UNDER WESTERN EYES
THE CAMBRIDGE EDITION OF THE WORKS OF JOSEPH CONRAD

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UNDER WESTERN EYES

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INTRODUCTION BY
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EXPLANATORY NOTES BY
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**Map**

Late nineteenth-century Geneva  
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Joseph Conrad’s place in twentieth-century literature is now firmly established. Although his novels, stories and other writings have become integral to modern thought and culture, the need for an accurate and authoritative edition of his works remains. Owing to successive rounds of authorial revision, transmissional errors and deliberate editorial intervention, Conrad’s texts exist in various unsatisfactory and sometimes even confused forms.

During the last years of his life he attempted to have his works published in a uniform edition that would fix and preserve them for posterity. But although trusted by scholars, students and the general reader alike, the received texts published in the British and American collected editions, and in various reprintings of them since 1921, have proved to be at least as defective as their predecessors. Grounded in thorough research in the surviving original documents, the Cambridge Edition is designed to reverse this trend by presenting Conrad’s novels, stories and other prose in texts that are as trustworthy as modern scholarship can make them.

The present volume contains critical texts of Under Western Eyes and its ‘Author’s Note’ (1920). The Cambridge text of Under Western Eyes is based on the extant revised typescript held in the Free Library of Philadelphia. The copy-text is emended to incorporate authorial revisions drawn from later authoritative documents as well as editorial corrections of errors. The copy-text of the ‘Author’s Note’, the revised typescript held in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University, is treated in the same way.

The ‘Introduction’ provides a literary history of the work focused on its genesis, sources and early reception, including its place in Conrad’s life and art. The essay on ‘The Texts’ traces the textual history of the volume, examines the origins of its individual texts and explains the policies followed in editing them. The ‘Apparatus’ records basic textual evidence, documenting the discussion of genealogy and authority in ‘The Texts: An Essay’ as well as other editorial decisions, and the ‘Textual Notes’ deal with cruxes and textual issues. Appendices
present the novel’s original manuscript ending and matter that Conrad deleted from the typescript of the novel, both published here in full for the first time. His working methods in the typescript are also described in this section. The ‘Explanatory Notes’ comment on specific readings that require glosses, dealing with sources, identifying real-life place-names and related matters, as well as explaining foreign words and phrases. Supplementing this material are a map and illustrations.

The textual essay, textual notes, appendices and ‘Apparatus’ are designed with the textual scholar and specialist in mind, while the ‘Introduction’ and ‘Explanatory Notes’ are intended primarily for a non-specialist audience.

The support of the institutions listed on p. vii has been essential to the success of this series and is gratefully acknowledged. In addition to those, and the individuals and institutions listed in the Acknowledgements, the General Editors and the Editorial Board also wish to thank the Trustees and beneficiaries of the Estate of Joseph Conrad, Doubleday and Company and J. M. Dent and Company for permission to publish these new texts of Conrad’s works.

The General Editors
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the following institutions and individuals for facilitating access to manuscripts and unpublished materials: the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, and Graham Sherriff, Library Services Assistant; the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, and Isaac Gewirtz and the late Lola Szladits (Curators); the Free Library of Philadelphia; and the Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia, and Elizabeth E. Fuller (Curator).

A number of individuals kindly supplied information or otherwise shared their expertise, and we should especially like to thank the following: Paul B. Armstrong for advice on textual issues and James C. Hatch for seeing the volume through the Committee on Scholarly Editions of the Modern Language Association; Laurence Davies for replies to enquiries about Conrad’s letters; Alexandre Fachard for information and comments on the textual materials; John G. Peters for information about reviews; and Donald J. Shewan for his work on the map. Stephen Donovan’s endeavours to bring Conrad’s serializations into the digital age with Conrad First: The Joseph Conrad Periodical Archive (www.conradfirst.net) have proved valuable.

Special thanks are due to the late S. W. Reid, former Chief Executive Editor of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, under whose ægis this project began and whose encouragement, advice and wisdom were unstintingly available to Conrad textual scholars for more than two decades. Gratitude is also due to Robert W. Trogdon, Director of the Institute for Bibliography and Editing at Kent State University, whose advice and sharing of editorial resources were invaluable. We are also grateful to them and to David Leon Higdon for on-site readings of the originals.

The identification and collation of first printings, the proofing of some transcriptions and other work both at Kent State University and, at an early stage of this project, by David Leon Higdon, eased the task of the present editors. We should also like to acknowledge
the work of earlier Conrad scholars, especially those who have studied the documents of *Under Western Eyes*. Whether our conclusions follow or correct theirs, the present edition has profited from their labours.

Thanks for assistance with support tasks are due to Catherine L. Tisch and, at an early stage of this project, to Gale Graham, at the Institute for Bibliography and Editing at Kent State University. Gratitude is also expressed to Linda Bree and Maartje Scheltens at Cambridge University Press for steadfast support and helpful advice; to Christina Sarigiannidou, who saw this volume through production; and to Leigh Mueller, whose careful and sensitive copy-editing has enriched the text in numerous ways.

Roger Osborne and Paul Eggert are especially grateful to the co-General Editors and to the members of the Editorial Board, all of whom provided valuable advice during the evolution of their work. Roger Osborne also wishes to record his gratitude to the University of New South Wales, Canberra, for a University College Postgraduate Research Scholarship that supported much of the foundational research for this edition, and to the Library and ancillary staff there, whose assistance was indispensable. Paul Eggert also wishes to thank the University of New South Wales, Canberra, for study leave and for travel, administrative and library support, and to express his gratitude to the Australian Research Council for generous financial assistance.

Keith Carabine is grateful to the British Academy for financial support, and to the Department of English, the University of Kent at Canterbury, for administrative support and study leaves. He owes special thanks to Angela Faunch, Interlibrary Loan Office of the University of Kent Library, and to Owen Knowles.

Jeremy Hawthorn wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the advice of Andrzej Busza, Wolfgang Wicht and Leona Toker.

For their support of the Edition we also wish to express gratitude to present and former administrators of Kent State University, including, in alphabetical order, Rudolph O. Buttlar, Carol A. Cartwright, Cheryl A. Casper, Ron Corthell, Joseph H. Danks, Todd Diacon, Robert Frank, Paul L. Gaston, Alex Gildzen, Cara L. Gilgenbach, Charlee Heimlich, Dean H. Keller, Sanford E. Marovitz, Tim Moerland, Thomas D. Moore, Stephen H. Paschen, Terry P. Roark, Michael Schwartz, F. S. Schwarzbach, Carol M. Toncar and Eugene P. Wenninger. Acknowledgement of special support goes to the staffs of Kent State University’s...
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The facsimiles that precede the textual essay are reproduced by courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, and the Free Library of Philadelphia.
Joseph Conrad’s life may be seen as having several distinct stages: in the Ukraine, in Russian exile and in Austrian Poland before his father’s death (1857–69); in Austrian Poland and the south of France as the ward of his maternal uncle (1870–78); in the British merchant service, mainly as a junior officer sailing in the Far East and Australia (1879–early 1890s); after a transitional period (early 1890s), as writer of critical esteem (1895–1914); as acclaimed writer, although perhaps with his greatest work achieved (1915–24). After 1895 the history of his life is essentially the history of his works.

Publication dates given below are those of the English editions, unless otherwise specified.

1857 December 3 Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski (Nałęcz coat-of-arms) born in Berdyczów in the Ukraine, part of the Russian Empire, to Apollo Korzeniowski and Ewelina (or Ewa), née Bobrowska, Korzeniowska

1862 May Apollo Korzeniowski, his wife and son forced into exile in Russia

1865 April Ewa Korzeniowska dies of tuberculosis

1867 Conrad visits Odessa with his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski; perhaps his first view of the sea

1868 Korzeniowski permitted to leave Russia

1869 February Korzeniowski and Conrad move to Cracow

1870 May Korzeniowski dies

1870 Conrad, ward of Bobrowski, begins study with tutor, Adam Pulman

1873 May Visits Switzerland and northern Italy

1874 October Takes position in Marseilles with Delestang et Fils, wholesalers and shippers

1875 Apprentice in Mont-Blanc (to Caribbean)
1876–7
In Saint-Antoine (to Caribbean)

1878
late February or early March
Attempts suicide

April
Leaves Marseilles in British steamer Mavis
(Mediterranean waters)

June
Lands at Lowestoft, Suffolk; first time in England

July–September
Sails as ordinary seaman in Skimmer of the Sea
(North Sea)

1878–80
In Duke of Sutherland (to Sydney), Europa
(Mediterranean waters)

1880
Meets G. F. W. Hope and Adolf Krieger

June
Passes examination for second mate

1880–81
Third mate in Loch Etive (to Sydney)

1881–4
Second mate in Palestine, Riversdale, Narcissus
(Eastern seas)

1884
December
Passes examination for first mate

1885–6
Second mate in Tilkhurst (to Singapore and India)

1886
Submits ‘The Black Mate’, perhaps his first story, to Tit-Bits competition

August
Becomes a British subject

November
Passes examination for master and receives ‘Certificate of Competency’

1886–7
Second mate in Falconhurst (British waters)

1887–8
First mate in Highland Forest, Vidar
(Eastern seas)

1888–9
Captain of barque Otago (Bangkok to Australia and Mauritius)

1889 autumn
Begins Almayer’s Folly in London

1890
February–April
In Poland for first time since 1874

May–December
In the Congo. Second-in-command, then temporarily captain, of Roi des Belges

1891
Manages warehouse of Barr, Moering in London

1891–3
First mate in Torrens (London and Plymouth to Adelaide)

1893
Meets John Galsworthy and Edward L. (‘Ted’) Sanderson (passengers on Torrens)
Chronology

autumn
November
1894
January
February
1895
April
1896
March
September
1897
December
1898
January
October
1899
February–April
1899
1900
September
October
1901
June
1902
November
1903
April
October
1904
July 15
1905
June
July
1906
August
October
1907
mid-May–mid-August

Visits Bobrowski in the Ukraine
Signs on as second mate in Adowa, which sails only to Rouen and back
Signs off Adowa, ending career as seaman
Bobrowski dies
Meets Edward Garnett and Jessie George
Almayer’s Folly
An Outcast of the Islands. Marries Jessie George
Settles in Stanford-le-Hope, Essex, after six-month honeymoon in Brittany
Begins friendship with R. B. Cunninghame Graham; meets Henry James and Stephen Crane
The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’
Meets Ford Madox (Hueffer) Ford and H. G. Wells
Alfred Borys Leo Leo Conrad born
Moves to Pent Farm, Postling, near Hythe, Kent, sub-let from Ford
‘The Heart of Darkness’ in Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine
Begins association with literary agent J. B. Pinker
Lord Jim
The Inheritors (with Ford)
Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories
Typhoon and Other Stories
Romance (with Ford)
Assassination in St Petersburg of Interior Minister Vyacheslav Konstantinovich de Plehve
Nostromo
One Day More staged in London
‘Autocracy and War’ in Fortnightly Review
John Alexander Conrad born
The Mirror of the Sea
Conrad and family in Geneva
May 18  
First ‘idea’ for short story ‘Razumov’, later
*Under Western Eyes*

September
*The Secret Agent*. Moves to Someries, Luton, Bedfordshire

c. December 3
Begins writing ‘Razumov’

1908 January
Expands and revises ‘The Black Mate’, first
drafted in 1886

c. March 11
Reaches end of Part 1 of ‘Razumov’

March 15
Envisages ‘a short novel’, but progress
slows on reaching Geneva section

August
*A Set of Six*

September 18
First instalment of ‘Some Reminiscences’
for *English Review* now drafted

September 29–
October 14
Typing of ‘Razumov’ reaches near start of
Part ii/4

October 8
Second ‘Some Reminiscences’ paper now
finished; lays ‘Razumov’ aside to continue
with third

mid-November?
Writes review of Anatole France’s *L’Île des
Pingouins* for *English Review*, returns to
‘Razumov’ towards end of month

by c. December 9
Concludes first series (four instalments) of
‘Some Reminiscences’; has put aside ‘some
8000’ words, probably ‘Prince Roman’
(revised September–October 1911)

1909 early January
Finishes ‘Razumov’ to manuscript page
700 (towards end of Part ii/4)

February
Moves to Aldington, Kent

eyear March?–May 20
Completes three further instalments of
‘Some Reminiscences’

by March 31
Passes end of Part ii of ‘Razumov’

December 5–c. 18
Breaks off ‘Razumov’ to write ‘The Secret
Sharer’

December 18
Receives Pinker’s demand to complete
‘Razumov’ within a fortnight

1910 January 12
First mention of title *Under Western Eyes*

January 19?
Completes up to manuscript page 1300
(near end of Part iv/3)

January 27
Delivers manuscript to Pinker to near end
of Part iv/4; furious row with him
xxii  

CHRONOLOGY

by January 30

January 30

April–May

June 24

c. late October

December

1911 before May 13?

by early September

October 5

1911

1912

October

1913

1914

1915

September

1917

1919

August

October

1920 by May 20

June

Writes last manuscript pages

Nervous collapse, followed by slow recovery throughout the spring

Undertakes typescript revisions, sending batches to Robert Garnett for retyping and correction

Moves to Capel House, Orlestone, Kent

Corrects English Review proofs of first instalment of Under Western Eyes, hereafter a monthly obligation

Serialization begins in English Review and North American Review (concludes October 1911)

Serious problems with English Review proofs

Methuen proofs begin arriving in duplicate; ‘muddle’ with proofs ensues

Under Western Eyes in England (19 October in America)

Some Reminiscences (as A Personal Record in America)

‘Twixt Land and Sea

Chance, with ‘main’ publication date of January 1914

Visits Austrian Poland with family; delayed by outbreak of First World War; returns via Vienna and Genoa

Within the Tides

Victory

The Shadow-Line

Moves to Spring Grove, near Wye, Kent.

Dramatic version of Victory opens in London

The Arrow of Gold

Moves to Oswalds, Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury, Kent

Writes ‘Author’s Note’ for Under Western Eyes

The Rescue
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>January–April</td>
<td>Visits Corsica. Collected editions begin publication in England (Heinemann) and in America (Doubleday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Notes on Life and Letters</td>
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<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>November</td>
<td>The Secret Agent staged in London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>May–June</td>
<td>Visits America, guest of F. N. Doubleday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December</td>
<td>The Rover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Declines knighthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>August 3</td>
<td>Dies at Oswaldis. Roman Catholic funeral and burial, Canterbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September</td>
<td>The Nature of a Crime (with Ford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October</td>
<td>The Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Tales of Hearsay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Suspense (unfinished)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Last Essays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>The Sisters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTE ON EDITIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

[London is the place of publication unless otherwise specified.]

Bibliography

Carabine

CR

Donovan, ed.

Hervouet

Kirschner (1988)

Kirschner (1992)

Kirschner, ed.

Knowles
Owen Knowles, ‘Under Western Eyes: A Note on Two Sources’, The Conradian, 10 (1985), 154–61

Letters
The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad. General Editors Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies, xxiv

Najder


Najder, Conrad


Najder, Letters


Register


LOCATIONS OF UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

Berg

Berg Collection, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Hofstra

Joan and Donald E. Axinn Library, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York

Northwestern

Charles Deering McCormick Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois

Philadelphia

Free Library of Philadelphia

Rosenbach

Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia

Yale

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

NOTE ON EDITIONS

References to Conrad’s works are to the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad where these have been published. Otherwise, references are, for the sake of convenience, to Dent’s Collected Edition, 1946–55, whose pagination is identical with that of the various ‘editions’ published by Doubleday throughout the 1920s. References
to the Cambridge Edition take the following form: title (year of publication), whereas publication dates are not provided for citations from Dent’s Collected Edition.

Citations from critical and other works are identified by author, title and date of publication. References to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866) are to the translation by Frederick Whishaw, first published in 1886 in Vizetelly’s One-Volume novel series, in its Everyman reprinting of 1911.
INTRODUCTION

THE LAST in a trilogy of political novels that includes *Nostromo* (1904) and *The Secret Agent* (1907), *Under Western Eyes* (1911) engages with the great issues of imperialism, revolution, capitalism and anarchism. In the first significant revaluation of Conrad’s canon after the Second World War, F. R. Leavis judged the novel ‘a most distinguished work’ although regarding the other two as Conrad’s ‘supreme masterpieces’.\(^1\) While this verdict has stood the test of time, several later commentators have hailed *Under Western Eyes* as among the most significant fictions of the twentieth century,\(^2\) and placed it alongside such European classics as Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866), to which it is indebted, and Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1925).

Shortly before *Under Western Eyes* was published, Conrad informed his literary agent, J. B. Pinker, that he planned to explain in the preface to *Some Reminiscences* (later *A Personal Record*) ‘how I came to write such a novel ... so utterly unlike in subject and treatment from anything I had done before’.\(^3\) The ‘subject’ – Razumov’s twofold betrayal and twofold confession – is a variation on familiar Conradian themes; and because it is the writer’s only full-length work set in Russia, the country of his birth, Conrad knew before he began the work that it would draw upon childhood memories and require him to explore his profound ambivalence about his divided Polish heritage and his complex feelings about his parents and family. Conrad’s ‘most deeply meditated novel’ (*Letters*, v, 695) took three years to compose and culminated in a physical and mental breakdown in early 1910.

The narrative ‘treatment’ involving a double focus is familiar enough, but *Under Western Eyes* is a radical variation on it in being based upon a diary mediated through the Western eyes of an unnamed,

\(^1\) The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad (1948), pp. 251–2. The chapters on Conrad were first published in *Scrutiny* in 1941.
\(^3\) Conrad to J. B. Pinker, 13 September 1911 (*Letters*, iv, 477).
INTRODUCTION

elderly English teacher of languages who, by confessing that he lacks both the novelist’s ‘high gifts of imagination and expression’ and ‘comprehension of the Russian character’, disqualifies himself as an interpreter. Unsurprisingly, the complexities and tensions of the dual narrative and the riddling narrator have generated widely differing valuations of the doubleness variously detected in the novel’s narrative focus, irony and authority.2

ORIGINS

According to Conrad’s first biographer, G. Jean-Aubry, it was during Conrad’s three-month stay with his family in Geneva, from mid-May to mid-August 1907, that he remembered ‘a casual conversation he had had with a stranger’ during a visit to the city in May 1895 that provided ‘the idea’ for Under Western Eyes.3 Long the haven of Russian revolutionaries of various stripes – from the anarchist Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin and socialist Alexander Herzen to the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and their grim shadows, the Tsarist spies – Geneva was a city Conrad knew well, having repaired to it for hydrotherapy at periods of personal crisis.4 During each visit he lodged at the Hôtel-Pension de la Roseraie in Champel-les-Bains, a mere 400 yards (some 360 metres) from an area nicknamed ‘La Petite Russie’ (‘Little Russia’). Situated in the commune of Plainpalais between La Cluse and the Carouge Bridge, the quarter played somewhat reluctant host to Russian revolutionaries in exile. In 1905, Russia’s defeat by Japan was joyously celebrated there, while the area was associated with clandestine activities, including bomb-making.6

In 1907, the noise made by Russian students became a concern for local residents;7 and so dramatic was the flood of young Russians into

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1 See pp. 113, 122. Subsequent references to the texts of the present edition appear in round brackets.
2 For a summary and interpretation of these issues, see Carabine, pp. 209–51.
4 Conrad’s previous sojourns in the city are dated as follows: (1) 21 May–14 June 1891 in the wake of his return from the Congo; (2) 8 August–6 September 1894, six months after the death of his uncle and guardian Tadeusz Bobrowski; and (3) May 1895 to seek relief from ‘attacks of melancholy’ (Letters, i, 211). On Conrad’s detailed knowledge of Geneva and on the novel’s topographical accuracy, see Kirschner (1988) and Kirschner (1992).
5 For a map of this area, see Kirschner, ed., p. xvi.
7 Étienne Barrès, Contre le socialisme révolutionnaire (1907); see Kirschner, ed., p. 269.
Switzerland in the wake of unrest in, and the closure of, Russian universities that it became a matter of official concern. Living near this district, Conrad would have heard Russian – a language familiar to him from childhood – daily, and in many ways would have been reminded of his origins and early years.

His last stay, with his wife and two young boys in 1907, possibly suggested the contrast between a safe, bourgeois city and the unstable city of St Petersburg upon which both the plot of his new work and the clash between East and West pivot. However that may be, Conrad was also dealing with political themes, Russian intrigues and the contrast between English and Russian values in the main work he accomplished whilst in Geneva: the revision of The Secret Agent. The central action of that novel – the attempted anarchist bombing of the Greenwich Observatory in 1894 – is inspired by ‘the cynical self-satisfaction’ of the spy-bureaucrat Mr Vladimir, descended ‘from generations victimised by the instruments of an arbitrary power’.

The remote germ of Under Western Eyes seems to lie in an idea that Conrad had been contemplating during the spring of 1907 and had mooted to his literary agent shortly after he and his family arrived from Montpellier to stay in Geneva: to treat the topics of ‘war, peace, labour in general’ in a novel ‘with a sufficiently interesting story’. Nothing came of this, or, rather, it complexly evolved into another, quite different work dealing with political themes.

Conrad probably began Under Western Eyes as a short story on his fiftieth birthday, 3 December 1907. He made rapid progress on ‘Razu mov’, then conceived as a tale ‘about the revolutionist who is blown up by his own bomb’ (Letters, iii, 513). Shortly after completing its first seventy pages – the final novel’s first chapter – he wrote two revealing letters, to his friend and fellow writer John Galsworthy and to Pinker. Speaking of himself in the third person, he informed Galsworthy:

He is writing now a story the title of which is Razumov. Isn’t it expressive. I think that I am trying to capture the very soul of things Russian – Cosas de Russia.... Listen to the theme: The Student Razumov (a natural son of a Prince K—) gives

1 In 1907, the rectors of Swiss universities agreed to implement considerably more stringent admission policies to deal with the influx of Russian university students; see Journal de Genève, 11 June 1907, p. 2; 11 August 1907, p. 2.
3 Conrad to Pinker, 18 May 1907 (Letters, iii, 440).
4 For a detailed account of the novel’s writing and revision, see ‘The Texts’, pp. 296–315.
up secretly to the police his fellow Student Haldin who seeks refuge in his rooms after com[mitting]ting a political crime (supposed to be the murder of de Plehve).

First movement in S' Petersburg. (Haldin is hanged of course). [in margin] ‘done’

2d in Geneva: The Student Razumov meeting abroad the mother and sister of Haldin falls in love with that last, marries her and after a time confesses to her the part he played in the arrest and death of her brother. [in margin] ‘to do’ ...

But I had to write it. (6 January 1908, Letters, iv, 8–9)

To Pinker the next day, Conrad repeated and augmented his announcement: ‘Here is given the very essence of things Russian. Not the mere outward manners and customs but the Russian feeling and thought... And, I think, the story is effective. It is also characteristic of the present time. Nothing of the sort had been done in English. The subject has long haunted me. Now it must come out’ (Letters, iv, 14).

These statements attest to Conrad’s assured sense of his story’s contemporary relevance, while demonstrating that his decision to write it was inspired by personal memories and a desire to portray the Russian national character. His friend Richard Curle records another, rather less personal spur to writing that reveals an interest in the marketplace: ‘As he noted in my copy, he was induced to write Under Western Eyes “by the rubbishy character of stories about Russian revolutionaries published in magazines,” and undoubtedly he composed it with that antagonism to Russian institutions and character which he had always showed.’

1 Conrad did not exaggerate the timeliness of his subject: since 1894, Constance Garnett’s translations of almost all of Turgenev’s works and a substantial part of Tolstoy’s had roused a preoccupation with the Russian ‘soul’ and, in particular, with Tolstoy’s spiritual depths, moral courage and austere lifestyle.

Through Razumov’s ‘record’, Conrad intended to ‘capture the very soul of things Russian’, but the ‘subject’ outlined to Galsworthy – of Razumov’s betrayal of Haldin, his subsequent tortured double life and desperate need to justify, confess and be understood – describes the ‘very soul’ of themes and things Conradian. It is a variant of what he called ‘the inner story of most of my books’ (Letters, iv, 139). This

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1 Richard Curle, The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad (1928), p. 99. The genre to which Conrad was antipathetic would include such works as Joseph Hatton’s By Order of the Czar: The Tragic Story of Anna Klosstock, Queen of the Ghetto (1890), Richard Henry Savage’s The Anarchist: A Story of To-Day (1894) and Arthur R. and Mary E. Ropes’s On Peter’s Island (1901). For a survey of such writings, see A. G. Cross, The Russian Theme in English Literature from the Sixteenth Century to 1980: An Introductory Survey and A Bibliography (1985), and Barbara Arnett Melchiori, Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel (1985).