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Dynamis and Energeia **in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes***

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" $E = mc^2$ ", Einstein's famous formula defines energy as the relation between mass and the speed of light squared. Einstein, Conrad's near contemporary, certainly contributed to redefine our relationship with the universe that surrounds us – and so did, in their various ways, modernist works belonging to the galaxy of such well-known authors as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner and so on, including of course Joseph Conrad in it, with his novels and short stories in general and *Under Western Eyes* (1911) in particular. However, Conrad's natural literary bent is rather towards the past, and tradition. He very often looks towards Greek Antiquity, with its myths, and Greek philosophy.

Indeed, although Plato might sound more congenial to Conrad's aporetic tales – see Councillor's Mikhulin's "Socratic forehead" (123) and the manner he leads the conversation with Razumov, reminiscent of Socrates's practice in most of Plato's dialogues –, and as regards our reflection on the modalities of energy in *Under Western Eyes*, I would like to start with Aristotle. Indeed, in his *Metaphysics* (Θ8, 1050 a 9), inspired by physical models, Aristotle distinguishes between two modalities of energy: *dynamis*, often translated as "potentiality", describes virtual energy, and *energeia*, translated by "actuality", designates energy in action, that is to say the actualisation of what has remained so far only in a state of potentiality.

Following Aristotle's distinction, the present essay wishes to explore the irony and the tensions at play between the forms of *dynamis* and *energeia* in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, bearing in mind that if to Blake (in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) "Energy is eternal delight", this is not so in Conrad's fictive universe. In the process of writing, Conrad was at times painfully aware of the potentialities of a character. For instance, in an answer to Olivia Rayne Garnett's criticism of his treatment of Nathalie Haldin in the novel, he wrote in a letter of 28 Oct. 1911:

You are a good critic. That girl does not move. No excuse can be offered for such a defect but there is an explanation. I wanted a pivot for the action to turn on. And I had to be very careful because if I had allowed myself to make more of her she would have killed the artistic purpose of the book: the development of a single mood. It isn't that I was afraid or ignorant of her *possibilities*. Indeed they were

very tempting. But it had to be a performance on one string. It had to be (Karl & Davies, 1983, iv, 489-490, my italics).

In the Author's Note to *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad wrote about the revolutionists of the novel:

These people are unable to see that all they can *effect* is merely a change of names. The oppressors and the oppressed are all Russians together; and the world is brought once more face to face with the truth of the saying that the tiger cannot change his stripes nor the leopard his spots (Conrad 1989, 51, my emphasis).

"To effect" describes this evolution from *dynamis* to *energeia*. Conrad suggests here the very vanity, or at least the very ambiguity, of leaving potentiality in order to hope to enter the realm of facts. In *Lord Jim*, Marlow comments on the Jim trial: "Facts! They demanded facts from him, as if facts could explain anything!" (63)¹ – convinced as Conrad is, of the Einsteinian relativity of all moral situations.

First and foremost, from a literary perspective, *dynamis* can be defined as the expectations, the hopes, the aspirations suggested by a character, and the virtual quality of a sign or phenomenon. By contrast, *energeia* stands for reality, achievement, the upshot or realisation of the said phenomenon or situation. My contention is that one of the dramatic prime movers of *Under Western Eyes* is the problematic relationship between the dynamic – in this sense, potential – nature of a character or symbol on the one hand, and its energetic dimension, that is to say its actual unfolding of it, into the plot. In *Under Western Eyes*, the meaning of a word or an action constantly oscillates between two unequal poles, that of its potential meaning or meanings, and that of its actual meaning and its eventual relevance. More often than not, this is the least expected meaning which is actualised and contributes to the plot. Razumov uses a phrase which describes this phenomenon very aptly when he evokes: "the strange dread of the unexpected" (109).

The eyes (do not) have it

I shall start by considering a number of instances before analysing their impact on the course of the novel. These instances shall consider places, gestures, words, characters and other signs that are read in the novel. Places are not what they are expected to be. For instance, already in Conrad's time, Geneva and Switzerland were almost synonymous with political havens of neutrality, but Conrad, in his Author's Note, uses the terms "jungle" and "wilderness" (51) to designate the place. The Château Borel, evocative of aristocracy, lead by "Madame de S—, a lady of advanced views" (150) is actually a nest of revolutionaries. Even Razumov's chamber, viewed as a cocoon where he expects to shelter a lonely life dedicated to his studies, becomes the locus of his alienation when it is taken over by the intrusion of Haldin. Of course the irony here is that both take the chamber to be a shelter for each of them; but it becomes a place of betrayal for Haldin and a place to leave for Razumov.

¹On the relationship between facts and the writing of myths, see Yann Tholoniati, 2003, 57-66.

The potential meaning of gestures is also ironically contradicted by the actual intention they carry, as revealed by the narrator or by Razumov himself. For instance, to ascertain Haldin's real presence in his room, Razumov touches his shoulder ever so lightly (97). Haldin believes that this is a manifestation of kindness (98). In this situation, Razumov is half-aware that they both remain blind to the actual consequences of their action: "I don't say you have done wrong. Indeed, from a certain point of view you could not have done better" (99). But of course, another point of view prevails, and this is according to that point of view that Haldin is betrayed by Razumov, arrested and molested before being executed.

The characters of *Under Western Eyes* keep asking the meaning of words, for which they try to provide self-made definitions. They believe that the definition they provide is shared by others. This process of definition/redefinition is particularly palpable in Razumov: "what is a throne?" (79), "what is betrayal?" (82), "what [is] happiness?" (109). But as may be surmised, his reachings for verbal certainties are to no avail. When he is willing to distinguish himself from Haldin and his kind, Razumov tells General T—: "Liberty with a capital L, Excellency. Liberty that means nothing precise" (92). Meaning nothing precise is the stamp of his other definitions. He is rather fascinated by sounds, as exemplified by the list of abstract nouns (104) that he writes in an "unsteady, almost childish" hand and that he stabs on his wall:

History not Theory.
Patriotism not Internationalism.
Evolution not Revolution
Direction not Destruction.
Unity not Disruption².

The actual meaning of this list is his desire to set an intellectual and political gap between himself and Haldin's revolutionary attempts. There is "little logic" (189) in them.

In addition, the Teacher of Languages reminds the reader of the opacity of words on a regular basis – of Russian words specifically. Indeed, he warns the reader, "There is little logic to be expected [...], not only in the matter of thought, but also of sentiment" (189) in the characters of his narrative. In the context, this sentence can be rephrased by saying that in the fields of thought and sentiment, there is little logic between *dynamis* and *energeia* in *Under Western Eyes*. The paradox lies in the fact that most characters in *Under Western Eyes* are not what they seem to be, so that the traits or clues the reader might gather so as to construe them are always subject to caution, let alone to interpretation. In this novel, Conrad achieves the paradoxical *tour de force* which consists in building up characters whose secret side is really the core of their psychology.

² Razumov's arbitrary list of binary oppositions anticipates, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the statements Winston Smith believes in after he has been brainwashed ("Freedom is Slavery", "Two and Two make Five", "God is Power", etc.), some of which are introduced in the first chapter.

The difficulty in apprehending them resides in the fact that “all secret revolutionary action [is] based upon folly, self-deception, and lies” (117). Not being what they seem to be, not looking what they are, they undermine the traditional logic of nineteenth-century characterization one can find for instance in Conrad’s master Gustave Flaubert. With Emma Bovary and Frédéric Moreau, Flaubert explores in depth the social milieu, the psychology and specific moments in the life of his main character. In *Under Western Eyes* the phenomenon reaches a new dimension in that the construction of characters goes hand in hand with the systematic undermining of the elements which have been foregrounded to delineate them. They are reduced to mere labels, and are shown as socially disconnected and psychologically alienated beings.

Occurring almost as a running-gag in the novel, Razumov is himself defined by others: by Haldin first, who reads him as a silent accomplice; by the gaunt student (110) then, and by Madcap Kostia, who both read Razumov after Haldin’s words of praise. Victor Haldin, General T— (93), Nathalie Haldin, Sophia Antonovna, all decide that Razumov is trustworthy. When he tries to provide a definition of himself (100), this is as a simple “worker” (not as a student), in opposition to Haldin, described as a “political saint”. Little does he perceive the virtual irony of these labels for the two of them. The relative inadequacy of these tentative definitions is gradually revealed in the narrative. Now, Razumov’s face is described as if “modelled vigorously in wax” (57)³. The material is indeed characteristic of dynamis, in that it could be kneaded and modified, like a piece of dough, to produce an infinity of actual shapes. At the outset of the novel, “wax” signals that the character of Razumov is still in the making.

As has been remarked, Razumov’s patronymic (“Kirylo Sidorovitch Razumov”) has a particular significance: “Razumov” means “reason” in Russian; St. Isidor wrote, among other things, etymologies; and the Russian (Cyrillic) script was invented by St. Cyril. The Cyrillic alphabet is often endowed by Conrad with mystery, as in *Heart of Darkness* where it is believed to be “cipher.” (Conrad 1988, 40) Ironically enough, Razumov is more governed by his passion than by his reason. Although he affirms: “I am reasonable” (123), he can but acknowledge that “there could be no rational answer” (119) to the situation he is in. And when he argues with himself in order to justify his betrayal of Haldin, he experiences “the irrational feeling that something may jump upon us in the dark” (80). These sudden impulses and his opacity nonplus everybody throughout the novel.

By and large, onomastic signifiers tend to follow their own logics and even to be shift: some Russian characters have a westernized designation (*Peter Ivanovitch*, *Eleanor Maximovna de S—*, *Gregory Mikulin* – whose second name is Matvieitch in I, 3 and surprisingly enough Gregorievitch in IV, 1), whereas others keep their full Russian name (Victor Victorovitch Haldin, Sophia Antonovna). Finally, Miss Haldin is referred to either as Natalia or as Nathalie. This hesitation in designing characters blur their *dynamis* and complicate their *energeia* by enhancing the ambiguity of identities within the economy of the novel.

³ See also the description of the gaunt student with such words as “tallowy”, “cardboard”, “stamped” (109), signalling here again the elasticity of this character’s features.

Every character, like Razumov, has a label. The label consists in a kind of nickname that sticks to a character to such an extent that even if the character has a proper name that is known, the label tends to cover it. Thus, a character is most of the time designated by a metonymy, the function standing for the person. More often than not, the said label is disconnected from its actual use.

First and foremost, the Teacher of Languages is *only* a label, a periphrasis which confines his identity to that of a profession involving a certain *auctoritas*. Granted, he is a figure of the author, but this is greatly ironic that he does not understand Russian, let alone Russianness in the tale he has chosen to narrate. After all, "born from parents settled in St. Petersburg, [he] had acquired the language as a child" (198). When the character of Tekla appears (166), she is merely referred to as the "lady companion" when she is with Razumov, and the "*dame de compagnie*" when she is with Nathalie Haldin, before she names herself Tekla in the third part, seventy pages later. And even then, the reader is not sure that it is her real name: "My poor Andrei called me so. [...] That is the lot of all us Russians, nameless Russians" (236). Characters with a proper identity (first name, surname) also receive a label in the course of the narrative. For instance, Peter Ivanovitch is referred to as the "heroic fugitive". His oxymoronic and ironical label originates in the grudge borne to him by the Teacher of Languages and stresses the duplicity of the man. Sophia Antonovna is the "woman revolutionist", and one may wonder whether Conrad wanted to see an oxymoron as ironical as the previous one in this label, as if being a woman and a revolutionist at the same time was somewhat or somehow incompatible.

Razumov is but a label ("Distinction would convert the label Razumov into an honoured name", 63), and more specifically the label "of a solitary individuality" (61), because his father, Prince K—, refused to recognize Razumov as his son. Because Razumov commits an unforgivable mistake in betraying Haldin, the chance to possess an honoured name dwindles as the story proceeds. He is rejected by everybody: "the unrelated organism bearing that label, walking, breathing, wearing these clothes, was of no importance to any one" (113).

As the Teacher of Languages says to Razumov: "Your name is a sort of legacy" (201): again his name gets beyond his control. In *Under Western Eyes*, the potential is certain, but *energeia* is uncertain. When he could have found a "shelter,"⁴ or a family in "Natalia Victorovna," it is "too late" (320).

The gallery of partial portraits goes on with characters which are evoked by an object, a metonymy of his or her identity. Peter Ivanovitch is a bulk with dark glasses. Whenever he appears, his dark glasses are mentioned. Behind them, "he could be as impudent as he chose" (154) and remains "impenetrable" (231, 308). His glasses are his objective correlative, a symbol of his unfathomable duplicity: he proclaims he is a revolutionist but he sponges on the aristocrat Mme de S—. About Peter Ivanovitch, Jacques Berthoud underlines the gap between *dynamis* and *energeia*: "Every one of his aspirations is cancelled out by a contradictory reality" (Berthoud, 1978, 168). When Miss Haldin stresses the paradox, he cries:

⁴ "So Mr Razumov [...] went to meet Councillor Mikulin with the eagerness of a pursued person welcoming any sort of shelter" (290).

“Prejudice! [...] There is always something to weigh down the spiritual side in all of us” (154). He speaks highly of “the spiritual superiority of woman”, but his tirades are undermined by Tekla who reveals that, “behind the scenes” (164), Ivanovitch is an “awful despot” (233).

Another device is to focus on a part of the body which thereby acquires an existence of its own, which is endowed with a specific energy of evocation. The essence of the character is concentrated on special spots and the body is deprived of a proper image. It can be Prince K—’s grey whiskers (84), or hands (94), but, as is to be expected from a novel bearing a title mentioning “eyes”, the parts of the body singled out are the eyes. When the eyes are focused upon, Conrad links a character with a particular facial expression: Tekla blinks, Councillor Mikulin glances down his beard, Sophia Antonovna’s gaze penetrates, Nathalie Haldin’s eyes are frank. Reduced to *membra disjecta*, the characters undergo another process of destruction in so far as they are described as socially disconnected and psychologically alienated.

Anxiety and alienation

What characterizes Razumov is his fundamental inability to distinguish between imagination and reality. He is also deprived of his self by Haldin who takes him for someone he is not; as a consequence, he has to live the life of a revolutionist he has precisely tried to avoid in denouncing Haldin. He then lives in irreparable solitude. From the outset, *Under Western Eyes* presents the great expectations of the hero: Razumov has “an access of elation” when he fancies himself receiving the silver medal offered by the Ministry of Education (61). Razumov’s visions are purely on the “dynamic” side. It is only in retrospect that one can perceive their relevance, or, more often than not, the ironic irrelevance of *energeia* that is pervasive in *Under Western Eyes*.

On his way home, Razumov has “a morbidly vivid vision of Haldin on his bed” (77). He does not notice the “delirious” (83) drift of his argumentative speech, but he only sees that “between the drunkenness of the peasant incapable of action and the dream-intoxication of the idealist incapable of perceiving the reason of things [...] he was done for” (77). He is lost in hypotheses: “the police would very soon find out all about him, they would set about discovering a conspiracy” (68). Later on, in a flash, he imagines that he stabs Peter Ivanovitch to death “with a horrible triumphant satisfaction” and tries to find an alibi, before realizing that Ivanovitch is still before him as towering as before (215-6).

The process of disintegration of Razumov’s personality begins when he is taken for someone he is not (Mayoux, 1960, 130) – especially as “an altogether trustworthy man” (57). Belonging to a line of self-divided Conradian heroes (among whom the most notorious ones are Kurtz, Jim and Nostromo), Razumov becomes schizophrenic: “He felt, bizarre as it may seem, as though another self, an independent sharer of his mind, had been able to view his whole person very distinctly indeed” (232). Razumov knows he is on the verge of madness (216, 263, 325). Razumov cannot forget and he is “the puppet of his past” (335). A possible solution to his state might be to find some sort of shelter, but: “What did it mean? Was he forgotten? Possibly. Then why not remain forgotten – creep in

somewhere? Hide. But where? How? With whom? In what hole? And was it to be forever, or what?" (287).

One can try to be more specific about this contagious feeling of alienation by giving it a proper name: anxiety, whose symptoms Conrad manifested throughout his life. Thus, in *Under Western Eyes*, Conrad says in the Author's Note: "My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality" (49). In his article "Anxiety in *Under Western Eyes*" (Berthoud 1993), Jacques Berthoud takes up Sigmund Freud's definition of anxiety as a "particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it". But in *Under Western Eyes*, there is no certain *dynamis* on which to rely, and *energeia* always comes up with a twist. Razumov is anxious because he has, first, a difficulty to sleep (195, 202, 203), and sometimes to eat correctly (318). He goes through phases of utmost weariness (124, 240, 265). Razumov's anxiety is noticeable in his speeches prone to *non sequiturs* (with Haldin, 99-100; with Sophia Antonovna, 248). His mental state also wavers between phases of sudden exhilaration (61) and overwhelming anxiety (204, 213, 252). His anxiety comes from the fact that he is under a variety of simultaneous pressures, outward and inward at the same time. But as a matter of fact, everybody is anxious in the novel, and anxiety is contagious: "my companion [Nathalie Haldin]'s natural anxiety had communicated itself sympathetically to me" (313), the Teacher of Languages says. The consequence of the disconnectedness between *dynamis* and *energeia* in Razumov is that he is drained of his mental strength: "An infinite distress possessed Razumov, annihilated his energy" (109), the symptom being "physical giddiness" (113). He is "annihilated", according to his lodger, by the "Nihilists" (112). If the pun is not intended by the speaker, it is part of Conrad's dramatic irony in the novel.

The discrepancy between "what might be" and "what is"

Everything is relative. Everything is seen and has to be seen from a relative point of view. Ramon Fernandez noted:

Quant au commentaire psychologique, il nous est présenté comme simplement probable. C'est dire qu'il n'intervient aucunement dans la détermination du personnage [...], il demeure tangent à la réalité, d'où vient que l'opacité de l'individu, de la scène, n'est jamais complètement dissipé (Fernandez, 1981, 101, his italics).

Rephrasing this statement from the perspective of the dialectics between *dynamis* and *energeia*, we would say that Ramon Fernandez notices here that in *Under Western Eyes*, what has been actualised is not always fixed, certain, and can always develop new potentialities which in their time will reveal new actualities.

Thus no judgement can resist its conflicting undecipherability, one opinion undermining the other. Indeed, Razumov evolves through trials and errors and his personality is always elusive. He is all the more easily swayed because he is taken unawares: "I shall never be found prepared" (250). The *energeia* of an action is only to be understood in retrospect, that is to say, too late. When Razumov decides to confess himself to Nathalie Haldin then to the terrorists, it is

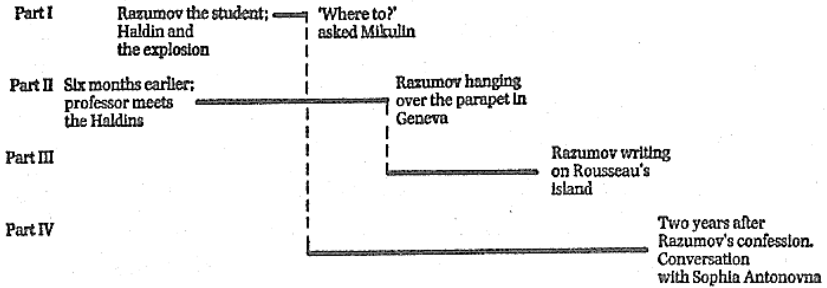
of course significant that it is Nikita Necator who gives him the symbolic deathblow. Nikita Necator, “the perfect flower of the terrorist wilderness” (53) is one of “the poisonous plants which flourish in the world of conspirators, like evil mushrooms in a dark cellar” (213). Razumov, who is endowed with the insight (which is often a hindsight) of tragic heroes, is doubtful: “how could that creature, so grotesque as to set town dogs barking at its mere sight, go about on those deadly errands and slip through the meshes of the police?” (261), whereas Sophie Antonovna asserts: “there’s no malice in him” (264). Nikita Necator is the inverted double of Razumov, who has an “inspiration” (348) about his actual nature: “A squeaky voice screamed, ‘confession or no confession, you are a police spy!’ [...] ‘And what are you?’ [Razumov] said” (338).

Not only do the hero and his evil *Doppelgänger* have to undergo a reversal, but so do minor characters. In Conrad’s novel a whole process of undermining the characters is at work: the higher a protagonist goes, the deeper he will fall; the one who pretends to be the most trustworthy can turn out to be a fraud of the worst kind. About Peter Ivanovitch, Sophie Antonovna sticks to her errors of evaluation with the concluding words of the novel: “Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man”. As a matter of fact, Peter Ivanovitch is one of Conrad’s most ambiguous figures. The “great feminist” claims “the spiritual superiority of woman”. Does he believe in what he preaches – or does he delude himself? He is the one who utters a sentence with far-reaching logical and almost nihilistic consequences: “The man who says he has no illusions has at least that one” (214)... He is to be paralleled with Councillor Mikulin, since they are the leading representatives of the two parties, Autocracy and Revolution. S. K. Land notes that both have “a highly suspect private morality”. (Land, 1984, 165) Indeed, Tekla more than debunks the myth of the great feminist by disclosing the cruel treatment she suffered from him (166-7, 233-4). Moreover, the respect he pays to Madame de S— probably hides a more intimate connection, as is shown by his repeated slips of the tongue: “I needed no urging, but Eleanor – Madame de S— herself has in a way sent me” (152), “I myself was inspired that evening by the firm and exquisite genius of Eleanor – Madame de S—, you know” (154). As for Mikulin, he is “a bachelor with a love of comfort, living alone in an apartment of five rooms luxuriously furnished; and [...] known by his intimates to be an enlightened patron of the art of female dancing” (290). Their trajectories are quite the opposite: while Peter Ivanovitch grows from pariah into revolutionary leader, Mikulin falls from the ranks of the governing class to the social status of a “civil corpse” (291). Half-way through their ascending, or descending, path and at the end of the novel, they chance upon each other in a railway carriage and ironically indeed, converse amicably during “half the night” (348).

“They shall be destroyed” (92)

In the Author’s Note, Conrad distinguishes the “form” and the “formula” of peace (56). In the dialectic between the two words, we can see the dialectic between *dynamis* (“form”, a form which remains to be filled), and *energeia* (“a formula”, an actual verbal rendering in so many words). The discrepancy between the two modalities of energy is dramatised in a number of disruptions

and explosions. First, *Under Western Eyes* has an exploded structure, marked by a division of time and space (the Occident vs. La Petite Russie). The narrative line is also disrupted, as is shown on the diagram produced by Boris Ford in his introduction to the novel (Conrad 1989, 25):



If we use the extended metaphor of the novel as a vehicle, the transfer of energy (from potential to actual) is its engine. The structure as established by Boris Ford can be read as the various shafts of the engine. As we can see, the apparently trite question asked by Mikulin at the end of Part I is actually loaded with *dynamis*, the *energeia* of which unfolds in the rest of the novel.

The multi-layered “game of make-believe” (257) overlaps a “frightfully disconnected piece of writing” (180). The distortion of the chronological frame has to be put in relation to the tragic strain of events, and the fragmentation of the episodes acts like a disposition of reflectors pouring light on one another. Indeed, the embedded narratives dramatize the antagonistic forces at stake in the novel. But even at a more intimate level the novel is punctured throughout. Most dialogues lapse into aposiopesis and are fractured by ellipses: “Despotic bureaucracy... abuses... corruption... and so on” (80).

We can go as far as to say that Conrad does not so much explore his characters as explode them. Indeed, the narrative is interspersed by explosions, most of them affecting Razumov. There is of course the description of the bomb-attack against Mr de P—, which is staged in two times: the first stage gathers “an excited crowd”, whereas the second bombing perpetrated by Haldin seems to blow the Russian crowd to smithereens: “The first explosion had brought together a crowd as if by enchantment, the second made as swiftly a solitude in the street for hundreds of yards in each direction” (60). This “Big Bang” is gradually internalized by Razumov, although he desperately endeavours to control his emotions, but to no avail: “Razumov discovered that he could not suppress the trembling of his lips” (255). He has recurring fits of convulsions (103, 109, 200, 280, 320, 324) and nausea (103, 221, 228, 271). The first major crisis occurs when he is confronted with Ziemianitch’s drunken torpor; he beats him up in despair: “Razumov belaboured Ziemianitch with an insatiable fury, in great volleys of sounding thwacks” (76). On his way back home, as a muffled echo to this fit of violence, there is “the crash of two colliding sledges close to the curb” (81), which may suggest the colliding lines of life of Razumov and Haldin or, beyond Haldin, fate.

When Razumov last faces Haldin, the discrepancy between the remorse resulting from his betrayal of Haldin and the mask he has to wear crystallizes in a concentration of stress which is almost palpable: "Razumov seemed beside himself; but his mind was lucid. It was really a calculated outburst" (91), "he was beset by an insane temptation to grip that exposed throat and squeeze the breath out of that body" (97), "a paroxysm of silent hatred towards Haldin" (98), "He avoided with difficulty a burst of Mephistophelian laughter" (99). His supersensitive nerves are on the rack: "This absurdity made him start in the chair convulsively. He literally had to shake his head violently to get rid of it" (103), "The faint deep boom of the distant clock seemed to explode in his head – he heard it so clearly.... One!" (103). Similarly, the interview with Councillor Mikulin is so dense that Razumov's mind explodes with such phrases as "A suspect! A suspect!" (118), "Reserve! Reserve!" (123).

Throughout the many tense dialogues that take place in Geneva, the interlocutors are so much under pressure that they always seem on the verge of explosion: they speak "explosively" (127, 219, 270). The workings of the plot turn the character of Razumov, who has "a smouldering fire of scorn in [him]" (227), into a time bomb, and the final climax of the novel also occurs in two stages: after Razumov's two confessions, Nikita Necator cruelly performs a "Big Crush" in bursting his eardrums: "[Razumov] heard a faint, dull detonating sound, as if some one had fired a pistol on the other side of the wall. A raging fury awoke in him at this outrage" (339). The symmetry with the initial bomb-attack is noticeable: "In an instant there was a terrible shock, a detonation muffled in the multitude of snowflakes" (59). Finally, Razumov completes his destruction in "smashing himself" (340) under a tramcar.

Dynamis is "Looking forward": this is Razumov's mantra (107) which allows him to find a quantum of solace, to find some hope in the future, just after he has had Haldin arrested. As opposed, *energeia* can be defined as "reflection" (used by Conrad in his Author's note, 55), a "retrospect" (a word used by the Teacher of Languages at the beginning of Part Four, 281). This is how Razumov eventually understands the matter, retrospectively: "In giving Victor Haldin up, it was myself, after all, whom I have betrayed most basely" (333). One could go as far as saying that even Conrad does not escape from the discrepancy between expectations (*dynamis*) and result (*energeia*). Indeed, Conrad's hopes for *Under Western Eyes* were to be confronted to the *energeia* of history. This Conrad acknowledges in his Author's Note: "It must be admitted that by the mere force of circumstances *Under Western Eyes* has become already a sort of historical novel dealing with the past" (49). Let us remember that what Conrad deplores about the revolutionists is that "all they can effect is merely a change of names" (51). Between the *auctoritas* of the author taken as autocracy, and the revolutionary quality of his narrative, the reader is reminded that "events started by human folly link themselves into a sequence which no sagacity can foresee" (118), and which is "unfathomable" (99).

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