

THE POLITICS OF RUSSIAN STEREOTYPES  
IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *UNDER WESTERN EYES*

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## ABSTRACT

In my project, I focus on analyzing Russian stereotypes in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*. The novel's oversimplifications stem from centuries of Western biases, which position Russia as partially civilized and partially barbaric. Such emotionally-charged biases are reinforced by Conrad's depictions. Although the author professes a neutral stance, his Polish background, childhood, and family politics have influenced his perception of the nation. Serving as an extension of Conrad's critical position, the English narrator incorporates stereotypes when describing Russian men and women, and such ideas are only complicated by Natalia, whose character also embodies Western traits. My project's revelations are significant because the novel perpetuates stereotypes that illuminate flawed Western beliefs rather than Russian authenticity.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my favourite university roommate, my Baba, who always recognized people for both their idiosyncrasies and shared humanity.

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## The Politics of Russian Stereotypes in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*

*Under Western Eyes* is recognized as Joseph Conrad's 'Russian' novel. Set in St. Petersburg and Geneva, the action follows Razumov Kyrilo Sidorovitch's personal and political turbulence. In the novel, Conrad's representations of Russia rely on images familiar to the intended Western reader. Moreover, most of his characters are oversimplified types rather than authentic, complicated people—so much so that the depiction of Russia and its people becomes stereotypical. Written in English, narrated by an Englishman, and intended for a Western audience, *Under Western Eyes* (*UWE*) presents images that echo the long history of the West stereotyping Russia. Likewise, although Conrad claims to be objective ("Author's Note), his fraught relationship with Russia and his absorption of European moralities, philosophies, and politics (Lippmann 84) have thwarted any attempts at objectivity. Presented on both conscious and unconscious levels, the author's biases were complicated by his traumatic childhood, his family's political views, and his Polish lens. Conrad's stereotypes are particularly revealing when he depicts Russia's political system, men, and women. Such portrayals not only reflect Conrad's critical perception of Russia, but also fuel the Western audience's emotionally-charged notions of the nation. Therefore, Conrad's 'Russian' novel is less about Russia and more about the West's perception of the nation.

When writing, an author always has an audience in mind. While Conrad's intended audience for his fiction is primarily male (Peters 4), *UWE* has another layer of intentionality, which is present in the title of Conrad's work – *Under Western Eyes* – and in the narrator's declaration that "this is a Russian story for Western ears" (121). For centuries, European notions of Russia, which position the nation as "half European and half barbarian splendor" (Brandes 7), have been reinforced. Conrad works with – rather than against – such preconceived notions. The stereotypes in *UWE* work with cognitive "economy" in which, as explained by Walter Lippman, the audience will "notice a trait which marks a well known type, and fill[s] in the rest of the picture by means of the stereotypes [they] carry about in our heads" (88-9). Thus, when the audience is introduced to a "fact" that fuels the image with which they are familiar, they focus on it; however, if a "fact" disagrees with preconceived notions, they disregard it (119). For instance, although the plot's primary event occurred in summer, Conrad set the event in wintry Russia, so the assumption that "winter stamps the whole life and character of the people" (Brandes 14) is recognized and confirmed. However, if Conrad had accurately set the St. Petersburg events in

summer, the setting would have been ignored. Therefore, even if the text challenges the “wintry Russia” image, the audience maintains – rather than also challenges – that stereotype.

By feeding the Western audience’s preconceived notions, Conrad illustrates that his intention is not to challenge the West’s stereotypical view of Russia. Instead, Conrad reassures his audience that they occupy the simplified and seemingly truthful perspective in which Russian people are partially primitive and partially civilized, while European people – thus, the readers – are wholly civilized. Nonetheless, a stereotype is not truthful, nor is it – as Homi Bhabha argues – “a simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality” (107). Therefore, even though Conrad appears to supply an easier analysis in which the notions remain unchallenged, he commits a disservice because he is cementing a “false representation” (107). As such, Conrad is following the tradition of Western writers which bolsters notions that safeguard the West from Russia.

Safety is not only physical and political, but also emotional. At its core, stereotyping is an emotional act of protecting and defending one’s culture: “It is the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights. The stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy” (Lippmann 96). Essentially, the society that actively typecasts another group reveals more about itself than of the other culture, and feelings of insecurity are often exposed. Moreover, internal discomfort can be shifted and replaced with a false sense of security when focusing on the supposed flaws of another culture. An example of such a shift occurs during the discussion of Russian people. For instance, the language teacher argues that the audience is not accustomed to Russian pessimism and skepticism: “Western ears, which, as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty, of moral negation, and even of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe” (Conrad 121). Within this quotation, the narrator clearly implies that Russian “ears” are accustomed to such tones because, he argues, “the spirit of Russia is the spirit of cynicism” (50). The narrator comforts the reader, who may not understand certain elements of the text, by arguing that their lack of understanding is not due to a cultural lack of sophistication. Rather, the unsophisticated nature rests with the Russian people who experience “moral distress” (121) that Westerners already endured and overcame. With this reassurance, the reader perceives that their culture is morally advanced in comparison



to the Russian culture.

The audience is aware of stereotypes that are divided by gender, particularly when Russian men seem to differ vastly from European men, and Russian women from European women. Both cultures operate within a patriarchy, in which men hold power, but the reader observes differences between the patriarchies. According to Worobec, “The patriarchal Russian peasant family was but a microcosm of a hierarchical social order that extended from God to his representative on earth, the *batiushka* (little father) tsar to all other fathers” (175). This explanation of Russian patriarchy is supported by the words of Mr. de P——, the individual whom Haldin assassinates: “It was not Reason but Authority which expressed the Divine Intention. God was the Autocrat of the Universe” (*UWE* 6). Thereby, Mr. de P—— argues that God’s intentions must not be flexed for liberty, but should instead be upheld by the people, particularly by the people with power. On the other hand, while the Western patriarchy is also “a hierarchical social order” (Worobec 175), the church and state were, for the most part, divided by the time of the novel’s publication. Moreover, while European patriarchy is still undeniably influenced by Christianity, some of these explicit ties had been severed by that time. As such, Mr. de P—— represents a patriarchy that can only thrive in Russia, and this fact reassures the Western reader of their culture’s liberty.

The audience is also comforted when they compare their Western men and women with Russian counterparts. Stereotyping their own men as reasonable, civilized, stoic, controlled, sober, and, most importantly, strong, the reader believes that because their men are strong, their state is strong. Thus, even though Russia serves as a political threat, the threat does not seem as ominous when the state is controlled by supposedly weak men. This is best illustrated when regarding Prince K——’s fear of his wife. Although he maintains a powerful position in public, Prince K does not threaten the European reader. In the eyes of the reader, because Prince K—— is stereotypically afraid of his violent wife, his public power is undermined. Moreover, the audience is not impressed by Prince K——’s wife, as her domestic power over Prince K—— weakens his political power. The reader is assured that, unlike Russia, their Western public space is not infiltrated by the female presence. According to the reader, the stereotypically fragile, demure, and chaste Western women know that their place is only in the home, which is controlled by males.

Evidenced throughout the discussion of the audience’s role in – and appeasement with –

Conrad's stereotyping, the types are not simply attached to the Russian culture and detached from Europe. Instead, the representations are "characterized by their very contingent and relational nature" (Dubova 5). Therefore, the audience's images of Russia are intricately entangled in their perception of the West. Likewise, such stereotypes are attached to the author who regards himself as a Westerner, particularly by choosing to write his work in English and by associating himself and his beliefs with the West. Although Conrad exhibits "notorious Russophobia" ("Conrad in Russia: A Discipline in Absentia" 147), his dislike for Russia is a fundamental part of himself as both a person and writer, and for that reason, he is attached to Russia.

Conrad's aversion toward Russia (Dubova 87) was deeply connected to his childhood and his family's relationship with the nation's officials. Born in Ukraine and of Polish ancestry ("Joseph Conrad"), Conrad had a traumatic childhood, and it is likely that he connected this trauma with Russia. When he was four, Conrad and his parents were exiled to Northern Russia because of Conrad's father's involvement in a group that "direct[ed] the Polish insurrection against Russian Rule"; by the time he was twelve, Conrad had lost both of his parents to tuberculosis ("Joseph Conrad"). Thus, within his childhood, Conrad suffered hardships and intimately experienced the political tensions between Russia and Poland. Moreover, during his childhood, Conrad was first exposed to English works of literature. While Conrad acknowledged that his introduction to English works and Western ideas stemmed from his father's influence as a translator ("Joseph Conrad"), it is also important to recognize that Conrad's revolutionary father likely influenced his son's perception of Russia. Consequently, by literarily reinforcing ideas that highlight Russia's inferiority, Conrad could perceive Russia in the manner he had since childhood.

Conrad's perception of Russia was not only weighted emotionally and psychologically, but also politically, which highlights a political edge to the stereotypes in *UWE*. In particular, Russia's precarious position at the beginning of the twentieth century undoubtedly influenced the 'Russian' novel as tensions between the Russian government and people grew and materialized in the form of the 1905 Revolution (Ascher 3). One influential factor of the revolution was the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War, which highlighted the problems of the Russian autocracy: "The catastrophic defeats suffered by the Imperial army and navy seemed to justify every criticism that the political opposition had leveled at the autocratic regime: that it was irresponsible,

incompetent, and reckless” (43). This depiction of the Russian government is paralleled in Conrad’s timely 1905 essay on “Autocracy and War,” in which Conrad describes Russia as “a yawning chasm open between East and West; a bottomless abyss that has swallowed up every hope of mercy, every aspiration towards personal dignity, towards freedom, towards knowledge; every ennobling desire of the heart, every redeeming whisper of conscience” (45-6). Although Russia was internationally positioned as more European than the Asiatic Japanese during the war, Conrad argues that Russia is neither European nor Asian. Instead, he asserts that Russia is spatially and culturally distinctive, and this distinction draws all humanity from its people. To Conrad, this hopelessness is reliant on the relentless and unwavering Russian autocracy.

At times, Conrad seems to only criticize the authority and to empathize with Russian people. For instance, he argues that autocracy has “buried millions of Russian people” (36). Highlighting Conrad’s sympathetic statements, Wheeler contends that “Conrad, through inheriting and maintaining an implacable hostility to Russia as an oppressive autocratic state . . . was not hostile to Russians as such and was not blinded by bias in his portrayal of them” (33). However, the author also makes sweeping, judgmental statements about all Russians, pointing to “political barbarism of the Russian people” (42). For instance, Conrad’s “Author’s Note” in *UWE* closes with the following words: “The oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together, and the world is brought once more face to face with the truth of the saying that the tiger cannot change his stripes nor the leopard his spots” (283). Evidently, Conrad does not distinguish the state as the “oppressors” and the people as the “oppressed.” Instead, he argues that all Russian citizens occupy both positions. With such a declaration, Conrad reveals antipathy rather than empathy for the Russian people.

Conrad’s portrayal of Russia is not only influenced by personal factors. As previously discussed, European stereotypes of Russian people – which are often regarded as factual – have permeated literature and minds for centuries. Voitkovska acknowledges that such representations often exist closer to Russia: “For the Polish mind, everything associated with Russia is revolting” (“Conrad in Russia” 147). Likewise, for Conrad, the Western influences are compounded with the Polish influences, both of which position Russia as inferior. Therefore, stereotyping Russian people serves Conrad’s larger context and worldview.

In his “Author’s Note,” Conrad outlines his intentions for writing *UWE*. The author continuously stresses that the work is based on “general knowledge” of the nation: “I need not

say that in writing this novel I had no other object in view than to express imaginatively the *general truth* which underlies its action, together with my honest convictions as to the moral complexion of certain *facts* more or less known to the whole world” (281; emphasis added). While Conrad may have indeed relied on the general truth and facts, such details have been tainted for centuries, and they are fictional representations rather than valid realities. In essence, the supposed truths are subjective biases rather than objective facts, and they are thus stripped of truth.

Instead of using the space of the “Author’s Note” to explain his complicated personal relationship with Russia, Conrad uses the space to emphasize his objectivity. He only alludes to his personal experiences when claiming to be impartial and detached in *UWE*:

My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality. The obligation of absolute fairness was imposed on me historically and hereditarily, by the peculiar experience of race and family, in addition to my primary conviction that truth alone is the justification of any fiction which makes the least claim to the quality of art or may hope to take its place in the culture of men and women of its time. I had never been called before to a greater effort of detachment – detachment from all passions, prejudices, and even from personal memories. (281)

Stressing his inherent objectivity, Conrad essentially tells the reader that his personal and familial tension with Russia has not influenced the text. However, some schools of literary criticism, such as psychoanalytic criticism, undoubtedly argue that the author of a text has an imprint and personal bias on the text. This seems particularly true for Conrad, who chose to write about a subject with which he has a fraught personal relationship. Furthermore, even if Conrad denies his personal imprint on the text, he could not deny the text’s impression on his personal life. After writing *UWE*, Conrad suffered a nervous breakdown (Meyer 206), which illustrates that he did not achieve his desired detachment and emotional separation from the work.

It would be simplest for readers to observe Conrad’s “Author’s Note” and take his words and intentions at face value, but intentions, whether conscious or unconscious, can be misleading. For instance, Conrad claims, “I first heard that the book had found universal recognition in Russia and had been re-published there in many editions” (281). However, Voitkovska clarifies that by the time the “Author’s Note” was published, “the novel had been published only once” in Russia (“Conrad in Russia” 159). If such a hard fact can be disputed, it

is plausible that subjective intentions can be contested as well. Moreover, intentions, like stereotypes, are neither simple nor straightforward. Both are complex, emotionally charged, and built on ideas that have previously prospered. Therefore, the reader must be cautious when considering Conrad's intention was to include objective facts about Russia.

Despite similar claims of impartiality, the text's narrator, an Englishman and language teacher who speaks Russian, is a central voice of the novel's stereotyping. The language teacher professes objectivity by stating that the work "is based on a document; all I have brought to it is my knowledge of the Russian language" (Conrad 3). Rizzuto, who analyzes confession, takes the narrator's words at face value: "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 the story will be a truthful or accurate account of the personality on which it centers" (79). However, the dialogue, the description of events and characters, and the decision to include and omit details relies not only on Razumov's document, but also on the narrator's account. Thus, the narrator's presence, subjectivity, and commentary are pervasive within the work. For instance, even though the narrator claims to "have no comprehension of the Russian character" (Conrad 3), he makes sweeping statements about the people: "I think sometimes that the psychological secret of the profound difference of that people consists in this, that they detest life, the irremediable life of the earth as it is, whereas we westerners cherish it with perhaps an equal exaggeration of its sentimental value" (78). Within this reflection, the narrator not only declares the way in which Russian people perceive life, but also compares Russian and Western people. When creating the comparison, the narrator illustrates that the European culture defines itself by occupying the negative space, essentially asserting that the audience is Western because it is *not* Russian. Such categorization not only creates a dichotomy between the two cultures, but also a hierarchy, in which the West—the culture that generates meaning—allegedly occupies the upper echelon. The narrator's reflections throughout the novel charge that Russian culture maintains inferiority.

European readers can easily identify with the narrator, who not only verifies readers' beliefs, but also serves as a blank slate onto which readers can project themselves. Wheeler argues that the narrator's role "is not in general a mouthpiece for the author . . . but rather a caricature of the legendary inability of Westerners to comprehend the Russian nature" (27). Wheeler not only creates a necessary distinction between the author and narrator, but also claims

that the narrator represents Europeans who actively stereotype Russian people. Because the narrator does not have a name, only comments on his personal history when discussing his relationship with Russia, and does not speak of being in relationships outside of the Haldin and Razumov circle, he serves as a blank slate for readers. Moreover, because of the shared culture, the European reader deems that the language teacher is trustworthy. Serving as a guide into the cold (Conrad 25), cynical (50), and autocratic (80) nation, the narrator not only guides the readers, but also represents the them.

Both the narrator and intended audience are not blank slates when regarding Russia and are instead charged with animosity toward the Eastern country. Due to the lengthy and hostile rivalry between Britain and Russia (Nikitina, Don, and Loh 5), the West describes Russia as alien and “geographically and ideologically elsewhere; it defies both European and Asian traditions, indeed even humanness itself” (Hollander 4). Such sustaining perceptions of Russian “otherness” have, as explored by Neumann, helped create a united Western identity: “Russia could be held up as a mirror in which Europe could find its way back to itself” (95-6). In this sense, the narrator holds Razumov’s personal and political situations up for the reader to reflect on. Noting that they cannot identify with Razumov’s position, the audience is reassured by their own situation.

Before evaluating gendered stereotypes, it is necessary to understand the context in which these representations exist. After all, Russian patriarchy operates differently than European patriarchy; therefore, expectations placed on Russian men are different than those faced by Western males. Within Russia’s patriarchy:

everyone, male or female, was subject to a higher authority . . . All of the links in that chain of command, however, were men whose power and obligations were defined in terms of family overlordship, beginning with God, ‘our Father,’ and extending to the batiushka (father) tsar and finally the father of every family. The state had a vested interest in supporting the patriarchal system as a means of social control. (Worobec 185)

Evidently, this chain of command affects all Russian people – from the women and children who must obey the family’s male head to the male head who, through a long line of bureaucratic people in power, must obey the tsar. Thus, Russia’s specific patriarchal system supports the rigid autocracy that Conrad analyzes in “Autocracy and War.” Moreover, Russia’s patriarchal system is tightly bound to its system of slavery, which observes “the relations between the superior to

the subordinate” (Dubova 90). Concerning *UWE*, Dubova argues that Razumov is subjugated to both Mikulin’s political power and guilt over betraying Haldin (Conrad 90). Because Mikulin and Haldin represent two different directions of loyalty, there is a high degree of tension for Razumov who is subordinate in both directions. Razumov is thus enslaved by the two men on an individual level and is subjugated to the Russian patriarchy on larger scale.

Razumov’s place within the patriarchy is further complicated by his absence of a family, and particularly by the absence of a father. Without a patriarch within the home, the chain of command is broken for Razumov: “He was as lonely in the world as a man swimming in the deep sea. The word Razumov was the mere label of a solitary individuality. There were no Razumovs belonging to him anywhere. His closest parentage was defined in the statement that he was a Russian” (8). For the Western reader, Razumov’s palatable isolation illustrates the importance of both the family and patriarchy for Russian men. Razumov’s position stereotypically emphasizes that, in Russia, the communal is favoured – and even necessary – while individuality is tragedy. After all, a Russian person’s value is not as an individual but as a contributor to the group. Within the novel, Razumov is further punished for his lack of family by Haldin, who recognizes Razumov’s isolation. The revolutionary leverages Razumov’s position for his own – and his group’s – political agenda: “It occurred to me that you – you have no one belonging to you – no ties, no one to suffer for it if this came out by some means” (14). Evidently, Haldin chooses to turn to Razumov for assistance after weighing that few people would be affected by that decision. As such, Razumov’s potential for individual suffering is not a significant factor for Haldin.

By enslaving Razumov, Haldin is in turn enslaved by Razumov. After all, the revolutionary’s potential to escape depends on his fellow student. This mutual enslavement is stereotypical in Russia because the chain of command binds individuals. Unfortunately for Haldin, Razumov’s isolation does not influence him to serve the revolutionary group; instead, he replaces his lack of a family by binding himself to Russia and thus to autocracy. The ideas sustained in *UWE* exhibit that Russian men cannot be disconnected individuals like men in Europe. Instead, they are bound to autocracy, whether that be through upholding autocracy or through rebelling against it. In essence, both Razumov and Haldin are politically enslaved due to Russia’s patriarchal system, which forces individual men to associate with a group.

An additional notion perpetuated by Conrad is the belief that Russian men, particularly those who are wealthy and politically powerful, are overweight. The first overweight gentleman the reader meets is General T—— whose home, complete with “the great carriage gateway” and “reception-rooms all barely lit and one of them prepared for dancing,” exhibits great wealth (32). Such opulence is rare in the impoverished nation; thus, the reader immediately understands that the General holds a powerful position, which allows him to accumulate wealth, materials, and rich food. Razumov observes the General’s “fleshy profile” (33) and describes him as a “grotesque man in a tight uniform” (36). Later reflecting on his encounter with the General, Razumov expands on his illustration for the reader: “the thick-set man with his heavy jowl resting on the collar of his uniform, the champion of autocracy, who had let no sign of surprise, incredulity, or joy escape him, but whose goggle eyes could express a mortal hatred of all rebellion” (52). Razumov’s observations are charged with personal feelings of insecurity and fear that are attached to the politically powerful general. Razumov presumes that the General is suspicious of his political intentions, and such suspicion could compromise the student’s academic and occupational records. Within this example, Conrad clarifies that the stereotype of overweight Russian men does not only concern their physical size, but also the size of their political threat. The united threat of the physical and political size of powerful men is echoed in the size of Russia, whose nation is not only extensive in land mass, but also politically threatening to the West.

Another example of the stereotypical overweight and powerful Russian man is first introduced when Razumov stands afar. The man with a “great white hairless face, double chin, prominent stomach” walks with Sophia Antonovna, and Razumov soon observes the man in close proximity:

The abrupt squeaks of the fat man seemed to proceed from that thing like a balloon he carried under his overcoat. The stolidity of his attitude, the big feet, the lifeless, hanging hands, the enormous bloodless cheek, the thin wisps of hair straggling down the fat nape of the neck, fascinated Razumov into a stare on the verge of horror and laughter. (195-6)

The man’s surname, Necator, is derived from the Latin *necare*, which means “to kill” (“Explanatory Notes” 300). Indeed, Necator embodies his name as Razumov reported that the man “was supposed to have killed more gendarmes and police agents than any revolutionist living” (196), and he would later be responsible for brutally deafening Razumov, which would



result in Razumov's subsequent disability. The description of "the fat man" is highly connected to his reputation as a killer, particularly the "*lifeless, hanging hands, the enormous bloodless cheek*" (196; emphasis added). The emphasized word choices represent death and foreshadow Necator's brutalization of Razumov. Understandably, Razumov's feelings of approaching horror are present because he is staring at his own grim reaper. In this example, Necator's stereotypical weight is connected to his ability to overpower others. Both Necator, with his physical power, and General T——, with political power, emphasize the representation of overweight, powerful Russian men.

Another type – that of the primitive Russian male peasant – is embodied by Ziemianitch, the coachman. Ziemianitch's name "is derived from Polish *ziemia* ('soil')" ("The Russian Redemption" 193). His name is thus connected to Brandes' observation that travelers will "occasionally meet a man or woman who exactly embodies this Russian soil" (33). Brandes positions this embodiment as a compliment, but his claim is instead condescending. He asserts that the Russian peoples' embodiment of the soil is due to their "simplicity" and "mysticism" (Brandes 34), which highlights the primitive side of the primitive-civilized type that marks Russians. This notion reinforces Brandes' sweeping statement that "the Russians have invented very little, have contributed nothing, so to speak, to the development of civilization, but have only appropriated the culture of others. They are, it is said, a people of imitation, a people without originality" (16). By asserting that the Russian people have leached off other cultures, the author implies that the "civilized" European culture is what has been leached. However, according to Brandes, civilization cannot be entirely appropriated because the Russian people cannot be entirely civilized, as evidenced by figures such as Ziemianitch.

Conrad's *UWE* perpetuates the image of drunken Russian males. Alcoholism has been a withstanding problem in Russia for hundreds of years (Fedun "How Alcohol Conquered Russia"), and one that particularly affects Russian males. While alcoholism is a debilitating disease, it is often used as a trope when portraying Russian men in fiction. Embodied by Ziemianitch, such drunkenness is intertwined with another oversimplification: that Russian men fail to restrain their women, particularly their romantic partners. In the novel, Razumov expresses disbelief when he visits the den and is told that Ziemianitch is drunk. In response, the den's owner decides

He would show Ziemianitch to the gentleman to prove there were no lies told. And he

would show him drunk. His woman, it seems, ran away from him last night. ‘Such a hag she was! Thin! Pfui!’ He spat. They were always running away from that driver of the devil – and he was sixty years old too; could never get used to it. But each heart knows sorrow after its own kind and Ziemianitch was a born fool all his days. And then he would fly to the bottle. Who could bear life in our land without the bottle? (Conrad 21)

Ziemianitch’s current drinking episode is precipitated by trouble with “his woman,” and this example represents the entwined relationship Russian men have with alcohol and heterosexual romantic relationships. The “they” mentioned by the den’s owner not only refers to the numerous relationships Ziemianitch has had with women, but also to the number of times the coachman has lost control of his women; after all, the women are the ones who are actively fleeing from the stationary Ziemianitch. While the den’s owner criticizes Ziemianitch’s lack of control over his relationships, he does not judge the coachman’s compulsion to drink. Arguing that the harsh Russian life drives men to the bottle, the owner – of a drinking establishment, nonetheless – perpetuates the idea that Russian men drink by insinuating that it is *necessary* for Russian men to drink. As such, Ziemianitch, who embodies three stereotypes about Russian men— that they are primitive, drunk, and have lost control of women— is regarded as “a proper Russian man,” “a proper Russian driver,” and “a true Russian man” (21-2).

The intersection of Russian men being both civilized and barbaric is best examined through the character of Peter Ivanovitch, the hypocritical “great feminist” (166). Suitably, Hollander describes the West’s perception of Russia as resisting not only European and Asian institutions, but also resisting humanity (4). This parallels the description of Peter Ivanovitch as his defiance is central to his character. According to the story of his life, Peter Ivanovitch spent a period living on the land:

It was as though there had been two human beings indissolubly joined in that enterprise. The civilized man, the enthusiast of advanced humanitarian ideals thirsting for the triumph of spiritual love and political liberty; and the stealthy, primeval savage, pitilessly cunning in the preservation of his freedom from day to day, like a tracked wild beast. Conrad (91)

Peter Ivanovitch and other Russian intellectuals are stereotypically inseparable from barbaric behaviours. Despite his progressive perspective, Peter Ivanovitch resists humanity – thus civilization – through his animal-like, barbaric behaviours.

The dichotomy within Peter Ivanovitch is best represented by his supposed elevated views of women that are crossed with his physical abuse toward them. On one hand, Peter Ivanovitch claims, “the greatest part of our hopes rests on women” (89), and on the other, he verbally and physically abuses Tekla (119-22; 161). The irony of Peter Ivanovitch is best captured in the narrator’s surprised response after he first hears of the verbal abuse: “Do you mean to say that the great feminist allowed himself to be abusive to a woman?” (122). Within this rhetorical question, the narrator highlights the discrepancy between “the great feminist’s” words and actions. Although Peter Ivanovitch’s voiced perception of women is an anomaly, his beating of Tekla serves as a representation of the ways in which Russian men treat women: “The subordination of women to men was based on misogynist beliefs in women’s inferiority and moral weaknesses. Men had appropriated for themselves the right to demand complete obedience” (214-5). Peter Ivanovitch claims that women are superior, but his misogynistic actions, which are fueled by the Russian patriarchy, supersede his feminist words. Therefore, through a Western lens, Peter Ivanovitch’s European feminist politics and philosophies are undercut by his stereotypical Russian barbarism.

Peter Ivanovitch is not an exception; Russian men are often regarded as common participants in barbaric violence. The primitive aggression of men is captured within the novel’s plot, which hinges on an aggressive act toward a statesman: Haldin and his comrade’s assassination of Mr. de P——. The narrator introduces this act as “characteristic of modern Russia . . . and still more characteristic of the moral corruption of an oppressed society where the noblest aspiration of humanity, the desire of freedom, an ardent patriotism, the love of justice, the sense of pity, and even the fidelity of simple minds are prostituted to the lusts of hate and fear” (6). Therefore, the narrator argues that the Russian people’s civilized aspects are compromised by barbaric undercurrents. “Prostituted” and “lusts” (6) are particularly associated with barbarity, as the words signify disrespect and passion instead of civility and reason. Therefore, although England was the breeding ground for many revolutionaries, and although Europe has a dense history of murderous revolutions, similar actions in Russia are perceived as barbaric.

Barbaric, animalistic aggression is also attributed to Razumov, who beats Ziemianitch when the coachman is found drunk and incapable of escorting Haldin from St. Petersburg, and thus away from Razumov. “Blind rage” (22) strips Razumov of his reason and intellectual

proWess. In line with Brandes' stereotyping of Russian people, Razumov's civilized veneer gives way to his barbaric compulsions: "He looked round wildly, seized the handle of a broken stablefork and rushing forward struck at the prostrate body with inarticulate cries. After a time his cries ceased, and the rain of blows fell in the stillness and shadows of the cellar-like stable. Razumov belaboured Ziemianitch with an insatiable fury, in great volleys of sounding thwacks" (22). Again, Razumov's vision, thus his perspective, is described in feral terms. Moreover, his actions, which are not preceded by reason and forethought, are led by impulse, while his "inarticulate cries" (22) resemble the primitive incapability to linguistically communicate with other humans. In effect, Conrad "portrays Russians as non-European barbarians" ("The Russian Redemption" 195). The animal-like barbarism is not only attributed to the perpetrator, but also to the victim. Drunk and incapacitated, Ziemianitch sleeps in a cellar-like stable like a barn animal. The lack of human vision is also attributed to the coachman, who "saw nothing. His eyeballs blinked all white in the light one, twice – then the gleam went out" (Conrad 23). Because both men are blinded – one with rage and one with drunkenness – their civilized traits are usurped by their highlighted barbaric natures.

Despite their stereotypical public aggression, Russian men are represented as weak within the private setting, while the women, particularly wives, are stereotyped as dominant. This notion even prevails in noble families, in which the husband occupies an important public position, but the wife maintains superiority within the home. In *UWE*, the fearful male and the dominant female images are first observed when Razumov reflects on Prince K——: "Probably [Prince K——] was afraid of scenes with his wife. She was said to be proud and violent" (39). In effect, Razumov feels "an indulgent contempt" (39) for the publicly powerful Prince K—— who fails to preserve his patriarchal power in the domestic sphere. Another example is demonstrated by Peter Ivanovitch's encounters with women. As previously explored, "the great feminist" (166), who embodies no principles of feminism, beats Tekla. By the end of the novel, the narrator learns that Peter Ivanovitch has married a peasant girl (280). Recalling Peter Ivanovitch's abuse of Tekla, the narrator wishes that the perpetrator will be abused in return: "I hope that [his wife] won't hesitate to beat him" (280). Even though Peter Ivanovitch has a history of abusing women, the narrator is comforted by the notion that Russian women abuse their spouses, and the narrator also suggests that some husbands are deserving of such abuse.

Conrad's depiction of young, unmarried women in *UWE* echoes Brandes' observations in *Impressions of Russia*. Brandes, writing from the perspective of the prudent Victorian era that had influenced his native Denmark, is shocked that a young female and a young male are allowed to privately accompany one another: "Nowhere is the relation between the two sexes judged with more liberality. . . . No one in the more cultivated circles of Russia finds it strange if a man and a woman seek one another's company by themselves. . . . The Russian mother is generally not afraid to leave her daughter alone with a young man" (52). Evidently, Brandes "finds it strange" and is "afraid" (52) for a supposedly innocent and vulnerable young woman to spend time alone with a young, sexually-preoccupied male. His fear is loaded with sexual implications, as Brandes believes that, in solitude, a young pair is guaranteed to engage in sexual relations, thus damaging the reputation of the young woman.

Conrad explores Brandes' stereotype in his work by illustrating the relationship between Natalia and Razumov. Although Natalia's mother is initially unaware of Natalia's daily encounters with Razumov, in which they discuss Natalia's deceased brother Victor, Mrs. Haldin eventually becomes suspicious of Natalia's absences (Conrad 236). After Natalia confesses that she has been visiting with Razumov, her mother begins her inquiry: "How long has he been here? What did he know and why did he not come to see us at once, this friend of her Victor? What did that mean? Was she not to be trusted even with such memories as there were left of her son?" (237-8). Evidently, Mrs. Haldin's concern does not reside in her young daughter's unsupervised visits with a young man whom, it is eventually revealed, has romantic feelings for Natalia. Alternatively, Mrs. Haldin voices grievances that she has not met with Razumov to hear about her son's final hours. Furthermore, Mrs. Haldin does not accuse Natalia of being untrustworthy; instead, Mrs. Haldin asks if the untrustworthiness rests with herself. Thus, Mrs. Haldin's lack of concern with the potential romantic or sexual relationship between her daughter and Razumov fuels Brandes' notion that it is not perceived as "strange" if a young female and a young male are unsupervised.

The portrayal of Natalia's character also succumbs to Brandes' observation that Russian women shy away from the domestic sphere and are attracted to the public sphere. Brandes claims that "these young women would like to live a full human life" (53), which implies that Russian women desire a man's life. Given the novel's time-period, it was rare for European women, particularly those surrounding Brandes, to attend university. Nonetheless, the Russian Natalia

“obtained a diploma of a Superior School for Women” and is a critical and independent thinker who “thirsted after knowledge,” which leads her mother to hire the narrator as Natalia’s English language-teacher (76). Neither passive nor yearning for a domestic life, Natalia strives to be actively engaged in understanding her brother’s final hours, and her desire for “a full human life” is illustrated in her involvement with Razumov and the revolutionaries. Although she critiques the revolutionaries and does not wish to be part of Peter Ivanovitch’s feminist flock, she intelligently leverages his interest in her in order to better understand her late brother’s position. Likewise, her time with Razumov is not rooted in a goal to secure her domestic position as a wife; instead, Natalia’s purpose is to learn more about Victor and his final intentions. Therefore, although there are romantic feelings directed toward Natalia – by both Razumov and the narrator – Natalia does not reciprocate the feelings, nor does she pursue the domestic life. As such, Natalia feeds Brandes’ notion that Russian women are intrigued by a life in the public – rather than domestic – sphere.

Another notion exhibited in *UWE* is that Russian women are physically strong. This idea creates a sharp contrast with the European depiction of its women as frail and weak and its men as strong and powerful. The Russian female strength is perpetuated by physical descriptions of Natalia, particularly when her hands are described: “strong, shapely hand” (88), “strong, white hands” (88), and “she greeted him with a manly hand-grasp” (175). Her hands, capable of action and decisiveness, can help Natalia achieve her desire to reside within a full human life. Moreover, her “manly hand-grasp” (175) depicts competence and a semblance of equality between the two parties shaking hands. Natalia’s other masculine descriptions are often juxtaposed with feminine qualities: “her voice was deep, almost harsh, and yet caressing in its harshness” (76), “Oh, the sweet creature! And strong!” (174), and “her voice, slightly harsh, but fascinating with its masculine and bird-like quality” (105). By integrating feminine qualities, Conrad asserts that Russian females are not entirely overtaken by masculine qualities. Moreover, the author may have intended to help the Western reader understand why the narrator and Razumov are both romantically attracted to Natalia. In doing so, Natalia can serve as a romantic goal as well as a typecast of the strong Russian woman.

When Natalia’s masculine characteristics disappear and are replaced by feminine characteristics, she stresses that she is more like a Westerner than a Russian. Upon meeting Razumov for the first time, “her lips trembled, her eyes ran full of tears . . . she had behaved

unworthily, like an emotional French girl” (126-7). Comparing herself to “an emotional French girl,” Natalia argues that she is stripped of her usual Russian strength. By attaching the term “unworthily” to the comparison, Natalia reasserts that Russian culture favours emotional and mental strength in women. Within this comparison, the Russian culture also has stereotypes of Europe that position Russia as strong and Europe as weak, particularly when observing its matriarchal power. Moreover, Natalia expresses that ideas of *other* cultures are predominantly influenced by our *own* culture (Lippmann 81), which supports Figes’ proposition that “the idea of ‘Russia’ could not exist without ‘the West’ (just as ‘the West’ could not exist without ‘the Orient’)” (66). In essence, Natalia’s perception of French girls is influenced by her expectations as a Russian woman, and *vice versa*. This idea is prevalent when analyzing the work: the depictions of Russia rely on the narrator’s “Western eyes” (Conrad 254) while depictions of the Europe rely on those of Russia.

Furthermore, Natalia demonstrates that emotional strength is connected to trust in Russian social relationships. Later reflecting on her emotional outburst, she tells the narrator that Razumov “would have been justified in taking [her] for a person not to be trusted. An emotional, tearful girl is not a person to confide in” (130). Again, Natalia describes herself as a “girl” rather than a woman, indicating the naïve, submissive, and shameful perceptions connected to expressing emotions in front of a stranger. Natalia is particularly upset with her conduct toward Razumov because she does not want to compromise her opportunity to learn more about her brother’s final hours. Wanting Razumov to trust and “confide in” her, Natalia confidently reasserts that she is trustworthy (133), thereby flexing her stereotypical Russian female strength to replace her initial impression.

The narrator recognizes the strength not only embodied in Natalia, but also generalized in all Russian women. When reflecting on Natalia’s mourning period and her first unsatisfactory meeting with Razumov, the language-teacher understands that his student has encountered a trying time, and he too compares Western females with Russians: “The stress, its causes, its nature, would have undermined the health of an Occidental girl; but Russian natures have a singular power of resistance against the unfair strains of life” (131). The dichotomy between European and Russian women is emphasized again: European females are perceived as weak and fragile, whereas Russian females’ strength can sustain them through hardships. In a sense, the narrator expresses that although Natalia is experiencing a hardship, the reader should be

reassured because she will endure. Moreover, because Natalia exhibits strength in her body and mind, the narrator is comfortable taking directions from her. For example, after Natalia's short meeting with Razumov, Natalia asserts that she must check on her mother. She leaves the language teacher with Razumov after saying, "Mr. Razumov does not quite understand my difficulty, but you know what it is," and the narrator reflects, "in Miss Haldin's last words I perceived the clue to the nature of my mission" (134-5). The narrator then spends time with Razumov and fulfills his mission—a mission that is directed by a strong Russian woman.

Another reason the language-teacher takes direction from Natalia is because he is charmed by her. As a result, the narrator adheres to the idea that elevates Russian women as exotic objects of desire. The central motivation behind the narrator's idolization of Natalia is his attraction toward her, evidenced by his reflection after first meeting his new student:

Her voice was deep, almost harsh, and yet caressing in its harshness. She had a dark complexion, with red lips and a full figure. She gave the impression of strong vitality. . . . She directed upon me her grey eyes shaded by black eyelashes, and I became aware, notwithstanding my years, how attractive physically her personality could be to a man capable of appreciating in a woman something else than the mere grace of femininity. Her glance was as direct and trustful as that of a young man yet unspoiled by the world's wise lessons. . . . She was—to look at her was enough—very capable of being roused by an idea or simply by a person. At least, so I judged with I believe an unbiassed [*sic*] mind; for clearly my person could not be the person—and as to my ideas! (76-7)

Captivated by "the most attractive female character in Conrad" ("Drawn into Liminal Space" 61), the language-teacher becomes tongue-tied, evidenced by the dashes and ellipsis within the text. Although the narrator highlights that he is attracted to Natalia's personality, he specifies that he is "attractive physically" to her (Conrad 76). Thus, the reader understands that the narrator is physically aroused. Moreover, he objectifies her appearance: "to look at her was enough" (76). With such objectification, Natalia is transformed from being a person into being an ideal. By idealizing her, the narrator stereotypes Natalia as a being without faults, so the narrator highlights her strengths and deemphasizes her shortcomings. With such idealization, it proves impossible that the narrator judged her without bias; after all, oversimplified ideas are heavily weighted in bias.



Evidently, although Natalia has served as a strong example of a stereotypical Russian woman, she simultaneously incorporates traits of a Western female. In particular, her European traits are revealed when she exhibits vulnerability and as she serves as an object for the male gaze—for Razumov, the narrator, and the intended male audience. By serving as a binary of both Russia and the West, Natalia complicates the categorical simplicity of stereotypes. Thus, Natalia not only becomes a complex character, but she also unites Russia and Europe by embodying their tensions and their coexistence.

Stereotyping a group of people is a common practice in life and literature. Alongside its commonality, stereotyping is socially and politically divisive, dangerous, and reductive, as evidenced by Joseph Conrad's depiction of Russian men, women, and politics in *Under Western Eyes*. Such representations satisfy the intended audience's preconceived notions of Russia as well as the West's perception of itself as powerful and civilized (Neumann 8). However, noncritical readers fail to recognize that such notions are politically, socially, philosophically, and culturally charged. Thus, simple, narrow-minded opinions, bolstered by the likes of the narrator, are mistaken for emotionally-charged truths. As examined by Lippmann, such perpetuation can be dangerous: "If what we are looking at corresponds successfully with what we anticipated, the stereotype is reinforced for the future" (99). Therefore, by supporting existing notions of Russian people, Conrad further contributes to the hostility between Europe and Russia.

Conrad's complicated personal and political relationship with the nation is entangled in his works. The author's childhood trauma was deeply connected to Russia's political oppression; however, as a writer, he not only criticized the nation's politics and leaders, but also the oppressed people themselves. The author overlooks his criticism by claiming objectivity, and perhaps Conrad believed that by presenting expected types of Russian people, his claims of objectivity would stand. Nonetheless, such representations are loaded with centuries of implications. As such, it is useful for readers—particularly readers who are outside of the scope of the intended audience—to study Conrad's novel not for its objectivity, but for its *subjectivity*. By examining one's preconceived notions as well as the political and social implications behind stereotypes, readers can utilize Conrad's novel to not only understand the author's emotionally-charged relationship with Russia, but to also understand their own personal and cultural relationship with the nation.

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