by Razumov’s tormented journal. Hence his persistent manipulation of the reader, who is often puzzled by the opposing, criss-crossing viewpoints on, and interpretations of, either a given event, such as Jim’s jump, MacWhirr’s storm strategy (“Typhoon”), Falk’s cannibalism, or of totemistic commodities such as ivory in “Heart of Darkness” and silver in *Nostromo*. Hence, as his narratives spiral vertiginously around his subjects, we are always aware that they are “long” as Conrad told Garnett, “because my thought is always multiple” (3:492).

iii

The following six chapters concentrate in different ways and with differing emphases on the complex inter-relations between the “art” and the “life”, on the intersections between Conrad’s personal preoccupations, fictional aesthetic, and working practices with regard to what he described as “without doubt ... the most deeply meditated novel that came from under my pen”.³⁶

Chapter 1, “The Composition of *Under Western Eyes*” is an original piece of research that charts Conrad’s uneven, lengthy composition of the novel and corrects the false assumptions of biographers and critics as to Conrad’s progress on, and sense of his novel. More importantly, it is designed to canvass the biographical, genetic, and interpretive concerns of my book. I argue that Conrad’s volatile sense of both the subject and the scope of his novel, through several revisions, is inseparable from his discovery that his stated intention to capture the “very soul of things Russian” inexorably demanded an exhumation and exploration of things

³⁵ G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, New York, vol. II, 317. Henceforward *Life and Letters*.

³⁶ An unpublished letter, 24 December, 1916, quoted in Roderick Davis, “*Under Western Eyes: the most deeply meditated Novel*”, *Conradiana*, 9/1 (1977), 74.

Polish (IV, 8). Chapter 2, "Conrad, Apollo Korzeniowski, and Dostoevsky" is the most controversial in the book because it is based upon an assumption that Conrad's determination to distance himself from Dostoevsky by insisting he is "too Russian for me" sprang not only (as many critics have argued) from a shocked sense of identification, but also from the inextricable interpenetration (for a complex of historical, cultural, ideological, and not least personal reasons) of things Russian and Polish in Conrad's life and writing.³⁷ I place this chapter second because it canvasses Conrad's "passions, prejudices and even ... personal memories" ("Author's Note", viii) which resurface throughout my study. Chapter 3, "The Figure Behind the Veil: Conrad and Razumov in *Under Western Eyes*" is a companion piece to chapter 2 and an amplification of notes sounded in chapter 1. I compare the MSS to the novel and concentrate especially on several remarkable sequences that Conrad cut in the spring of 1910 after recovering from his breakdown earlier in the year. The MSS confirm, on the one hand, Conrad's own admission that "A writer of imaginative prose (even more than any other sort of artist) stands confessed in his works";³⁸ and, on the other, show that Conrad's slashing of the more overt autobiographical traces signals his determination to remain "the figure behind the veil; a suspected rather than a seen presence — a movement and a voice behind the draperies of fiction".³⁹ They also reveal the ways in which Conrad's personal concerns during the writing of the novel criss-cross with, and are refracted in Razumov's predicament.

In the last three chapters I show that a knowledge of Conrad's intense personal involvement in the writing of the novel and of his changing approaches to his subject, allows for a fresh and open-ended assessment of the intricate narrative strategies of, and the interpretive problems raised by, a novel justly acclaimed as a masterpiece of high modernism. The fourth chapter, "From *Razumov* to *Under Western Eyes*: The Dwindling of Natalia Haldin's 'Possibilities'" is perhaps the purest example of my attempt to fuse "the art" and the "life". I draw on the MSS and Conrad's Polish background to show that during successive revisions he curtailed

³⁷ 27 May, 1912, in *Letters from Joseph Conrad*, ed., Edward Garnett, New York, 1956, 240. Henceforward, *Letters*.

³⁸ *APR*, 95.

³⁹ *APR*, 95, and "A Familiar Preface", xiii.

her “possibilities” both of action and speech, not only because he subordinated them to the changing needs of his plot, narrative, and “artistic purpose”, but because he also feared them (IV, 490).

The last two chapters concentrate mainly on Conrad’s “art”, focusing on the reader’s predicament and functions. I dwell on the difficulties and *impasses* Conrad encountered during two major revisions (in October 1908 and the spring of 1910) and several minor repointings of his novel. Chapter 5, “Conrad at Work: the Case of Razumov” dwells upon the difficulties he faced and struggled to resolve once the protagonist re-entered “the transactions in Geneva” (“Author’s Note”, ix) in Part II, chapter IV, and on the consequences for the reader’s relation to the narrative of both his late decision to conceal his protagonist’s double agency and of his belated sense of the latter’s motivation for confessing to Natalia. I also demonstrate (for the first time I believe) Conrad’s dual method of slow, open-ended, incremental changes and of retrospective reshaping, that allow conflicting, even contradictory possibilities to run in tandem and to jostle against each other. Hence both the extraordinary density of the novel and, as generations of readers have testified, its manifest indecisiveness. The last chapter, “Narrative and Narrator”, is designed to refocus and to justify all the concerns of my book. I survey the extraordinary range of confusing and confused critical accounts of the narrator’s authority, limitations, and “character”; then, drawing upon the argument of my previous chapters, I show that during Conrad’s troubled, stop-start composition of *Razumov*, the old teacher accumulated such a variety of *competing* functions, roles, and characteristics in a multilayered narrative, comprising his own account, Razumov’s diary, and the novel itself, that he is gradually *overloaded*. Once again, all the biographical and genetic evidence demonstrates that the old teacher’s conflicting models for assessing both the Russian character and Razumov’s diary are inseparable from his author’s initial, deeply divided, and subsequent volatile sense of, the range and ramifications of his theme. As ever in Conrad’s great fictions, we ponder “the almost unimaginable inclusiveness of what we are being left to piece together”:⁴⁰ and in the case of *Under Western Eyes* we ponder Conrad’s radical and experimental testing of the capacities and possibilities of a riddling first-person narrative.

⁴⁰ Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, Berkeley, 1979, 210.

I include at the end of Chapter 3 nine Plates of manuscript pages. I also provide an Appendix, made up of four Tables that draw on the MSS and Conrad's correspondence *et al* and on the computer-generated "*Under Western Eyes: Parts and Chapters with Word Counts*" (kindly provided by the Center for Conrad Studies at Kent State University, Ohio). The Tables chart the intricate composition of the novel. I refer to them throughout my book, but readers could glance at them before they read on.